

reflective

dialogues

Chris Capper
Andy Devine
Chris Langlois
Peter Tilley

reflective dialogues

an exhibition of work by

Chris Capper

Andy Devine

Chris Langlois

Peter Tilley

first shown at the University Gallery, the University of Newcastle, 9 May - 16 June 2012

curated by Gilean Shaw, Art Curator, the University of Newcastle

text by Michael Hedger, Manager, Cultural and Information Services, Manly Council



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The four artists whose works are presented in this exhibition collaboratively chose its title. They reflect deeply on their subject matters, absorb underlying themes, and portray personal “dialogues” with their subjects, with themselves and with their viewers. Despite the wide range of imagery, from formalist sculpture to landscapes and still lifes, and their varied techniques, the artists’ reflections unify the exhibition.

We perceive influences from Cornell, Turner, Whistler and Morandi, artists whose reputations are based on, partly, their intriguingly patterned surfaces and the presences they created from otherwise undistinguished objects. Although the influences on each of the artists in the exhibition are diverse and their works are highly individual, all emphasise silence and stillness and the formal qualities of order, negative spaces and the relationships of simple forms within their spaces. Like the artists who influenced them, they create their gestalt from the prosaic.

The images are underlain with personal concerns, which the artists voice candidly. The multiple meanings are intertwined with the aesthetics and make the outward results of the inward “journeys” rewarding for them and for us. Some have used their practices to resolve deeper questions, and for some, these art works were instrumental in personal healing processes.

The images are uncrowded, non-directional, self-referential yet universal, and studying them leads viewers to rewarding personal interpretations.

Michael Hedger

March 2012



chris capper

Chris Capper's four groups of flower paintings are the antithesis of that traditional genre since in reworking the symbols of Feint, Reyfisch, Latour and Cezanne as Pop metaphors, they reflect the artist's journey and state of mind at the time of their creation. While the subjects make us note the effects created by tight formal compositions of simple and prosaic elements and flattened geometric patterns, it is the quietude behind them that resonates. The satisfying completeness of these pictures is due to their restricted geometric compositions pushed around the picture plane, their negative spaces and their overworking, a characteristic of Capper's oeuvre. They are never really complete in Capper's mind as his approach to them changes constantly, reflecting directly his restless mind and his continually evolving fascination with the craft. In this sense they resemble diaries or personal "journeys", and the inclusion of previous lines and paint, traces the development of the paintings and his state.

They are deliberately anti-kitsch and "anti-tasteful" flower paintings, countering the traditional floral metaphors for beauty and formal events such as funerals and weddings. Dominant at first are the bright colours and textures, but it is the details such as petals and the drawn frames, and attempts at unravelling the hidden messages, which linger.

The flowers are recognisable and their groupings represent the varying emotions experienced by the artist and understood by the viewers. The red carnations burst with optimism; the "black" group reflects a concern at the passing of time; the bases of the vases refer to the foundations of solidity. The techniques are also worthy of comment: the tulips show a more painterly technique with the loss of stems and the buds float in space; the "soda glass" paintings give substance to the mundane Pop forms of Oldenburg. Only the symbolic triangle group has metaphoric titles such as *Climbing the mountain*, further recognition that time moves inexorably on and we have highs and lows. Fortunately the highs, represented by the triangles, dominate.



Chris Capper *Diagonal and frame* 2012, 50x60cm, oil on canvas



Chris Capper *Climbing the mountain - a brief respite* 2012, 50x60cm, oil on canvas



Chris Capper 2 *Agapanthus* 2012, 50x60cm, oil on canvas



Chris Capper *5 Carnations - brown* 2012 , 60x75cm, oil on canvas



andy devine

Andy Devine's industrial landscapes are reflective and restful but their underlying messages are ambiguously troubling and personal.

The *Distant* series reference Whistler's *Nocturnes* and are dominated by sky patterns created by smoke stacks and lights above night time industrial landscapes. As the production of smoke is subject to the same natural atmospheric forces of all entities, it creates a paradoxically restful atmosphere. The portions of buildings have strangely aloof presences, as indicated by their titles.

The silhouetted series, *Black Seam*, *Fool's Gold* and *Mass* depict the Cormorant's Way coal stacks at Newcastle Harbour. They are studies of the massed stacks against dramatic skies, emphasising solitariness and isolation. They are symbolic of wealth, but the irony in their titles is not overtly political. The underlying message is more personal.

The formalism and scales of the *Black Seam* series are lessened and humanised by the *Fool's Gold* series which are anchored by the angled Jeffrey Smart-type height markers. The humanised perspectives, the literal references of the fences and natural vegetation define the compositions as Australian. The *Mass* series shows Devine's mastery of the ambiguous and mysterious as the studies combine elements from the other series and show a building of atmospheric tension, with the climatic explosion or storm in *Mass #5*.

