

Jennings Kerr

Bonnie Porter Greene *All The Observations*

Painter, Explorer

All The Observations is a connection to landscape and place. The paintings are intimate recordings, symbols that become wedged in her mind, charred bushland, wild flowers, flowing rivers and what I think are special places for the artist. Safe spots to feel, observe and paint in order to understand her connection to them. These paintings are vibrant and richly marked and are as much about the juicy blobs of paint as they are the places they depict. I think this show tells the story of change and progress, of how the artist has observed her home shift over her lifetime. These changes are seen seasonally in the landscape, as well as in larger changes to the built environment. I think of Bonnie Porter Greene as part painter, part explorer. Her trips out into the wild are how she fuels her studio. Her field recordings are captured in plain air trips and then reworked obsessively in the studio. The studio acts as another site for exploration, experimentation and recording. Bonnie Porter Greene is able to feel the pulse of the region and how it has changed, she is able to map it in paint and to tell stories of her adventures.

The Shoalhaven is a south-eastern coastal zone of New South Wales, Australia and is where Bonnie Porter Greene has spent much of her life. The area is held dear to the artist and has been hugely important in her development as an artist. Porter Greene has covered so much of the region and seen it shift and change over the years. I think the changes and uncertainty have also helped the artist focus in on more consistent variations in nature. The seasonal shifts in wildlife, the bursts or as the artist calls 'explosions' of Wattle, Hardenbergia, and Dockrillia flowers. There are eight paintings of grotto lichen, as well as depictions of remembered cloud formations, sunsets, burnt bushland, rain, rivers, and future sunburn. These stories make me think of a childhood at play and after school shenanigans with friends. Exploring the bushland, hiding in caves, running along the river and gaining a sense of self through a place. I think the painting *Three Bridges Over The Shoalhaven River*, 2021 is an important observation to focus on and helps you to understand the artist's practice. The work has been painted while following the construction of the new bridge over the river and in many ways has been the most difficult for the artist to complete. I feel this has to do with a coming to terms with the change to the region. There is also an awe for the engineering involved in constructing the bridge. The support for this painting has been stitched together with what is at hand and the artist even works without ever measuring. The painting is layered, dense and the bridges rendered in a hatching pattern of crosses that contrast the more gestural and loose marks of the landscape. There is a much stronger sense of time and labor in this work that does not show the immediacy and ease in many of the other paintings in the exhibition. I think this speaks to the difficulties of seeing the area change and open up, to population growth and the bridge as a beacon of change and connectivity. It will bring more people and create an ease of travel into the area. It will change the relationship the artist has with the Shoalhaven. Porter Greene perhaps looked at the earlier bridges at a younger age and thought how they would take her out into the wider world on a different adventure but now is more worried about the new bridge and its obsolete companions preventing the next generation of kids chasing each other along the river.

Porter Greene works extensively in plain air and through visiting the rural bushland area of Budgong. The bushland is held very close to the artist and she has been visiting some of these locations since early childhood. The painting *All That's Left (Trees On A Hillside)*, 2021 was created after seeing the devastation caused by the wild fires that ripped through the area and caused so much havoc. The painting was created by quickly sketching the blackened trees as poles left without their foliage. The artist later worked back into the painting, adding fire in order to tell the story of destruction. The mark making reminiscent of the British painter Sir Howard Hodgkin as the fire spills out over the edges of the board and onto the timber frame. It is a wonderful sight to see how a natural environment can spring back after destruction and it is a central motif in this series of work. Porter Greene states:

"I wander out into the bush in Budgong, hoping to find a billabong mum has told me about. I don't, but instead a sandy trail exploding in purple and green, the Hardenbergia is in full bloom, something I've never seen before en masse. The 2019/20 bushfires have stripped all the trees, so the light pours in, allowing the Hardenbergia to swamp the destroyed landscape. I focus on this. It gives me hope. I make pattern on the board to try and convey the feeling of the plant taking over."

The other critical site for the artist is that of the studio. This is where the sketches and plain air works can come home to be resolved, obsessed over and replicated again and again until the colour of lichen is just perfect. It is an interesting little ecosystem of its own and in planning this exhibition it was obvious that it was always going to be a matter of how to edit it down to tell the story. The studio is littered with boards, scraps of fabric and many paintings on the go. Another wonderful work in the show *Gold Coast Bin '96*, 2021 comes from stumbling across an old photo in the studio. The important note to make from this is how passionate Porter Greene is in telling her tales of adventure. Works such as *I Keep Thinking About The Sky*, 2021 show how the artist is able to bring back memories from her adventures into the studio and create a celebration in the juicy chaos of her paint filled space. It is this ability to work from memory that brings to mind the work of the late American artist Forrest Bess. Bess was also referred to as a 'painter, fisherman' and this sits nicely with me when I think of Porter Greene. Bess was famous for painting symbols from his dreams and worked in a naive and raw style that is reminiscent of some of the mark making we find in this exhibition.

Bonnie Porter Greene has always been an explorer, someone who dives into the world and loves to share her stories in paint. It is important for her to tell new tales of places she is very familiar with, to not copy herself or repeat her adventures but to constantly explore the awesome beauty that is the world around her. The Shoalhaven is her home and through these paintings we are able to enjoy the passion Porter Greene has for these special places. This is what I feel makes these works contemporary while also being rooted in the personal history of the artist. It is her special ability to capture the energy of the landscape and the joy it brings her. It might be the symbiotic partnership of lichen found on a walk, a huge expanse of burnt bushland or just a photo of a rubbish bin from the gold coast but what is certain in these works is the fun and sense of exploration and wonder. I have found it really enjoyable following the artist beyond this series and seeing the paint push out onto her letterbox and front porch. It is evident that if one gets too close to the artist that they might just get a little paint on them. It is a world of paint and adventure that I look forward to being a part of. I think of Porter Greene at a younger age and hiding in a cave, looking out over the expanse of bushland and saying to herself that she will never leave this beautiful land.

James Kerr, 2021