

Jennings Kerr

Lucinda Chambers

Flower

"To be a Flower, is profound

Responsibility— " 'Bloom — is Result — to meet a Flower' (1945) by Emily Dickinson

Tear from the Stem

Rising to the chirp of birds, sun cutting through the pines and drying off the morning dew. A call to action and out to tend to the vegetable garden or into the studio. A life full of joy, creation and slowing down, observing the seasons through the garden. The flower opens, closes, sways in the wind, or swings towards the light, fades, petals fall, withers, and energy returns to the ground. Showing us the fragility of life and its awesome beauty. The all encompassing cosmos and transference of energy within the system. How it is all interconnected: the activity of the flower symbolising our own minute part of the whole. Splendour in the garden and the studio, tending to the crop, the flower bed, and surrounds in order to come inside and tend to the acrylic glaze, the washes, stains, brush marks, and sewing. Where many might talk about the location and access to a 'kitchen garden' in order clip the parsley, gather the lettuce or pass out the rhubarb, Chambers thinks of her garden as critical to the creative process, essential ingredients of her painting. There is a psychedelic murkiness at work on the surface, the staining and washes bringing to mind the fluidity and melding of a tie-dye, or the movement of a bolus within a lava lamp. The processes are set up as a 'letting go', an invitation of chance and the incidental and very importantly for the division of colours that occur in staining. The harmony between the artist's hand and the temperament of fluidity is key, a balancing act not too dissimilar to that of the pruning scateur and stem. These works are a meditation on personal experience in that they trace the artist's own journey and connect her past with the present. In this sense they speak to the Chinese 'Moon Gates' of traditional Asian gardens and their transformative power. Chambers has a deep and long standing connection with gardens and as a show these works explore this complex relationship.

The 'Cosmos White' is a prominent flower in Chambers' meadows. It is simple and white petalled, dainty and able to sit back in a mixed bed. The flower symbolises purity and romance however this is a show about harmony and balance, the term cosmos derived from the Greek 'Kosmos', as a motif of harmony in the universe. Even the orientation of the painting is in essence a conceptual choice in order to express portraiture, that of nature, of the beauty and cyclical aspects of the garden. Chambers considers the Swiss psychiatrist and psychoanalyst Carl Jung's notions of the diamond in her painting 'Diamond', 2024 as a link to the spiritual, a representation of inner and outer balance. According to Jung, the apex symbolising illumination and the sides as the elements. In Chambers' painting we find a diamond configuration of 'Cosmos White' and the stems seem to be blown into this form, a dynamic sway amongst the fluid colour. This fluidity, the soft edge and focus, creating a mood of transition, perhaps from season to season or morning to midday and sundown. The shifts and changes in the garden, the perennials bursting into bloom, the weeds creeping up after a downpour, the shifting scene backdropped by the evergreens. Chambers capturing one magical realm within another.

On a recent trip to The Getty Centre in Los Angeles, California, Chambers was struck by the 'panel paintings' that often depict religious events amongst scenes of the everyday, rendered as shallow and flat spaces. 'The Deposition', 1490 by a follower of Rogier van der Weyden was one of a few favourites and on close inspection the narrative of figure in space and specifically in this case bordered by a passage of weed and plant life stayed with Chambers. On leaving the painting, exiting from the building and finding the scene again in the tiered spiral garden of the Getty. Chambers was struck by the garden beds of 'Cosmos White', in abundance, and the scenes in the panel paintings mirrored out in the world, connecting space and time, imagined and the real. I also think this garden experience transformed Chambers, through it acting like a portal to her magical garden as a child, or the one surrounding her current home. I guess these experiences of the artist are what brought to mind the Chinese 'Moon Gates'. The ability of nature and the garden to fold time and space. We also find a narrative of figure in the garden in these paintings. It might be a kiss or a stroll but like the experience at the Getty, there is a little magic at play. Our eye traces around the painting looking for activity and a sign of life but zooming back out and once again realising the entire scene is bursting with life. The soft sculpture of 'Belljar', 2024 continues Chambers' interest in containment, protection and preservation. Where previously it was a soft sculpture in a physical bell jar, it is now a soft painted sculpture of one. The foliage and flower speaking directly to the border of the favoured panel painting.

I was lucky to enjoy rhubarb pulled and handed over, baked in a tart and enjoyed as an extension of the studio visit. Equal conversation amongst the paintings and sculpture as that of the flowers and garden, chooks wandering around in the sun. An enchanted scene that brings to mind the fairytale, a fantastical innocence and freedom that infuses into this work. As you tear from the stem, stop and enjoy, see the potential for new growth and the cycle to continue. We, like the energy from the wilted flower, will return to the earth.

James Kerr, 2024