



WENDY STOKES

A Silent Conversation

10 June – 23 July 2011

Cover Images Left Veiled I, acrylic on canvas, 183 x 152 cm
 Centre Veiled II, acrylic on canvas, 183 x 152 cm
 Right Veiled III, acrylic on canvas, 183 x 152 cm

Interior Image Winter III (detail), acrylic and oilstick on canvas 183 x 300cm

Images courtesy of the artist and Catherine Asquith Gallery
 The artist is represented in Victoria by Catherine Asquith Gallery, Melbourne
 and in South Australia by BMGart ,Adelaide

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A Meditation on the Works of Wendy Stokes

There is an archaeology of thought in the work of Wendy Stokes which moves in a reverse order. Rather than digging from the surface into pre-existent layers of notation Stokes builds from the first signs of thought and reaction to sites, seasons and atmospheres. What gradually draws into focus are images of lost echoes, quietly humming grounds and present calligraphies which are seismic records of Stokes' journey through place and space. An immediacy of gesture and tremor is captured in concentrated cells of mark and gesture as the artist seems to hover there like a dragon fly over water.

I remember viewing a large retrospective of Cy Twombly's drawing, painting and sculpture in 1994 at the Museum of Modern Art in New York. The experience for me was profound on many levels however the gradual accommodation and consequent deciphering of Twombly's language of mark was compelling. I found myself returning to works over and over to confirm the sense of a small cipher or tremulous quiver within the larger context, first, of the entire work and second, the collection.

Wendy Stokes' marks, gestures and erasures contain a synergy with Twombly's calligraphy which was the result of obsessive modification of formal decisions relating to specific events and places. The result was and is a synthesised visual poetry in which the relationship between the elemental mark and the complete work is refined in the same way a poet prods and squeezes words to hear their elegance and relationship to each other, as words, as language and crafted whole.

At a glance Stokes' images are sparse, pared back, minimal, indebted perhaps to a Passmore-like brevity or the hovering fields of Rothkos' minimalism. Seemingly minor shifts of tone, hue and gesture recur across the collection as she considers silence or the crack of summer heat. I am reminded also of the music of Keith Jarrett, a pianist who immerses himself in the improvised ephemera of note and chord which builds a whole, lyrical, percussive 40 minute construction of an unrepeatable movement. But this is the delight in Wendy Stokes' work, the elements repeated in different orders, initially improvised and eventually captured in the visual field of the painting. Thus, following the glance, with more time her images begin to open, inviting longer, closer scrutiny. One notes deep erasures partially obscured by scumbles and washes deliberately given place by the artist as perhaps the relics of early skirmishes which remain the building blocks, the genetic code of the image. These "edits" accrete to a ground of subtle relationships in pictorial space which, at times, become infinite in depth. At the same time more declarative shapes step up to the foreground. They remind me of Giacometti and his constant struggle with the "vacuum" of space, the incessant carving with paint and brush handle at the edges of drawn perceptual form in an attempt to locate the "where", the edge where some thing ends and space begins. There are dark anthropomorphic forms in Stokes' pictures, they hover like mirages in a searing desert either arriving or departing. They are, to me, things held at the corner of ones' vision which evaporate or morph in the fullness of the gaze. Here also are echoes of Tony Tuckson and the great thread Abstract Expressionism, where there is no negative space, but more a hieratic interlocking of formal elements of mark, tone, texture and shape.

Stokes' titles allude to actual events, places, seasons etc, and in so doing manipulate notions of representation, memory and speculation. These elements are present in art, whether figurative or abstract, installed or filmed. The discourse at the surface, as a result of material/spatial interaction with the viewer is just the beginning of what Robert Hughes coined as the "long look".

For me this includes what one takes away in order to roll it through the presses of memory. In this realm Wendy Stokes makes images of contemplative force which become a kind of cartography of the remembered and the forgotten.

Christopher Orchard
Adelaide
7 October 2010

A Silent Conversation

Coffs Harbour Regional Gallery is delighted to exhibit work by Wendy Stokes, one of the region's most outstanding teachers and practitioners. Stokes is forging a sound career in the arts. Sydney Morning Herald art critic John McDonald has previously commented on Stoke's complex and ambiguous forms, while Christopher Orchard's essay acknowledges the 'great thread of abstract expressionism' that informs these considered works and their ability to invoke a musical response in the viewer.

