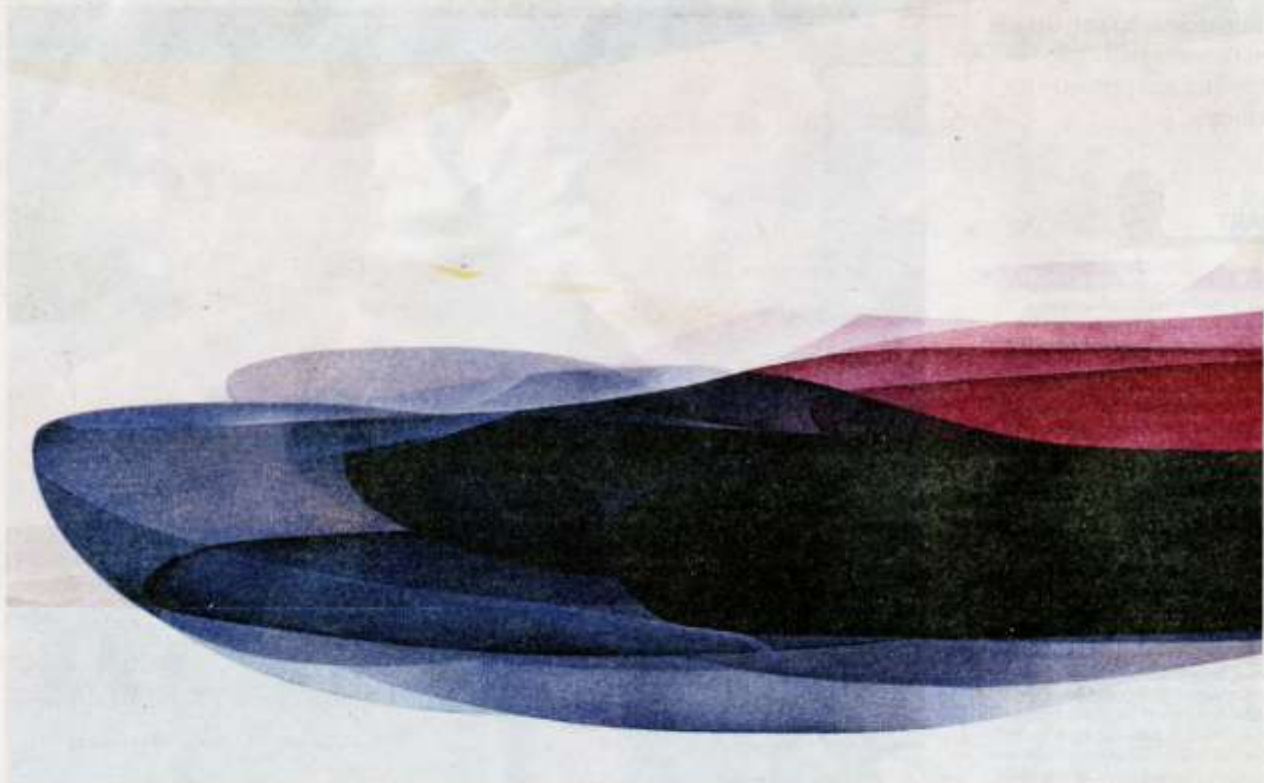


ARTS

Agneta Ekholm: *Evanescence*, a chromatically complex painting. Picture supplied

In slow art refined elegance prevails

Review

Sasha Grishin

AGNETA Ekholm is a Melbourne-based artist who was born in Helsinki and trained in Finland before moving to Australia in 1994.

Her large acrylic paintings have a refined elegance where all the elements of design have been carefully distilled within an organic flow of non-figurative forms.

A champion of her art, the art historian Christopher Heathcote, in 2019 aptly described her paintings as "serenity made visible".

It is a bit of a cheap shot to suggest that Ekholm's art simply reflects the snow drifts and glacial landscapes of her native Finland. It is much more complex and multifaceted than that.

Although the population of Finland is roughly same as the city of Sydney, it has an extensive and flourishing art scene dominated by some very strong women artists.

In my cursory knowledge of Finnish contemporary art, the artists who spring to mind include Heidi Lampenius, Marika Mkel, Nina Roos and Anna Retulainen, none of whom mirror icy winter landscapes nor for that matter does their art resemble Ekholm's work.

The artist who most strongly reminds me of Ekholm's paintings is the American painter and printmaker Helen Frankenthaler and the style what is sometimes referred to as Post-Painterly Abstraction.

A parallel may be drawn with Frankenthaler's works, especially from the 1960s,

Agneta Ekholm: *Recess*, a largish longitudinal canvas 85cm by 150cm. Picture supplied

that were painstakingly and laboriously created but which on first encounter deceptively appear as spontaneous marks on the canvas or what she called "one really beautiful wrist motion that is synchronized with your head and heart".

Ekholm works in acrylics in a very deliberate and meticulous manner.

There is a constant process of layering and erasure where acrylic paint is apparently attacked with a sponge and thin layers of pigment leave a film of colour on the canvas, almost like echoes and ghostly traces.

This is worked over for a period of time - sometimes over weeks or months - until

the flows and ebbs of washes find their own resolution.

In a painting such as *Recess*, 2021, a largish longitudinal canvas 85cm by 150cm, complete harmony has been achieved where the brilliant patch of yellow is subdued by floating and overlapping mists of grey.

The painting is defiantly non-figurative, although some viewers will inevitably read it in terms of a landscape, or a skyscape or a particular time of day, when light is fading but the darkness has not quite come to dominate the world. Is the title, "recess", meant to give us the clue that we are witnessing

a secret concealed within some hidden or secluded place?

Frankenthaler once famously said, "You have to know how to use the accident, how to recognise it, how to control it, and ways to eliminate it so that the whole surface looks felt and born all at once."

Ekholm appears to believe in this advice, after decades of practice she has devised a method of work where she surrenders to chance and employs it as a creative tool through which to create her paintings where the final result appears light and as if breathed effortlessly onto the canvas.

The larger canvas, *Traverse*, 2022, employs a similar palette to *Recess* of the previous year, but here the yellow appears in ascendancy and breaks through the containing layers of darkness. Above a white light seems to liberate the colours and indicate a path out of the composition. There is a stillness and a confined internal dynamism.

The painting *Evanescence*, 2022, is a chromatically complex painting where the tide suggests something ephemeral that can vanish like a waking dream or a passing mist. As in all of the paintings at this exhibition, there is a peaceful tranquillity that triumphs in the final resolution.

Ekholm's exhibition is an example of "slow art" where elegance prevails and there is nothing to distract the eye from the quiet and focussed meditative power of these paintings.

Agnetta Ekholm: Continuum. Beaver Galleries. Until September 17, 2022. beavergalleries.com.au.