

Catherine Cassidy

Artist Talk

New England Regional Art Museum

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ALL THE EXCELLENT DOLPHINS

I would like to begin by acknowledging the Traditional Owners of the land on which we meet today, the Ainawan people of the Ngwanya nation and pay my respects to Elders past, present and future .

I would also like to give thanks to NERAM and to Director Rachael Parsons, Curator Belinda Hungerford and the amazing gallery volunteers who helped hang the show so beautifully. Also a special thank you to my gallerist Alison Bellinger of AK Bellinger Gallery, Inverell for making this exhibition possible.

ART-

....art making is such a force for good.

I was recently watching Tracey Emin talking about this -

..... how art is needed so much in a world where we are bombarded with things that pull us away from our essential selves....

Why do we need to listen to music, come to galleries, read good stories and poetry?

....

There are forces within art that we actively seek out... that make us feel good, that put us in touch with our senses and our spirit.

We feel a bit richera bit fuller in our skins when we've absorbed something inexplicable like an amazing artwork or a ballet or a piece of music.

We are sensory beings and we need this extension of ourselves.

There's magic there and we know it.

Within the making of these wondrous things is the thinking - the why of it all-
....with painting- the visual philosophy.

For me, I need to seek out the philosophies within other artists that I have an affinity with....

Expanding on these affinities strengthens my purpose and resolve- I need to feel the continuum of art and artists through time- what they think and why.

A painting to me must have a reason for being.

It is not made from reason has absolutely nothing to do with logicbut it must exude a presence, it must become a living thing... that's its reason... to live in the present and keep giving out magic every time human eyes lock onto it.

There are emotions involved in seeing, in remembering and recollecting and so we travel somewhere when we look at images..... to hidden places within us, to familiar or new places and we put an intrinsic and monetary value on works that can pick us up and take us there.

We should not underestimate the power of elevating our senses....and what territory this can take us into... the ordinary, the perfunctory, the mundane will always take care of itself but this other self of ours needs nurturing.

I think we are made of 2 parts...the quotidian , the daily and this other thing that has been our constant companion on this planet since we drew on cave walls by the light of a flaming torch.

There is absolutely no difference between a cave painter of 40,000 yrs ago making images of the inexplicable forces surrounding him/her and me today doing exactly the same thing for the same reason.

So today's talk is about this continuum and these values of human connection.

I could choose here dozens of artists to expand on but keeping to just 4 means the common thread that I see will be easier to follow.

All of you here today and those who'll visit on- line or on the wall are integral to the making of these paintings... you are with me all the time—

-these works are made in a spirit of communion with you and with life itself and I thought you may like to be part of extending and exchanging these ideas this morning after this talk. ..so feel free as I talk to jot down any notes or ideas, questions, resolutions that you may have about anything really- we can go way off mark if you like- talk about other artists, other ideas on painting- anything at all.

The title of this show came from some words by artists Judith Nangala Crispin on neurodiversity , which sometimes affects artists to the point of defining themselves as troublingly disabled by their difference.

Her counter - take on this is to turn it on its head and embrace that difference more as a gift and declare- *' why see yourself as a disabled wombat when you are actually an excellent dolphin.'*

This exhibition is intended to be a bit of a flag-waving exercise, to include some of my most favourite artists across both time and distance. I have chosen four to hopefully link them and keep the references short and interesting.

They have been my mainstay, my constant companions...I look to them as renegades, outsiders and visionaries— often conflicted , ignored, passionate.....four most excellent dolphins.

As a painter, I think its important to have these stalwarts, these rods of iron to lean on.. and I know that they have willingly lived or do live on the edge of risk and failure to service some urgent and persistent need to communicate through making images.

There will be a bit of interweaving and zig zagging between all four artists that I'm about to talk about : they are:

Antoni Tapies
Rose Wylie
Colin McCahon
Howard Hodgkin

..... I'll attempt to explain how I associate them and why I bring them together today.

Within painting and the painting community there is a kind of collective ideology, of a communing between artists over time ... our minds roam back and forth across time, pondering on this feeling of inclusion.

Although this connection can feel tenuous, fragile,..... we work mainly alone, talking to our selves and our work... for days and weeks- we need to feel part of a thread, part of some continuum, a fabulous pod of humans.....what I call the meeting of all the excellent dolphins.

Antoni Tapies wrote on this communion in Vogue Paris in 1991 and he titled it '**300 Years of Friendship**' -

I quote—

'The work in which a painter gives emotionally must be closely linked to the ideology of the progressive forces existing at his time. -those of philosophy, evolution, change.... The word 'friendship ' in addition to its corresponding sense of affection or mutual intelligence also includes a certain idea of possession ...friends, books, music, they are not fruitful if they are not very... '*ours*'...-if we do not invoke them and make a body of constant communion.'

'Within (the painter)..... this struggle between the idea and the material form takes place- the dialogue between the idea and the subject of the painting.'

....and this is " at the root of Tapies sympathies of other artists and cultures... where " some works are on the border between plastics and literature - you could call it metapoetry or metapainting."...

This this liminal area .. this border is particularly visible in Wylie and McCahons work.

To me, the idea of metapainting is an elevation of the work above and beyond its subject. .. in fact the subject is gone, the painter is gone and in its place is this powerful image put out into the world in a form of *kinship*.... A kinship with the (as mentioned) progressive forces of the time.

With this in mind,....The UK critic Jonathan Jones has stated that with Rose Wylie we can see a way forward for contemporary painting- she is wholly engaged with the forces of her time..... she is a haptic painter, (as they all are actually).. working with the touchscreen of everyday life... she loves the physicality of paint, its aberrations and mistakes, the journey it throws up if you are constantly in playmode and the hard demands of composition .