I can only agree that Stoke's contemplative, nuanced canvases will compel audiences to look, and look again but also to listen. Whether her work brings Handel, Greig or contemporary pianist Keith Jarrett to mind is both wonderful and immaterial, for her paintings sing in this space and their melody (from where ever it originates) is cool, spare and lyrical.

Dr Leigh Summers
Director, Coffs Harbour Regional Art Gallery
15 May 2011

These works are key pieces from a sustained and evolving body of work that has held my interest during the last 5 years from 2006 through to 2010. They have been engaged in a preoccupation with space and mutable surfaces. Without denying 'landscape' origins they hint at quiet transient spaces, but defy specific labels to mimetic location. The viewer is invited into a dialogue, a quiet conversation with the elemental forces suggesting the states of air and water. As a maker of the work I strive to authenticate my responses through the integrity of the painting act. Boundaries become fused and we can be reminded of the capacity to be moved by the language of materiality of painting itself, covering, erasure and marking out; these actions aligning themselves with the sites and seasons of influence.

Wendy Stokes
15 May 2011

Selected History

- 1986 Graduate Diploma Visual Arts, Sydney College of the Arts
1999 -2011 Teaches North Coast TAFE, Kempsey Campus
- 2011 Coffs Harbour Regional Gallery, Coffs Harbour, *A Silent Conversation*
Catherine Asquith Gallery, Melbourne, *Melbourne View Points -Approach to Landscape*
Glasshouse Regional Gallery, Port Macquarie, *Reflections*
- 2010 Catherine Asquith Gallery, *Resilience*
BMGart, Adelaide, South Australia
The Glover Prize, Tasmania, Finalist
The Alice Prize, Alice Springs, Finalist
EMSLA, Coffs Harbour Regional Gallery and Touring Show 2011
Muswellbrook ,Taree Regional Galleries, NERAM
JADA, Touring exhibition, Grafton Regional Gallery, 2010-2011
Glasshouse Regional Gallery, *Select*
Catherine Asquith Gallery, *Landscape*
- 2009 Catherine Asquith Gallery, *Interplay*
Tamworth Regional Gallery, Tamworth, *Transience*
- 2008 Catherine Asquith Gallery, *New Territory*
Country Energy Landscape Prize, Lismore Regional Gallery, Lismore NSW, Finalist
Dobell Drawing Prize, Art Gallery New South Wales, Sydney, Finalist
Broken Hill Art Award, Broken Hill Regional Gallery
EMSLA, Coffs Harbour Regional Gallery
John Miller Galleries, Newcastle, *Red Herrings*
Stephen Killick, Geoff Maddams ,Wendy Stokes
- 2007 Galerie Skara, Norway, *Sydney Printmakers*
Catherine Asquith Gallery, *Festivite*
Port Macquarie Regional Gallery, *Confluence – Reclaiming Life*
JADA, Tamworth Regional Gallery, Stanthorpe Regional Gallery, Qld, Hawkesbury Regional Gallery
45 Years Sydney prints-Tamworth Regional Gallery; Hawkesbury Regional Gallery
Port Macquarie Regional Gallery, *Aspects of the Collection*
- 2006 JADA, Grafton Regional Gallery, Port Macquarie Regional Gallery
SH Ervin Gallery ,Sydney, *45 Years Sydney prints*
Port Macquarie Regional Gallery, *A Local Dialect*
Sunshine Coast Art Award, Caloundra Regional Gallery, Caloundra Qld, Finalist
- Collections National Gallery of Australia; Print Council of Australia; Newcastle College of Advanced Education; Parliament House, Canberra; Grafton Regional Gallery, Bathurst Regional Gallery, Port Macquarie Hastings Regional Gallery Collection; Narrabri and Gosford City Galleries; Print Council of Australia Secondary Schools Project; Artbank; numerous public, corporate and private collections in Australia and overseas.

Solo Exhibitions
Selected Group Exhibitions