

Jennings Kerr

Imbi Davidson
Chaos Theory

Sept 17 - Oct 18, 2021

In The Wind

The paintings in *Chaos Theory* sing with a joy of colour and rhythmic gesture. The marks feel primal, free and wild as they stretch out across the boards. However the compositions possess a tension and on closer examination of the layering, there is a sophisticated cohesion in the series. The works deal with memory and attempt to tell stories of the landscape. There is a continuity that suggests intention and the artist frequently works with found and recycled material including paint in order to create control but to also work sustainably. The frenetic gestures and dichotomy in these works bring to mind the late American painter Joan Mitchell. Imbi Davidson is able to achieve a balance and harmony in her paintings that speaks to her show title. The mathematical theory in which she refers is one of underlying patterns and repetition. Systems of control and notions of cause and effect. Imbi Davidson seems to tease out contemporary issues through her paintings while maintaining a focus on remembered landscapes and a connection to nature.

'Chaos Theory' is a branch of mathematics that deals with dynamical systems and how patterns and interconnectedness within systems govern result. It is this interconnectedness that seems to inform these paintings. There is rhythm in the series and I think the success in these works is the result of a very refined practice. The control comes through setting parameters such as the size of substrate and the use of only recycled paint gives us a continuity that at times almost presents the series as one painting. Despite this consonance, the paintings also feel like the result of frenzied battles on the surfaces. The works when viewed in isolation are bold, the marks are aggressive and intuitive. It is this fury pace that gives the work its power. The process seems to almost be performative and this comes on the initial read. These bold areas of rich colour are then tied together with scratchy, dry and more translucent passages. In the work 'Creation Story' we can see the complex layering and weaving together of colour but also the arching curved forms that are prevalent in the show. It is as if the soft pink is reaching out to connect with the blue tones. The colour pushes out to the edges and is layered and built up in varying levels of translucency. There is depth but also a raw energy that keeps your eye scanning the surfaces.

Colour seems pivotal like in most of the great abstract expressionist work and according to the artist the balance of colour and colour association are at the forefront of this series. Davidson states "Colour has ultimately played an important role in creating this body of work. Striking reds, pinks and warm hues form the dominant colour scheme, and for me, tell a story of the feminine (women, blood, lipstick, power, girls, prettiness and birth). Juxtapositions of bold yellows, blues and grey green temper the angry fire of reds and pinks, while layers of marks, opaque and translucent colours are pushed and pulled across the surface" The use of recycled paints is very interesting in relation to this and according to the artist a way of stepping outside of her comfort zone. It is this kind of process or control that leads to the serial nature of the work. It becomes a challenge to work with what is at hand and the paintings begin to chip away at each other with the artist's guidance. The studio, the material, the gesture are all connected to one another and this is then fuelled by elements of the everyday, weather systems, political climates, people, and most commonly places.

The work 'The Butterfly Effect' also manages to achieve equilibrium through many of the processes already mentioned. For me it is the minor moment of olive green and brown that set the whole composition off and charge the higher pitched colours. Once again the title referring to *Chaos Theory* and interconnectedness. "You could not remove a single grain of sand from its place without thereby ... changing something throughout all parts of the immeasurable whole." (Fichte, *The Vocation of Man*, 1800). It is this notion of understanding and appreciating the small and simple elements within a system and how they can have an effect on a larger and more complex system. I can feel that this speaks to the way Imbi Davidson lives her life, feeds her painting practice and explores the complexities of contemporary society. The mark acts as a meditation, an attempt to understand and make sense of the world.

One could imagine music playing while the sun streams in the studio window and boards scattered and at varying stages of completion, with many cans of recycled paint open and ready to mingle. I think the works are in conversation, different issues, people and places fleshed out on the surface. The gestures feel therapeutic and a process of connecting to the world. When beginning to think about this text I thought about an image that the artist had sent me. The paintings were lined up side by side in the grass, with foliage surrounding them. This felt refreshing for me. The image is honest and also speaks to the way Imbi processes what she does as a painter. I think back to the recycled paint, and other found materials, to the remembered landscapes and I wonder if Imbi is telling us the works are of nature and belong in it and to it. Perhaps it is important to consider it as cyclical, but for me it certainly conveys the artist's connection to landscape. The image and the paintings are chaotic and beautiful at the same time.

James Kerr, 2021