

ARTS

Bush Cove uncovers nature's life forces, energy and light

Review

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JUDITH White: *Bush Cove*. Beaver Galleries, 81 Denison Street, Deakin. Until June 20, 2021.

Judith White has been exhibiting in Canberra at the Beaver Galleries for close to three decades with at least 10 solo shows to her credit at this venue.

There is a consistency, dedication and complete integrity in her art as she focuses on the surrounding environment that she records through a process of layering of realities.

Her process of exquisite miniaturist painting, where she records in crystalline detail individual elements in the landscape, is disrupted through applied collage that destroys a rational structure in space.

The landscape elements seem to float as if suspended

in space so that one is uncertain where the individual elements are located - all is in a state of flux and movement.

This dynamic, kinetic aspect in her art introduces a note of ambiguity where we intuitively feel the bush tracks, creeks, ponds and beaches rather than rationally decipher them as landscape aspects that can be described, clearly articulated and separated.

A few years ago, White in her paintings introduced echoes of the human figure, almost like ghostly apparitions.

This strategy did not really work and appeared somewhat heavy-handed.

The human figure is present in most of her works, but not as an echo.

It is the omnipresent artist, as a diarist, who keeps this visual record of bush and coastal observations

and allows the beholder to peer over her shoulder and to explore the scenery before them.

This exhibition was largely created during last year's lockdown where the artist hibernated on the South Coast of New South Wales and "enjoyed" the enforced isolation when she could melt into that precious milieu where the bush comes down to embrace the sea.

The tranquillity may have been enforced, but purity and a refined sense of isolation and melting into nature was the outcome to emerge in these *Bush Cove* paintings.

One of the major works at this exhibition is *Rocks and wet sand*, a large acrylic painting with collage and measuring 102 centimetres by 141 centimetres.

As in all of White's work, the elements of nature are abstracted, felt rather



Judith White, *Rocks and wet sand*. Picture: Supplied

than graphically rendered, they evoke the forms that inspired them without attempting to mimetically convey them.

The dark floating masses, that we may interpret as rocks, define the upper and lower parts of the composition and the central yellow ochre band that rhythmically flows through the composition may be interpreted as

a band of wet sand.

Delicate collage and pieces of unpainted canvas peering through in spots allows the whole composition to breathe and gives the work a floating lightness.

It is a powerful and evocative piece that simultaneously suggests intimacy and vastness, where we cannot decide if we are seeing a tiny rock pool or an expanse of

ocean beach.

What we do sense is the presence of the artist as guide who is sharing with us a private revelation about beauty in this slice of nature.

In other paintings at the exhibition, including *Duck Creek no. 2* and *Scribbly Gum track no. 2*, we experience the combination of intimacy of observation of detail, such as the patterns on the bark of trees and rippling light on water, with a much broader expanse of the bush or the trickle of flowing water.

As an artist, White realised many years ago that she could not rival nature by precisely recording its peculiarities, but she could celebrate it by uncovering its life forces, pulsating energy and reflected light.

One cannot be locked down in nature without being seduced and liberated by the experience.