

Holmes à Court Gallery at Vasse Felix presents ...

REMOVING THE TRACES

aspects of abstraction from the Janet Holmes à Court Collection

11 February – 3 June 2018

There is no abstract art. You must always start with something. Afterward you can remove all traces of reality. Pablo Picasso

This exhibition presents intriguing aspects of south-west landscape from the Janet Holmes à Court Collection. The works included individually demonstrate varying degrees and methods of abstraction e.g. ultra-simplification, gestural and expressive brushwork, flattening of the picture surface and saturated colour, whilst maintaining the formal principles of line, form, shape, value, movement and composition. The real subjects recede and the aesthetics become the dominant factors.

Included in this selection of abstract works are demonstrations of Aboriginal longstanding presence. Removing the traces of the reality of aboriginal presence and ownership of country was pretty easy to do under the legal mandate of terra nullius. This was followed up by forced dispossession, imprisonment, extermination, assimilation and suppression of truth. A deliberate and sustained abstraction of our history took place. We managed to remove all traces of a particular reality and maintained only the essentials of the history suited to our purposes. These days, ever so slowly, the reality of this history is being reconstituted.

The purpose of this exhibition is to share some significant and captivating abstract works from the collection, works representing the essence of land, forest and water. I hope I've created a calm and meditative space which gives room for reflection.

Sharon Tassicker
Collection & Exhibitions Manager
Janet Holmes à Court Collection

Revel R. COOPER 1934 - 1983

Farm Scene, n.d., 7 tabletop - design scratched into laminex, 74 cm diameter

Bush Landscape with Emu, n.d., tabletop - oil on laminex on chipboard, 51 x 78 cm

Revel Ronald Cooper (1934?-1983), artist, was born of Nyungar descent, probably in 1934, at Katanning, Western Australia. As a young boy Revel was declared a ward of the state and placed in the Carrolup Native Settlement (from 1948 Marribank farm school). Amid conditions of poverty and degradation, in 1945 the school headmaster, Noel White, and his wife, Lily, established educational programs in art and music. Art produced by Carrolup children, including Revel, was widely exhibited: at Boans Ltd department store, Perth (1947); at Mysore, India (1949); and, through the auspices of a visiting Englishwoman, Florence Rutter, in New Zealand, Britain and the Netherlands (1950). Revel's work appeared in *Child Artists of the Australian Bush* (1952), written by (Dame) Mary Durack Miller in association with Rutter.

The Whites intended that the training provided at Carrolup would serve a vocational role and Cooper was employed for a short period by J. Gibbney & Son Pty Ltd, commercial artists, Perth. When Marribank closed in 1951 he worked locally as a farm labourer and as a railway fettler. In November 1952, he was convicted of manslaughter and sentenced to four years' imprisonment. Cooper subsequently served several prison sentences in Western Australia and Victoria. Nevertheless, he

succeeded in forging a career as an artist. In the mid-1950s he was employed briefly at Bill Onus's Aboriginal Enterprise Novelties, and he became a role model for the young aspiring artist Lin Onus and a formative influence on later generations of Nyungar artists.

With help from an art collector, James Davidson, and the Victorian Aborigines Advancement League, Cooper exhibited regularly during the 1960s in Victoria and elsewhere, gaining recognition for his landscapes and corroboree scenes. In a review in the Melbourne communist weekly, the Guardian, of 28 March 1963, Noel Counihan spoke of Cooper's 'strongly original artistic talent'. Working from Fremantle Prison, Cooper undertook several commissions, among them illustrations for the second edition of Mary Durack's book *Yagan of the Bibbulmun* (1976), and images of the stations of the cross for the Sacred Heart Church, Mount Barker, Western Australia. With emerging Aboriginal self-determination, he assumed a new cultural voice. While in gaol at Geelong, Victoria, he wrote an article, 'To Regain Our Pride', for the July-September 1968 issue of the *Aboriginal Quarterly*. In an interview for a documentary, 'The Broken Covenant', broadcast posthumously by Australian Broadcasting Corporation television on 1 September 1983, he recalled his experience of discrimination and injustice and, in a passionate affirmation of his Aboriginality, attacked the materialism of a 'white', 'machine' world.

