

Jennings Kerr

Imbi Davidson

Spectrum

The last time I wrote on Davidson's practice, the paintings had come out of a period of turmoil and chaos, a house of cards collapsed, the cards and everything else around were soaked through. There was great personal loss, devastation from floods and a means to connect to family heritage and trace a personal lineage. The paintings in this series continue to act as portals, a means to balance her pendulum. This series pulls you into places that run the spectrum from the calm to the devastated. It is powerful and rich, packed with raw emotion expressed through rhythmic gesture. There is a harmony on the surface that comes with Davidson's confidence to soften the pieces through translucence. Their depths are open and endless, sometimes allowing the viewer in through compositional structures that pull you to the centre. There are also pieces that explode out to the edge and keep the eye bouncing from corner to corner. They express spaces, rooms and places to explore. The surfaces are loaded, but balanced and they continue to image memory and dreamscape. These scenes infuse themselves into the work with a connection to the wild and landscape. The physical landscape in relation to the psychological is very much at the core. Davidson continues to channel her immediate surrounds and the broader contemporary issues of our times through her brush. The timber board exists as a safe space for Davidson to reflect on and navigate the issues of daily life. Its rigidity allowing for the frenetic gestures, holding up as a firm support to the catharsis.

The light creeps up and in, through the blinds, under the door. The day inviting itself into the room, waking the slumber and giving form to our surrounding. There is an expression of spaces, places and forms in these paintings. It could be a cave, a shed, or a glass box as well as a creek bed, valley or mountain, but what is important is the softening of form. The definition is blurred, contorted but full of life. Light bouncing around, reflected and refracted, absorbed and dealt. Visual phenomena and effects of light are critical in the development of this series of work. Waking from the dream and attempting to piece the shattered visual back together, opening your eyes and stumbling with the initial blur. 'Phosphene', 2023 alludes to the visual stimuli created when closing your eyes tightly and applying pressure to the eye. The swirls and zig zags dance around until the retina settles. The yellow suggestive of a gaze into the sun and the resulting dizzying spell. It is a work that pushes and pulls the eye, you trace its passages and forms around the boards, up and over its minor plywood ridging. This movement definitely brings to mind the eye attempting to regain focus, to shake the spots and swirls out and to find resolution. 'Luminol', 2023 refers to another phenomenon based in science and more specifically forensic investigation. Luminol being an organic compound that is used to detect blood splatter in crime scenes. The substances will emit light when oxidised, often activated under blue light. Davidson has waved her brush up and over her dark scene, blue light providing another element to the scene, a pronounced dark drip from the upper section to the top edge. All of these paintings question how we relate to light, how it allows us to understand forms, shapes, spaces, and colour. Davidson looking for it in every scene, dealing it out through her translucency and searching for it in her depths.

Davidson finds comfort in her abstraction and looks to the past in works by the great Joan Mitchell, Helen Frankenthaler and most certainly Mark Rothko. A contemporary would perhaps be the large paintings by Columbian born Oscar Murillo who shares a similar frenzied approach to mark. His *manifestation* and *news* series have a direct correlation with how Davidson works in terms of the absorption of mass media, social, political and economic streams feeding into the mind and memory. A battlefield of power and psychological landscape present in both artists raw and at times aggressive gesture. The layers reveal themselves with time and for Murillo it is also about balancing the nature of the mark and surface with the complexities of the world around. The trace of labor and worked surfaces clearly evident in Davidson's painting. There are many similarities but none more evident than the signing of the body. I look into these paintings of Davidson, they both calm and excite depending on the piece, but in all cases there is a suggestion of the exhausted body, labor and hand. Everything put on the line and left out and open for the viewer. The raw and wild. Freedom at the precipice.

'Night Jacaranda', 2023 hints at a mysticism and the unknown. There is a part of Davidson's practice that is in many ways about connecting on another level, a little shamanic, portals to spirit worlds, searching for light through the darkness. There, one can find hope in the light. It is this more grand and optimistic motif that is brought back down to earth through reflections on the everyday. Davidson states;

"Things like, plants, landscape, home, washing, working, driving, clouds, seasons and normal daily cycles of activity. The paintings weave a variety of themes together taken from many threads, and like a rainbow, reflect the multiple parts of the colour spectrum in varied configurations and compositions."

The mundane pulls equally with that of the fantastical, gateways as fields of immersion to explore but painting very much in its surface, material and gesture. The painter as gatekeeper, conjuror of colour and light, brushes abstracting the headlines of the day with a dream of night before. In the last series there was a connection with a Viking heritage, a sense of adventure continues here but an equilibrium achieved through finding value and importance in the simplicities of the home.

The first light as the sun creeps up and illumination spills out over the land. Form is found and colour starts to register itself. The darkness forgotten and focus gained. The morning news is digested with breakfast and then melded with a dream or memory into a gestural mark. Life emits itself out of these paintings with a raw and powerful presence. Thinking about the previous shows in relation to this series it is a focus on balance and harmony that fuels Davidson's abstraction. 'Spectrum' here, by definition, could be applied in any number of ways. Davidson's rainbow banding of colour, the classification of her varying inputs from the calm to the chaotic but also the notion of a range of objects, ideas or opinions. The paintings infuse an all encompassing stimuli through the active body, the surface holding an awesome power but balanced with sensitivity.

James Kerr, 2024