

Drawing the line Perspectives in contemporary Australian abstraction

Abstract, 1. that which concentrates in itself the essential qualities of anything more extensive or more general, or of several things; essence. 2. conceived apart from matter.

Drawing the line – perspectives in contemporary Australian abstraction is a group exhibition that examines the work of five Melbourne based artists. Across each of these artists practice is a presiding concern with both non-figurative modes of representation coupled with an interest in the expressive and communicative power of the linear. Their works moreover are concerned with particular interpretations of the world around them, ranging from the emotive and sensory vision of David Harley to the cerebral preoccupations of Kerrie Poliness.

In the work of **Ian de Gruchy** the graphic potential of computer aided design programs has enabled the artist to explore a range of pattern based systems, harnessing pre-existing codes such as camouflage and commercial dot screen printing fields. These have been used by de Gruchy to create digital prints and immersive room-sized projections rich in hypnotic and saturated fields of colour. On closer inspection de Gruchy's work appears to operate at the level of the sub-atomic, in which particles glide and collide in the infinite potential of quantum dynamics.

In common with Ian de Gruchy, the artist **David Harley** has long been exploring the expressive potential of computer-based design, aimed at creating a heightened, even operatic sensory experience. For Harley, (possibly the most definitive abstractionist of the group), a passion for classical and orchestral music and its corresponding representation through colour and movement has given rise to a dense body of images. These vivid productions are created through a form of free hand drawing using a conventional computer mouse or alternatively a digital pad and pen.

Taking a no less dramatic stance, **Stephen Bram** has combined aspects of both representational and non-representational systems, drawing in part on the renaissance invention of two-point perspective reduced to its barest essentials. As a self-proclaimed conceptualist, Bram has used this device to pursue the concept of abstraction about as far down the proverbial rabbit hole as one might think possible. In fact, the Cartesian coordinates of (0,0,0), or in layman's terms absolute vanishing points, become the starting positions for Bram's pristine perspectival paintings. Here the notion that 'something' might emerge from 'nothing' is lucidly illustrated in Bram's series *Untitled (Two Point Perspective)*, 2004. Consequently, when the artist suggests that his work is "about nothing",

his reference is to a concept of a resonate and potential nothingness, which may emerge at any given point in space and time. This has resulted in an ongoing series of works that play on the possibilities of closely linked permutations, using vanishing points located often at some distance from the picture plane. The resultant images hover between two-dimensional formalist compositions and elongated spaces reminiscent of architectural settings.

Similar tensions appear in **Raafat Ishak's** *Mount Rupture on the verge of a conclusive appearance*, 2006, a work that hovers between representational and abstract modes of communication. Derived from an interest in architecture, there is however a sense that what is commonly perceived as the tangible is in a perpetual state of disassembling. As the title of his mural sized installation suggests, reality is never entirely graspable, but rather, elusive at every turn. In a further intriguing conceit, Ishak's work, which is constructed from MDF tiles, is suggestive of a pixelated screen, as if the work is a mirror of a computer derived reality rather than the carefully hand painted image that appears before us. The effect further reaffirms the artist's ambivalent acceptance of the perceivable world.

Looking beyond the dichotomies at play in Bram's and Ishak's work, **Kerrie Poliness** employs geometric designs as a means of representing a theoretical understanding of the interconnecting systems that lie beyond the realms of graspable phenomena. In her work *threefold paintings: pink, black and white – small group of 12 (arrangement 1)*, 2007, Poliness has created a diagram consisting of three colours, which, despite its deceptively reductive construction has the potential to be remodelled in more than nine hundred distinctive configurations. Each of the pigmented colours in this work, black, white and grey are derived from natural sources in the immediate vicinity of the artist's studio, situated on the banks of the Maribrynong River in Melbourne. Black, from fire ash, whiting mixed with river water and pink-grey from the darkest of ochres made in the intense heat of volcanic explosion all point to a reverence for the elemental. Such references underscore the origins of Poliness' preoccupation with geometric systems as both the animating and binding forces at play in the material and conceptual universes.

What we see across each of these artists work is an interest in the questions of the phenomenal world. In light of all that we know of the world around us, is representation a reliable possibility? Or, as the work of these artists suggest, can we merely approximate that which we know to be ungraspable?