



Three Ways: G.W.Bot, Meg Buchanan, Anita McIntyre



G.W. Bot - 'Portrait', 2015
bronze, Ed'n: 5 + AP. 162.0 x 82.0 cm



Anita McIntyre - Angkor, 2016
porcelain paper clay, monoprint, slips, stamping
81,0 x 111,0 x 5,0 cm (overall x 9 units)

Introduction

Cowra Regional Art Gallery is pleased to present this significant exhibition Three Ways: G.W.Bot, Meg Buchanan, Anita McIntyre. Central to the exhibition is each of the artists' striking explorations and engaging experimental approaches concerned with the Australian landscape, incorporating a sense of place, memory and individual histories.

Curator Peter Haynes has known the three artists of Three Ways over many years giving him a unique perspective not only of their careers which span several decades but also of their work practices and imaginative creations. His essay for the exhibition about the three artists is an insightful background and exploration of their conceptual approaches and poetic responses to the natural world.

I would like to thank G.W.Bot, Meg Buchanan and Anita McIntyre for the sharing of their work, collaboration and support towards the realization of the exhibition. I would also like to acknowledge Peter Haynes, curator and writer, who has worked closely with the artists over the last two years and for his personal vision to develop and refine the exhibition and its presentation.

Brian Langer

Gallery Director
Cowra Regional Art Gallery
August 2016

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Three Ways showcases the recent work of three artists whose major aesthetic explorations are concerned with the Australian landscape as it impacts on them through the immediacy of their living and working environments and through each artist's particular histories of their relationship with the land (in its broader sense). The *three ways* of the title refers not only to the aesthetic and conceptual approaches of the artists but also to the formal means they choose to visualise their imaginative creations. They use a range of means to express the reactions to and embracing of the land. Bot is printmaker, painter and sculptor. Buchanan is painter, printmaker and draughtsman. McIntyre works in clay. The following discussions are introductory excursions into the work of the three artists of **Three Ways**. They offer ways of looking at art that escapes definition but has elicited from me deep responses over many years and that will continue to do so for years to come.

G.W.Bot's art celebrates the relationship between self and place and the importance of the balance of humanity with the natural world. To express this she has developed a unique pictorial language – glyphs – that is sourced from, and is acknowledgement of the power of nature and its impact on the creative imagination. The artist's works in **Three Ways** continue her explorations of the expressive possibilities of her chosen language and powerfully demonstrate the richness of these unlimited possibilities.

Grassland Glyphs is a beautifully nuanced work. The palette is limited to black and white with tonal variations of these two, a choice that simultaneously underscores a range of coeval aesthetic and interpretative readings. For Bot the elision of ways of viewing with ways of thinking is an essential path to confronting her art. Shades of meaning expressed through tonal changes and deviations create an active and suggestive pictorial amalgam. This entices viewers not just because of its essential beauty but also because of its layered philosophical, conceptual and cultural allusions visualised through the artist's signature *glyphs* and accompanying formal means.

The black and white palette is absolutely correct here. Bot has created a marvellously rich field of marks that constitute the background "grassland" of the title. This is divided by a series of elegantly contrived serpentine (and other) lines into various shapes and forms that speak of the landscape outside the artist's studio but stand for the natural world ("the land") in general. At the front of the picture plane and placed to the left-hand edge of the work stands the dark silhouette (read *glyph*) of a tree bereft of foliage with its bare branches reaching into the pictorial space, in almost angry gestures. The latter cut into the spatial configurations, their jagged and sharp edges a dark contrast to the barely delineated outline of a cloaked figure standing in the centre of the image. The anonymous (?) figure is ubiquitous throughout Bot's oeuvre and appears in a number of iterations. Its identity is not stated but one can postulate that the figure is the guide that will lead the viewer through the work. It is the mysterious poet whose language we need to accept if we are to follow the artist's journey: for indeed the artist is the poet.

