

# Jennings Kerr

Gary Christian

*On the Edge of a Beautiful World*

## *Industrial Romantic*

On approaching Christian's property from the front entry, there are three buildings that you can move towards, the entry forking out to the various projects and creative pursuits of a house the artist is building, the sculpture studio to the back and the living quarters that will turn painting studio on completing the house. Every direction you look exposes Christian's hand, his meticulous detailing and his ability to transform. It is a place the average would find overwhelming and the curious would breath inspiration from. There is a masculine and feminine in Christian's practice, a hard and soft, the industrial and the romantic applied evenly to all that he authors. I think of the duality expressed as both an optimism and pessimism in relation to the world around. Christian stands at the edge, he takes in his surroundings as beautiful but fragile and he infuses his works with the same balance.

The steel is softened, contorted from its feeding through presses, made malleable by pressure and left floating with a lightness that defies its material qualities. These undulations, folds and creases are heightened with their outfits, dressed in their chromes and powder coats, or left a little more honest and nude in their galvanised patina or rubbed down and oiled. Their treatments bring to mind the body, the scale and form also demand us relate to them in this way while examining them as thresholds, both physical and psychological. Can we dive through? Would we want to? The sculptures are somehow balanced despite their disparate surface treatments and finishes, at times elements feel lifted from the salt lake, worn and weathered by harsh environments but offset against the hyper-slick and mercury like glistening. There are rigid cubes as bases, boxes that perhaps would be a little too neat without their cor ten rust. Once again, an illusion and representation of nature's ability to eat into our so called strength. Christian infuses a little strength into his eggs, made hard in bronze, a classic art historical elevation. It is a straight transference of energy through material casting. Life perched up on its steel nest, crushing and folding all it comes up against. The sculptures defy their material rigidity, they pulse and sway. The light bounces off them, reflects and absorbs but the forms dance and mingle with one another. The room is a dance hall of portals, a precarious scenario that the artist explains as the beauty at the edge of chaos. The precipice before destruction, seen here through the sensitive and clever manipulation of material and rhythm of the artist's hand.

The salt lake acts as a key subject in this series of work. It is Christian's ongoing interest that allows for his continued palette of pinks and blues. These lakes are landlocked bodies of water with high concentrations of sodium chloride. They are places of incredible beauty but also harsh environments that at times feel alien. These strange lands give Christian room to explore the elemental wonders of nature. We certainly feel this in his titles; 'Windswept Salt Lake', 'Earth Water Salt', 'Rising Water on the Salt Lake', and 'Pink Salt Lake, Muddy Edge'. I recall a conversation at his studio about the vastness, the harsh wonderland and how these pink lakes are the edge. The strange precipice that invites contemplation and curiosity. Christian shared an image with me of a chair placed out in the lake, as an exclamation of the weird and wonderful. A sort of, 'why wouldn't you leave a seat out there for someone?'. The mark making is an equilibrium of bold and graphic, punchy gestures that are accompanied by fluid drips that speak to the patina on many of the sculptural pieces. The work 'Dry Bone Lake, Deep Time', 2023 possesses the full gamut of Christian's hand. There are notes of Cy Twombly in the tension between the verticals and the passages of calligraphic pencil markings. I love how Christian builds texture, a sand impasto or wiped on and off, scraping into and tracing over. Like the sculptures, the paintings possess a harmony of power with tender and quiet moments. They mirror the surfaces of the lakes, pushing and pulling, playing with light and testing the eyes focus.

It is so different to see the works installed onto the gallery walls and floor. They are now standing at attention, on duty in the white cube. They take on a different energy in here, at Christian's they seemed like his companions, informally placed amongst more of his unlimited creativity with his building works as backdrop. Then I look around and remember that in this gallery space, Christian also seamed together our showing spaces through his folded steel staircase, another threshold alongside a wall he has instated into the gallery in order to part conceal an exit from it. The wall now home to one of his metaphorical gateways, he offers it up for you to cross the threshold and enter into his world or at least how he sees our world.

James Kerr, 2023