The paintings are personal narratives, representing Devine's coming to terms with his background and family relationships in England. He has described his paintings as "honest" and a "cathartic embrace" of his past and they are reflective dialogues with it. He has literally replaced the industrial world of England with that of Newcastle, so memories are difficult to ignore.



Andy Devine *Distant #3* 2012, 33x30cm, acrylic on board



Andy Devine *Fool's Gold #1* 2012, 37x35cm, acrylic on board



Andy Devine *Black Seam #5* 2012, 33x30cm, acrylic on boardw



Andy Devine *Mass #5* 2012, 100x100cm, acrylic on canvas



chris langlois

Chris Langlois' grouping of large ravishing landscapes invites long study because of his flawless painterly techniques, but what maintains interest is their underlying unease and unique perspectives on traditional subject matter. The concern is not for the direct representation of nature but to force concentration and reflection onto the atmospheric features.

The three large landscapes, Middle Creek, Narrabeen Lake and Pipeclay Point use Australia's natural tertiary colours and sweep viewers' eyes from the foregrounds around to the right to the strong laterals of the horizons and landform lines at the centres of the paintings. These Whistleresque blendings of forms and air propel the viewers to immerse themselves, following the watercolour effects that seem to find their own forms. The mists evoke mystery and blur their vanishing points. The sweeping vistas are populated with rocks, trees and unremarkable landforms, but the colour saturation and blurring give them their unique mysticism. While much of the paintings' surfaces appear to be devoid of subject matter, Langlois shows his sensitivity to the minutiae of atmospheric conditions. It is impossible, of course, to portray nothing, and Langlois' seemingly empty spaces burst with both luminance and power. It is his ability to reflect on the seemingly emptiness of space that gives his paintings their power and attest to his deep sensitivity.

The Darkwood paintings, an expressionistic tree study and an enlarged water flow are devoid of colour and are clever demonstrations of the mysticism and threats inherent in all natural forms. They are evidence of an educated eye: one who reflects on and responds deeply to the minutiae of the natural world, and who is changed by it.



Chris Langlois *Middle Creek* 2010, 137x275cm, oil on linen



Chris Langlois *Pipeclay Point* 2010, 137x137cm, oil on linen



Chris Langlois *Narrabeen Lake* 2009, 122x213cm, oil on linen



Chris Langlois *Darkwood No.21* 2011, 153x153cm, oil on linen



FATE

peter tilley

Peter Tilley's three panels are more clearly self-reflective than the other works in this exhibition as their contrivance forces us to contemplate the meanings and implications of the abstract nouns of emotional states that we use automatically and casually. Limiting himself to panels of cut out letters symbolising, perhaps, the Pure and the Ideal, in white, the darker Risk, in graphite and the Reality, in rusted tones, Tilley has reflected on the natural human states that drive us, and their possible consequences. He has reworked Robert Indiana's timeless Pop LOVE graphic, and imbued it with a personal story. Reducing the complexities of experiences to semiotics or blocks of four letter words is a poignant method of focusing on the fundamental emotional issues which affect us all. As they are specific and personal to all, responses will be universal.

Tilley's free standing works monumentalise the sentiments of two concepts from the panels and visualise the risks involved in their attainment. *PAIR* adds a presence and solemnity to the letter arrangement by placing it on an altar / shrine to the bond of friendship or coupling. As the ambiguous form references a shrine or a headstone, it causes the viewer to ponder the power and stability of an ideal, something that can be attained only through literal physical effort. The opposing figures of bond face each other across an uneven form which is revealed as a handshake only from a distance, symbolizing the unsteady and possibly hazardous nature of friendship.



Peter Tilley *HELP* 2012, 106x87cm, ceramic and painted timber



Peter Tilley *LOVE* 2012, 106x87cm, bronze and painted timber



Peter Tilley *PLOT* 2012, 106x87cm, lead and painted timber



Peter Tilley *PAIR* 2012, 84x32x33.5cm, painted timber

The title of this exhibition, *Reflective Dialogues* was chosen by the artists themselves and is a marker of the premise for the show in its entirety. Not only does it describe the connectivity between these practitioners, but there have been many dialogues between them on the particular curatorial nature of the show, the importance of dialogue within their work and the importance of dialogue between the group.

Rarely is one granted the luxury of working with such like minded people who present their work and ideas with a respect for their medium, their practice and their friendship. This show has grown out of their respect for each other as artists and a desire to show intrinsic concerns and their development on a wider stage. Add to this group Michael Hedger, who has an intimate understanding of the practice of these four artists and who so eloquently has written the foreword for this show. We thank him for his thoughtful insights into these artist's work and world.

The University of Newcastle is very pleased to be able to collaborate with Chris Capper, Andy Devine, Chris Langlois and Peter Tilley to present this exhibition. The magic, skill and intellect that creates work which inspires a visceral reaction in us the viewers, is very palpable in this collection - it reminds us of the importance of art to the soul, it absorbs us in reflective dialogue with ourselves and with others.

Gillean Shaw
Art Curator, the University Gallery
April 2012



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