Bot uses deep black in especially expressive ways. The large tree is accompanied by smaller outgrowths situated further into the pictorial field. Their placement creates an activated space where the non-corporeal figure stands in contemplation of the "world" before him. The blackness of the sun at the top right-hand corner is particularly effective in the way it both concentrates the image's energies while simultaneously moving the viewer back to the tree at the front of the picture plane. The "grassland" is made up of myriads of small vertical cuts/lines whose variegated densities capture the underlying structures of the landscape. The strong thrust of the initial serpentine flow of the path that originates from the bottom left-hand corner is broken by quietly inserted horizontals. These coupled with the insistent presence of the verticals, provide spatial recession and a quietly directed movement through the work culminating in the dark sun at the top right. That this motif is both destination and source for movement back into the work imbues it with a seductive formal and aesthetic tension. Despite the ostensible pictorial and graphic activity that characterises the immediate viewer confrontation with *Grassland Glyphs*, Bot captures a meditative mood that is slowly revealed as one



Meg Buchanan - Soundscape V
pastel, acrylic on board. 60x109.5cm

moves through the work. The multiplicity of marks that are such an intense presence conversely may also be read as the fragile components of a world where the interfering touch of humanity can be a dangerous thing. Through consummate control of her pictorial structure Bot is able to intimate the coexistence of strength and fragility and the delicate balance that exists between them.

The deliberate limitation of palette offers shaded areas of visual and philosophical respite that are conducive to contemplation and that refer to the multivalent readings that are possible when humanity interacts with the natural world. Bot does not wish to be definitive but rather provides us with beautiful interrogative spaces where meditative response can take place and where individuals can find from her own deeply personal and uniquely expressed interactions their own relationship with nature.

Meg Buchanan is also interested in the interactions of man with the natural world. In a reductive almost abstract language she confronts, examines and analyses the landscape and man's interventions in that landscape



Anita McIntyre - Home Country, 2016
porcelain paper clay, monoprint, screenprint, slips, stamping. 55.0 x 148.0 x 5.0 cm



G.W. Bot "Grassland Glyphs", 2016
linocut on Kenzo paper. 94.0 x 64.0 cm (uf) (detail)

to produce powerful visual statements. *Laminal V* is a strong and stark statement. Buchanan continues to explore a previously successful format viz. the use of layers of horizontal bands each with strong lateral thrusts, populated with an array of pictorial and painterly devices and motifs that variously evoke aspects of the natural and the man-made world. Here the canvas is divided into the terrestrial and the celestial (the former occupying about two-thirds of the picture plane, the latter the remaining third). Buchanan adopts an essentially "earthy" palette for the terrestrial - browns, terracottas - broken by two dominant swathes of black that cut through the earth tones of the desolate and unpopulated landscape.

The spatial configuration is overtly ambiguous, and ambiguity is a device used with great perspicacity by the artist. The overall horizontality of the black bands creates areas that can be simultaneously read as flat; on the same level as the black insurgents; or deeply recessive, falling into a space behind, rather than directly aligned with the lateral thrusts of black. The areas between are texturally and tonally activated and provide modulated contrasts to the vibrant opacity of the black bands. Buchanan's "play" with space makes multiple readings possible. This tension is played off against the implied tensions between realism and abstraction, tensions that are subtly but nevertheless there. The lush blue of the sky that simultaneously juts out over the landscape and falls down deeply behind it, is activated by groups of scumbled clouds that dart across the (once again) lateral thrusts and offer a further example of the elision of the abstract with the real that so characterises Buchanan's art. Like G.W. Bot, Buchanan's works come from confrontations with real places but like the former they remain imaginative constructs of experiential activities built up over time. Buchanan posits landscape as a place for dialogue yet a source of powerful and direct beauty.

Black has been a part of Buchanan's art for some years. It is given starkly minimal eloquence in the *Soundscape* series of pastel and acrylic on board works seen in the current exhibition. *Soundscape V* exemplifies this. On a dense black ground fine white lines are dispersed in what seems a random fashion (but is in fact beautifully orchestrated) across the surface. The contrast of black and white is defiant and seductive. The sparsely populated surface capitalises on the density of its almost velvet blackness highlighted as it is by the fragile linear presence of white that seems to dance across and through the surface. The surface is not so much interrupted but rather accompanied by these lines that invite readings of spatial depth as they simultaneously hover over that depth. Again, spatial and other ambiguities happily coexist. While landscape may be alluded to, definitive references are avoided. Affinities with music arise and possibilities for synaesthetic response are clearly not avoided in these elegant imaginative and poetic expressions.