Cooper was of medium height with a slim build, a broad smile and an open, friendly disposition. His struggle with alcoholism and his itinerancy contributed to both the achievements and the tragedy of his life. About April 1983 he died from the effects of head injuries received when he was attacked with a heavy instrument. His body was found on 28 December 1985 at Buxton, after Matthew De Carteret confessed to the murder. He was buried on 30 January 1987 in the Catholic section of the Fawkner cemetery. Cooper is regarded as a leading figure of a distinctive Nyungar landscape tradition that is the heritage of Carrolup. His work is represented in the Berndt Museum of Anthropology (University of Western Australia), the Art Gallery of Western Australia, Fremantle Prison, Fremantle Hospital and Holmes à Court collections.

Reference: This article was published in Australian Dictionary of Biography, Volume 17, (MUP), 2007, by Sylvia Kleinert

Rod GARLETT 1962 -

Great, Great Grandfather, 2015, acrylic, river sand and ochre on canvas, plant material and Perspex, 161 x 100 cm

If you visit Rod Garlett's Midland home studio you will see a dozen or so paintings stacked against the wall. They have an unusual texture. The layers of natural ochres and acrylic are thick, but not through any typical impasto technique. They have a gritty texture because he mixes the colours with sand. Rod will tell you this is no ordinary sand. It all comes from Gugulga, at a permanent spring-fed pool on the Avon River that is sacred to his family.

"I believe the Rainbow Serpent has rubbed his belly up upon the sand, and has put magic there," he says. "It's what makes my painting unique. I seldom see artworks in the galleries with the thickness of my river sand art."

"I always wanted to find my own style, getting away from the dot work that I mainly found to be the art of the remote people, though many have adapted to it today. I remember as a young child it was always our landscapes that our people of the south painted. They used watercolour, charcoal, ochre and bark painting. I remember quite fondly me and my uncle picking the bark from the island in the river in Northam, which we call Narrjuk."

"When we go out to collect the ochre we don't just take it from the land. We ask the ancestors, or the spirits of that place, if it will be alright, so we can paint the stories of our people."

Rod says he spent most of his life in his home town of Northam. His late uncle was an accomplished bark painter and taught younger men the art. "I miss him but you get to walk alongside them for a while for a reason," Rod says. "When they go you must carry on the stories and remember the sites that they showed you and always care for them."

As an Aboriginal man with Yued, Ballardong and Wadjuk heritage, Rod began painting stories based on significant sites of his ancestors, and ancestral beings. He places tremendous importance on the fact

that he lives and works in his ancestral Avon, Swan and Canning River country.

"It's a huge bonus to be able to paint from a country where your inheritance lies, your spirit is connected, where you've been born, where you have lived," he says. "And also a place where you've been taught culture. Taught by the Elders, the stories of that place, their meaning and how they fit with us today and how we will walk the rest of our journey."

He is standing a short distance from the sacred pool, and picks up a handful of that special sand.

"It's sad because the sand tells another story about country, about destruction of country," he says. "It's the topsoil of the farmlands. All the natural barriers that were holding country together are now allowing country to fall apart. So the topsoil is the sand that's falling into the river that will eventually choke the river system."

Reference: Geoff Vivian, *Artsource Newsletter*, Winter, 2014,

<http://www.artsource.net.au/Magazine/Artist-Features/Rod-Garlett>.

Note: Rod Garlett is now living and working in Broome.

