

Kate Dorrough: The Enduring Landscape and the Inland River

By Diane Mah

A unique interaction of painting and ceramic vessel is bound together in Kate Dorrough's latest body of work presented by Arthouse Gallery Sydney. It is essentially a conversation between clay and paint.

Inspiration for this exhibition comes from Australia's inland river systems. With recent torrential rains and resulting floods, the inland river has been revived, transforming the landscape into a potent life force, emblematic of physical survival.

The starting point in paint represents a response to the landscape emanating from her residency at The Art Vault in Mildura and subsequent painting trips to rural NSW and South Australia. Anchored in the paintings are the totemic symbols of the landscape: the river, the trees, the rocks and the broader spatial vistas. It is an expressive collection of abstract visual languages reflecting Kate's unique visual perceptions.

In the ceramic vessel, these perceptions are modified by their encounter with the three-dimensional form, which expresses the landscape more fully. The ceramic vessel itself does not refer to classical forms, but to her individual hand-built sculptural responses. It is direct tactile link to the earth.

The painterly gesture is then applied to the three dimensional form, distilling the essence of the trees, rocks, water and vistas found in the paintings. The kiln adds colour and texture as the heat transforms the work into its final state. The iron oxide in the clay bleeds through the ceramic surface and creates an alchemy of glaze, gestural marks and clay. The process is not unlike the blaze of fire in the landscape itself. After the conflagration, the enduring landscape is revealed.

Shown side by side, the sculptural vessels and paintings show a unity of vision, form and character, a technical undertaking not often seen in the today's contemporary art world. However, its precedents can be found in Modernist art history. Her motifs arise out of this union.

The synchrony in visual language reveals a fascination with the river. Is this the classical River Styx of Greek mythology or the emblematic river of inland Australia? It could be either: the imagery suggests a subterranean darkness from the Greek myth as well as the chaos of the Australian landscape, an underworld of complex ecosystems impacted by human activity. The river binds together the physical and the psychological.

Kate's current exhibition builds on her previous shows in which she has combined ceramics and paintings. There is now greater strength in her vision and technique. Her childhood memories in the bush have matured. The river represents the journey of life in both its natural and human-influenced cycles

Arthouse Gallery

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