G.W. Bot - *Fallen Glyph*, 2015
steel, unique, 250 x 358cm (variable)

Anita McIntyre's art is the expression of her reflections on the world around her through the exploration of family, history and place. For her place is of especial importance in its embodying of multiple cultures and multiple geographies. In this exhibition *place* is exotic (Cambodia, Vietnam) and native (the Kimberleys, and Canberra and surrounding region). Journey to *place* is integral to her expressive modus operandi. Journeys involve a beginning and an ending but for McIntyre the journeys she undertakes are arguably without end. She constantly rethinks, reassesses and remakes her imaginative responses to the actuality of her experiences of places visited. She also incorporates the cultures and history of those places when those phenomena may be outside her immediate real experience. History, the past, is part of her present and informs through quiet allusion her visual vocabulary. For her the exploring eye is also the artist's eye and that is of course informed by a fertile creative imagination that ultimately shapes her aesthetic paeans to places visited, experienced and remembered.

McIntyre adopts a number of plastic and pictorial strategies to record her journeys. Of particular relevance to the present exhibition are boats and "tiles". The former has become a mainstay of the artist's morphological ceramic vocabulary since the early 2000s. The boat (or vessel) becomes emblematic of both journey and traveller(s). It is at once universal and particular. McIntyre's boats also become surfaces to record the places and memories of places she has visited. The imagery ranges from simple marks to carefully delineated subjects that speak of the traveller's jottings and the artist-traveller's sketches and drawings. In the "Mekong boats" images are incised into the ceramic hull and crude roofed shelters in random order, reflecting their role as personal palimpsests rather than factual records of retraced topographies. The images, marks and impressions on the boats evoke memories and meanings known only to those who were part of their making. Their randomness is exemplary of the associations that have promulgated their inclusion. Like memories, there is no necessary order to how they arrive. For McIntyre the boat becomes holder of memories, a plastic equivalent of the artistic psyche from which they arose.

Specificity of place and culture is a concern of the artist not only because it assists in *placing* works but also

because it is acknowledgement of cultures other than our own, and acknowledgement of the influence the confrontation with the *other* has on each individual. Australia's north-west coast holds particular significance to the artist and it often figures in her artistic recollections. The *Kimberley boats* beautifully illustrate this. Hulls here are alive with the flora and fauna of the region. Indigenous culture is quietly acknowledged in the manner the images are made (a nod to Indigenous x-ray painting). The deep spiritual connection of Indigenous Australians to the land is also present in the Wandjina figures. McIntyre's boats carry narratives that arise from personal experience but they are also narratives that have relevance beyond the individual and speak of universal concerns that matter to each of us.

"Tiles" are also a signature part of McIntyre's artistic language. The platter form is of course age-old in ceramics but the artist's "tiles" are given individual and group authority when expressed through the artist's unique visual language. For her the rectangular format is a means of creating a form of visual diary especially when they are grouped as in *Kimberley*, *Angkor* and *Home Country*. Each panel is like a page from a diary lovingly inscribed and populated with aspects of various topographies that in compilation provide a visual and imaginative re-creation of journeys experienced by the artist. Viewers might be offered a vicarious journey, once-removed from their reality. However in McIntyre's diaries the elision of place and memory is given persuasive expression through the embracing eloquence of her art.

The three artists confront different topographies but are united in their imaginative re-creations of their particular confrontations and experiences of place and memories of those confrontations and experiences. They are however separated by the individual means of expression each adopts and by the aesthetic languages that constitute their expressions. Through clay, metal, ink and paint Bot, Buchanan and McIntyre make works that celebrate not only the beauty of the environments that have stimulated their individual aesthetic imaginations, but also the continuing relevance of the products of the creative imagination for our often bewildering and chaotic world.

Peter Haynes
Canberra, August 2016



Meg Buchanan - Laminal 5
acrylic on canvas. 91x152cm



Anita McIntyre - Mekong boats, 2016
porcelain paper clay, linoprint, slips, stamping. 10.0 x 37.0 x 8.0 cm (overall dimensions variable x 3 units)



G.W. Bot - 'Fragile Glyph', 2016
oil on canvas. 80 x 132cm

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G.W.Bot "Grassland Glyphs", 2016
linocut on Kenzo paper
94.0 x 64.0 cm (uf) (detail)

Anita McIntyre "Kimberley", 2016
porcelain paper clay, slip, stamping
111.0 xz 81.0 x 5.0 cm (detail)

Meg Buchanan "Laminal 3", 2016
acrylic on canvas
91.0 x 152.0 cm (detail)

