

A Luminous World

Louise Morrison



WHILST WESFARMERS is well known for their custodianship of significant historical artworks, *Luminous World: Contemporary Art from the Wesfarmers Collection* is an exquisite showcase of their contemporary collection and, in particular, their recent interests in the diversity of contemporary Australian Indigenous art and in art from New Zealand. To view any selection of such acquisitions would be a rewarding experience, however, Helen Carroll, the Curator of the Wesfarmers Collection, has compiled an exhibition that is as thought provoking as it is striking.

As implied by the exhibition's title, all of the artworks share a thematic connection to ideas about the phenomenon of light.

Above

Rosemary Laing

Brumby mound #5 from the series *One dozen unnatural disasters in the landscape* 2003

C Type photograph, 110.0 x 222.0

© Rosemary Laing, reproduced courtesy of the artist and Tolarno Galleries, Melbourne
The Wesfarmers Collection, Perth

An exhibition that is as thought provoking as it is striking.

Some, for example, address its role in human perception whilst others explore its psychological or metaphorical associations.

A row of large works in the first half of the exhibition celebrates colour, paint and pattern. The luscious, pools of colour in the works of Gretchen Albrecht, Alex Spremberg and Dale Frank contrast the tight gridded patterns in Sine MacPherson's and Rosalie Gascoigne's works. Nearby, Paddy Bedford and Lydia Balbal describe their respective countries in soft, pastel hues whilst artists in Arnhemland use white ochre to achieve a shimmering brilliance in their recent works.

Clever arrangements of Indigenous and non-Indigenous works throughout the exhibition generate a rich, complex sense of place through artists' vastly different yet parallel experiences of this land. In *Brumby Mound #5*, 2003 and *Brumby Mound #6*, 2003, Rosemary Laing photographically

records the different hues in an arid landscape produced by changing light conditions whilst Wakartu Cory Surprise's horizontal bands of paint in *Mukurrutu*, 2007 also reflect the spectral characteristics of this sort of landscape. However, Laing's insertion of domestic furniture into the scene deftly describes an 'un-belonging' that dramatically opposes the confident knowing one can sense in Surprise's depiction of her country.

Brad Rimmer's *Wylkatchem Summer*, 2009 and *Dowerin Autumn*, 2005 alongside Rammey Ramsey's *Stony Creek Warlawoon Country*, 2010 provide twin portraits of the sort of quiet, empty landscapes in which one or two features operate as key descriptors. Whether the subject is a disused drive-in theatre screen or a hill that is culturally significant, the artists' processes of isolation and notation seem similarly important.



Luminous World: Contemporary Art from the Wesfarmers Collection is jointly presented by Wesfarmers Limited and the Art Gallery of Western Australia and runs until 11 February 2013. The superb catalogue, produced in conjunction with Fremantle Press, features essays by curator Helen Carroll, composer Richard Mills and artist Bill Henson as well as poetry by John Kinsella.

The second half of the exhibition contains vast, spare depictions of the cosmos. Mabel Juli's *Ngarrangkarni, Moon and Hill*, 2009, David Stephenson's *Star Drawings* and Timothy Cook's *Kulama*, 2010 describe the immensity of night-skies in which the dark is broken only by a softly glowing moon or a scattering of stars. The surface of Brian Blanchflower's *Concretion: Oceanic 1:8*, 2007 differentially absorbs and reflects light through its material composition: pumice, silicon, acrylic and oil. As above, so below; its dense darkness is difficult to fathom.

This perceptual ambiguity anticipates another group of works; of partially visible figures and nocturnal landscapes in which

a presence cannot be detected, but cannot be discounted. The smoky apparition in Paul Uhlmann's *Pulse*, 2006 seems to be dissolving into the impenetrable blackness that surrounds it whilst the underlying grid in Dale Hickey's *Black Painting*, 1969 is similarly at risk of obliteration. The potentially scientific documentation of Brook Andrew's *Owl*, 2005 and Andrew Browne's *Visitation*, 2009 is disrupted by a darkness that swallows both the clarity and the contexts of the specimens. The unseen in these powerful works feels unsettlingly present.

Louise Morrison is an Artist and a Lecturer at Central Institute of Technology in Perth. She also writes about visual art on a freelance basis with a focus on local, contemporary practice.

Top left

Wakartu Cory Surprise
Mukurrutu 2007
acrylic on canvas
120.0 x 120.0 cm

The Wesfarmers Collection, image courtesy of the artist
© Wakartu Cory Surprise, licenced by Viscopy 2012

Top right

Jenni Kemarre Martiniello
Medium flax eel trap 2012
glass. 48.0 x 30.4 cm
State Art Collection, Art Gallery of Western Australia
Purchased through The Leah Jane Cohen Bequest, Art
Gallery of Western Australia Foundation, 2012
© Jenni Kemarre Martiniello, 2012

NEW! Monthly Tours

A new series of monthly guided tours will commence in 2013. AGWA curators and guides, guest artists and arts specialists will share intriguing facts and stories about visiting exhibitions and the State Collection displays at AGWA.

Upcoming tours include:
Luminous World with Helen Carroll
Sunday 10 February, 2pm
Picturing New York
Sunday 10 March, 2pm

Made To Remember
Sunday 7 April, 2pm
Your Collection
Sunday 19 May, 2pm
See the Friends Event Guide for dates and details. Bookings essential.