Guy GREY-SMITH 1916 - 1981

Karri Forest, 1975, woodcut, 47 x 20.3 cm

Karri Forest II, 1975, woodcut, 29.8 x 20.3 cm

Sand Plain Shrubs, 1971, synthetic polymer paint on paper, 44.5 x 58 cm

Windy Harbour, South West, W.A., 1975, oil on hardboard, 125.5 x 186.5 cm

Karri Forest, 1976, woodcut, 26 x 21.5 cm

Karri Trees, 1979, oil on canvas on board, 122.3 x 111.5 cm

Guy Grey-Smith was born in Wagin, Western Australia on 7 January 1916 and spent most of his childhood in the South West. During the second world war, he served in the RAAF 1936 and the RAF 1937-47, and was detained as a prisoner of war in Germany 1940-4, where he contracted tuberculosis. After repatriation, he studied with Adrian Hill in a sanatorium in Sussex 1944-5, then under Robert Medley, Henry Moore and Ceri Richards at the Chelsea School of Art, London in 1945-7 and pottery under Heber Matthews at the Woolwich Polytechnic. He returned to Western Australia in 1948, built a house in Darlington in 1950 and the following year established a home pottery, where he made slip-decorated earthenware. The nearby rocks, trees and hills provided him with subjects for his art. With Tom Gibbons, Robert Juniper and Brian McKay he formed the Perth Group in 1957, to promote modernism in Perth. He travelled widely in the sparsely settled areas of Western Australia and was inspired by the vast, structural landscapes of the North West. Simplifying the forms and broadly applying vivid colour in flat slabs within a shallow picture plane, Grey-Smith sought to convey the power of nature, maintaining that 'what I do is make paint say what I have to say'.

He died on 11 August 1981, aged 65.

Reference:

Anna Gray, *The way we were: 1940s - 1950s*, catalogue from an exhibition at the Lawrence Wilson Art Gallery, 14 April 1996 - 30 March 1997, p. 30.

Brett NANNUP

Past, Present, Future, 2012, etching and aquatint, ink on paper, 37.5 x 50 cm

Brett Nannup was born in 1975 in Perth, Western Australia. He belongs to the Binjareb and Wilman Clans of the Noongar Nation. Brett is a printmaker who was introduced and trained in the medium by his mother, the respected Western Australian artist Laurel Nannup. The core focus of his work

investigates and interrogates the ideas of what it takes to be a 'man' in today's society, as well as, exploring his own identity and place in the duality of the Noongar and Wadjella worlds.

BEN PUSHMAN 1979 -

Scar 32, 2004, acrylic on canvas, 120 x 150 cm

Scar 31, 2004, acrylic on canvas, 120 x 150 cm

Ben Pushman was born in 1979, Perth, Western Australia and now lives and works Balingup, Western Australia. Pushman is a Nyoongar artist and his people are of the Minang language group and originally from the areas around Denmark in the southwest of Western Australia.

The art of Ben Pushman is a remembrance of tribal law, for ritual, for rites of passage and for the strength of spirit given to those who continue to respect it. Within his works, Pushman tells of his experiences as an urban Aborigine and the inner conflicts he has had to deal with, such as loss and finding of identity.

One theme that runs through his work is about scarification, which marked the body of an initiated Nyoongar man and formed part of traditional Nyoongar visual language. Another is of the six Nyoongar seasons.

Reference: Mossenson Galleries Website, <http://mossensongalleries.com.au/artist/ben-pushman/>

Howard TAYLOR 1918 - 2001

Open Country I (Night), 1982, oil on plywood, 119.5 x 182.5 cm

Open Country II (Day), 1982, oil on plywood, 119.5 x 182.5 cm

Landscape Enclosed, 1984, oil on plywood panel, 120 x 160 cm

Landscape Emblem, 1984, oil on panel, 102 x 144 cm

Several Figures, 1987, oil on panel, 90 x 126 cm

Untitled, 1986, oil on canvas on board, 28 x 22 cm

Study for Foliage Light, 1986, oil on board, 20 x 30 cm

Study for Column with Landscape, 1985, oil on board, 14 x 18.5 cm

Figure in Space, 1984, oil on board, 31 x 22.5 cm

Landscape, 1986, oil on board, 25 x 37 cm

Landscape, 1986, oil on plywood, 13.5 x 25 cm

Hillside, 1990, oil on canvas, 92 x 182.5 cm

Howard Taylor was born in Hamilton, Victoria on 29 August 1918 and moved to Western Australia in 1932. During the second world war, he served in the RAF in France 1939-40, where he was taken prisoner of war. He studied at the Birmingham College of Art 1946-8 under a rehabilitation program. He settled in the Darling Range east of Perth in 1949 and taught art at Perth Technical College from 1951 and later at Curtin University and the University of Western Australia. Howard Taylor participated in his first exhibition at the Art Gallery of Western Australia in 1949. Twenty-seven solo and twenty-four group shows followed to 1998.

