

Jennings Kerr

Vanessa Forbes

Ambience

“To understand the true nature of the universe, one must think in terms of energy, frequency and Vibration” - Nikola Tesla

These paintings whisper softly, sometimes familiar lands and sometimes a little harder to pin down. They are in many ways energy fields that channel the frequencies of the world around. The ethereal and expanse offer space to contemplate our relationship to the shapes and forms that make up our surroundings. The light and colour also call to mind wonderlands of the fairytale backdrop, possibly even the alchemy of potions and magic in the air. I see green, pink and purple, yellow and many other coloured filters, like observing the scene, looking out on the lands through the potion bottle, or Forbes waving her brush, spellbinding colour and illumination, fixed onto the canvas with a lightness that brings to mind the work of Lucas Arruda. I recall visiting Forbes' previous studio where most of the show was painted, a small pine-board lined space surrounded by green pastures, a horse out the window and only natural light to work from. I observed the space in the work, noticed the almost borderless scenes that take you on a journey and I could not help but wonder how Forbes is able to look out her window at the world and depict it with the magic we often reserve for fairytale and legend.

Quantum mechanics is a theory and branch of physics that looks at the physical property of nature at the atomic and subatomic scale. It attempts to understand the world with a focus on the properties of physical systems. This branch of physics directly relates to the paintings in this show, it helps inform how Forbes sees space and object but most relevant in how she renders these fields. Forbes states; “everything can be either particle or wave, this points to the fact that despite what we have been taught, nothing is solid, everything has a frequency and vibration, including colour”. This scientific lens helps give framework to the rendering of the expanse, it charges her voids with vibration and waves of energy but it is also a counterbalance to the soft and romantic. The ethereal tone of the painting is an attempt to infuse memory but to also harmonise literal representation with the emotional. The amorphous landscape is loose and free, like gases floating around in the atmosphere, bouncing, reflecting and refracting light. The forms are dynamic and fluid, they feel free to ping from edge to edge and the oscillating nature of the pieces often only grounded by the formality of tone and colour to render a faint suggestion of landscape.

The earth's water cycle is a key element in these paintings. The movement of water helps provide a subtle nod to the fluid and vibrational essence of the lands. We see this most prominently in the clouds of water vapour but also in the fog and more so pronounced in the piece 'Falls', 2023, where we see water falling through the mist, finding its way to ground and then continue its movement through evaporation. Anyone who knows these surrounds is familiar with the ground touching clouds, the obscuring fog blanketing and concealing the hills of Robertson. It softens and blurs the scene, almost daily at certain times of year, rolling in and around the hills and trees. It is an ambience that has fuelled these paintings and allowed for a way of seeing with soft focus, pulling memory with her brush like a wand drawing remembered scenes to a witch or wizards 'Pensieve'. I guess I can't help but feel a little magic and the fantastical in all that Forbes conjures, perhaps it is a world that we need to open our minds to.

I relate these pieces to the Brazilian painter Lucas Arruda in the way they side-step an attachment to place. Arruda is well known for his psychological landscapes that gravitate between genre in a way that speaks to the pieces in this exhibition. Arruda often fixating on the effect of light in the scene, but very importantly his paintings call into question our relationship to space and the notion of 'landscape'. Memory and feeling are central to Forbes show in that her paintings are also stitched together without singular locations in mind. The small scale is another commonality between the artists, allowing for the viewing to be intimate and focussed with Arruda also often only signing the landscape genre very sensitively through horizon and tone. Forbes' work in many ways is less abstract but almost more atmospheric and formless.

This room feels weightless, energy floating around in cycles and interconnected realms of imagination. These psychological terrains chip away at you, they build momentum with each viewing and contain, envelop and hold you inside their vastness. Colour touches in different ways and here we are very cleverly shifted from the familiar through filters laid over space. The chiaroscuro is handled with a comfort and ease, form and volume observed ever so softly and blended seamlessly, however still maintaining a great sense of depth and perspective in the scene. This is confident painting, accomplished technique and formality without calling our attention to it. Forbes' scenes are spellbinding, they are an antidote for the chaos and complexity of our reality. Like all good tales, it is important to consider with open mind and allow your imagination to run wild.