These artists to me, are all event painters, they are working with the distillation of memory and recollection, sifting, editing and arranging its vagaries and distortions to form another entity.

This new thing has as much validity , as much ' truth' , as the representational image.. it carries more psychic weight as it finds its way clear of description.... It is shaped by that struggle between the idea and the material form.

Bonnards great statement on the importance of finding the beginning of a painterly language holds true

“ By the seduction of the first idea the painter attains to the universal. It is the seduction which determines the motif and which corresponds exactly to the painting. If this seduction, if the first idea vanishes, all that remains is the object.... which invades and dominates the painter.”

This immediacy of thought and application is common to all 4 artists here. It is the universality in an image which is the communicative factor- not likeness or description.

Wylies words are often just a display, a sign, something heraldic- they are just there and like a billboard, they may be more felt than actually read, — and often used for their graphic effect alone and what they may contribute to the impact of the image.

She is a master of composition and the realisation and execution of the first idea.

Wylie , Tapies and McCahon all use text, script, heiroglphs in this gathering and formulation of presence- the now, the instant of the graphic and the billboard.... yet all present quite differently and have a different reason for being.

There is something so immediate about text- we move over it quickly, and we can process and understand a lot of it at once... in some of McCahons later paintings the text becomes so dense it is almost literally biblical— a sea of profound conversation - with himself and with us.

And yet he can also make a painting from one or two words or just several letters.

I AM.

His urgent and highly-strung announcements are monumental in their gravity, construct and delivery- full of grace and emotional power. His muscular landscape painting holds the earth, cradles the island he loved so much.

However, if we look to Tapiés,.....like a fisherman pulling in a net...he brings together what appears to be random matter, an old sock,... ash...dust ...single words scattered or graffitied onto the surface.

This is an extract from an interview in 2008 with Daniel Geralt-Miracle: - there are some parallels here with Rose Wylies choice of the ordinary things that she comes across in day to day encounters with popular culture. Pop stars, ducks, historical figures, myths, aeroplanes, movies, ... :

Q.It is curious that you always choose humble elements , you never use rich things or make 'pretty pictures'.. you always use socks, beds, blankets, cups, bones. The daily things, nothing fancy.

Tapiés -Answer: Yes.. it is a way of showing respect for life.. and everything that shapes our world.

Each of these artists is involved with the loss of their self in the work....however they are making an **event**.. out of light, air and colour and matter..- this is their communicative power .. and we can all share in this realm.

They put themselves aside to find something bigger than themselves...
Hakuin Ekaku - the most eminent Buddhist master of the last 500 yrs
ie. The Sound of One Hand Clapping...stated that....“ if you forget yourself you become the universe.”

This involves an essential separation between the maker and the work-
...Hodgkin describes the dichotomy of this erasure -

quote—

...’I like the characteristic of the handmade mark... and somewhere one tries to make autograph marks in inverted commas. So they are not ones own, they’re just autograph marks....’

I think that phrase— *‘they are not ones own* ‘..is very revealing.
We could ask....If they are not the artists marks who do they belong too?

They belong to us.

The autographic mark pops up in the work of all 4 artists- even McCahon whose highly personal and revelatory exclamations become his and everybody’s at the same time- fear of darkness, of unredemption, of death... of oblivion..... Of being unloved... including the land ...as in his.....
‘Landscape with Too Few Lovers’.

His words toll like a bell for everybody- as in the confessional title of his painting- ‘ Boy Am I Scared ‘...

We can we swing the pendulum the other way again to Rose Wylie.....
..... from this metaphorical darkness to the levity and lightheartedness of
everyday life that is Rose Wylie-

Amusing herself with her handmade marks and encounters with the
everyday....her references range from contemporary film to historical figures
or a walk in the park. — and her words certainly don't toll like a bell, they
jump and cavort, sometimes just display themselves like road signs.

They display themselves and move on -.....as intended.
Rose is having fun, and its contagious.

And we can move back yet again to- Howard Hodgkin- he too is a painter of
memories, of instants, of the importance of editing, editing, editing.

He distills the chatter of memory- a conglomerate of conversations,
intimate encounters, memories of light and time. — and uses the matter of
paint as the vehicle to do it.

He doesn't so much push paint as pull it, stretch it,... like stretching time...
its that whoosh of the final pulled or dragged mark with its breathless edge,
coming up against another, ..and its the sonorous colour colliding and
crossing over another that calls out like sound across water, like the glimmer
of light at the bottom of the dark garden.

With Hodgkin I feel I need silence.....as if I need to hold my breath for as
long as it takes to absorb the image of the frozen moment - as if to breath in
and out would be a loud and rude interruption.

Tapies is called a 'matter' painter but really ...I think it could be applied to all
four here .

They all delight in the stuff of paint.

His varnish paintings, 'working with honey' — are allowed to get 'out of hand' until they attest to something more than they thought possible and then,.. like the alchemist that he is... they arrive .. and are delivered up into something surpassing and beyond themselves and the artist...

.....as Rilke said..'for such saying as never the things themselves hoped so intensely to be.'

I've chosen these 4 out of hundreds not for their style or their technique but for their philosophy, their will, their volition, their solid intent and their steadfast forward engagement and momentum.

It is the matter of paint that delivers the emotion- in this way all these 4 artists could be regarded as 'Haptic Painters' — we feel the human touch..

.....what is delivered to us, given to us... in that long line of communion... comes from the vibration of the human hand.

These vibrations make it personal... it is made for us.

They have the ability to carry me, to further my curiosity.

These are the things I need as a painter from other painters.

So they are my Most Excellent Dolphins. —-and I Thank them.

Catherine Cassidy
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