In his art, he focussed on his love of the Australian bush and in particular, the eucalyptus forest. He moved from early representational works towards increasingly abstracted and symbolic forms in which he explored the elemental nature of his subjects. Often described as a recluse, Taylor lived at

Northcliffe in the south of Western Australia from 1967.

He received an emeritus fellowship from the Australia Council in 1986, was made a member of the Order of Australia in 1989, a Curtin University Fellow in 1991. He received an Honorary Doctor of Letters from the University of Western Australia in 1993 and an Honorary Doctor of Technology from Curtin University in 1988. His work is included in most state galleries including the National Gallery of Australia as well as numerous corporate, institutional and private collections around Australia. Howard Taylor died on 20 July 2001, aged 83.

Monique TIPPETT 1971 -

Illume, 2013, jarrah, inks, synthetic polymer on board, 200 x 106 cm

Guardians, 2017, jarrah, ink and lacquers, 143 x 143 cm

Corridors, 2010, jarrah and acrylic on board, 105 x 190 cm

White Light, 2012, blackbutt, acrylic and lacquer, 119 x 116 cm

Monique Tippett lives and works in Dwellingup, 100km southeast of Perth. She moved there 14 years ago with her husband, son and daughter in an impulsive leap of faith.

Her instinctive attraction to the southwest forests changed her life. After studying full time for two years at The Australian School of Fine Wood she put her new skills to use to create beautifully finished artworks using timber from the local area.

Her art is inspired by the forested environment she lives in. Its moods are her muse.

What you see on the wall is pure feeling, a vision of her personal relationship with the forest.

Her works are landscapes, images filtered, distilled through Monique's creative psyche.

They show the changing of light through the day and across the seasons.

Brooding under the brittle, bright light of summer.

Winter light, filtered through mists and rain.

So many colours, the ubiquitous greens, yellows and earthy tones.

Shades of blue as the forest breathes and the light transitions between night and day.

Her layered use of tinted lacquers that catch the light on different textures and colours, create a real sense of movement as the viewer moves past the work.

There are also references to light play on water, inspiration taken from the ocean, the Murray River near Dwellingup, and local dams, including the dam that her studio overlooks.

Her blank canvases are the natural timbers endemic to the region; the under lying grain informs the work and affirms the link to the timbered environment.

This material also allows her to burn the surface to create the texture of a fire scarred landscape, so prevalent in our consciousness for many months of the year. Ash is collected from the forest floor and applied to the surface to enhance the natural palette of texture and colour. Fire and ash, such a crucial facet of the forest cycle narrative; life, death, decay and regeneration.

In the last seven years her practice has expanded into the public art realm. This has challenged her creatively and afforded her the opportunity to explore the large sculptural form, a medium well suited to the scale of her subject.

Monique has recently built a new studio on twenty acres just outside Dwellingup. This bigger space is invaluable in producing large scale works and gives her the ability to view the emerging work in the context of an open space, an important tool in judging scale and composition. She is excited to consider what new directions this will take her and is anticipating fresh inspiration from new vistas and an even closer connection to the landscape. Her public artworks, wall mounted and external sculptures, can be found from Margaret River to Bunbury, Perth and the wheat belt.

Reference: moniquetippett.com

Desmond WOODLEY

Nannup, 2014, acrylic on canvas, 61 x 76.5 cm

From a diverse and challenging time incorporating the time of his childhood at New Norcia Mission,

leading to work at Meelah Station in the Eastern Goldfields horse riding as a musterer, followed by working fence lines around the Moora District. Moora being the place of his birth and from where he was removed from his mother by Native Welfare as a small child.

Nowadays Desmond's artistic pursuits are as an artist and crooner. He sings Country and Western covers of the likes of Hank Williams, Slim Dusty and Jim Reeves at the Stirling Arms in Guildford. In his more rebellious days Desmond drew inspiration from fellow painters like Jimmy Pike and Jackie MacArthur.

Since his involvement with the DADAA Arts Programme from 2004, Desmond has exhibited in three consecutive exhibitions: *Coming Together*, 2007; *The River Keeps Flowing*, 2008; *Natural Forces: Senses, Seasons, Elements*, 2009. Written by Neil J Patinson in conversation with Desmond Woodley. Further exhibitions have followed.

Reference: Desmond Woodley – Mundaring Arts Centre, website portal.



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