

JO DAVENPORT

REMEMBERED LANDSCAPE

2 - 20 October 2012

The Ephemera of a Remembered Landscape
 Laura Skerlj

"These trees are magnificent, but even more magnificent is the sublime and moving space between them, as though with their growth it too increased." -Rilke

In Jo Davenport's paintings, landscape is a transitional space. Day, night, and the seasons can change the appearance of the countryside in a split second. In the next moment, all of these elements shift and the landscape is redrawn. Davenport recalls this ephemeral process through colour and mark making, relying upon her memories as source material for her work. In the creating of an image, both momentary and well-observed recollections hold important intonations: as a glimpsed landscape triggers an intuitive response, a long term knowledge of place can decipher the nuances inherent in shifting seasons and times of day. These memories are transformed into mind maps of the artist's spiritual encounter with the wilderness.

In a series of new works at Flinders Lane Gallery, Jo Davenport's large-scale paintings explore this ephemeral quality shared by both memory and nature. As her home is in Albury, this work speaks specifically of the Murray River and its surrounding landscape. Although the artist has a lifelong understanding of this area, its transformability has made it an enduring muse.

On a recent boat trip down the long stretch from Echuca to Adelaide, the Murray carried Davenport through "a daydream of fleeting landscapes." Here, her sense of time was lost as she became mesmerised by the shifting environment that lapped at the side of the boat. Pockets of vegetation, unexpected flora, or the miraculous play of light upon water became as momentous as the overarching fabric that held this natural world together. From this interior view, time seemed to expand into a fluid continuum where the space between things became both full and elastic. This dream state was interrupted only by a series of blue markers that had been installed at intervals along the river's bank. Each marker had a number to document the distance in kilometres until Adelaide. As in a map, these markers pulled Davenport back to a solid point in the schema: "These markers have become distinctive dots within some of my paintings, as they constantly relocated our position on a journey that had seemed to become part of a larger consciousness."

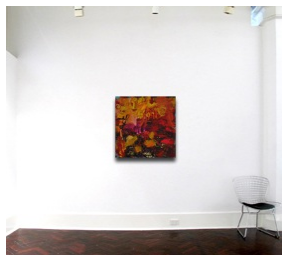
From such experiences comes Davenport's vision of the wilderness. This vision stems more from an encounter with nature than a critical observation of the landscape. In turn, the artist engages the ancient activity of mark making to express her experience. Her use of line and colour has the intuitive quality of drawing: a process that directly channels the mind to the hand as it creates. As this essential mode of art making could be seen to date back to Neolithic cave paintings, Davenport connects the timelessness of drawing with the timelessness of nature. Here, some marks take on a calligraphic form, while others are allowed to drip freely from the picture plane. There are sweeping gestures that conjure topography in a single line, just as there are sections of sensitive detail. In addition, areas of erasure speak of the evanescence of the natural world. As all of these marks seem to be both carefully selected yet unconsciously made, there is a sense that the artist comes to better understand her subject through this process of creation.

Colour too has this same instinctual quality. Bringing together discordant and harmonious values, Davenport transforms the landscape that surrounds her into an otherworldly terrain. Here, the melancholic hues of the Australian bush are wholeheartedly understood: each one conjuring the ache and magic of this land's history. However, it is the juxtaposition of these subtle tones with joyous colour that defines this landscape as 'unreal'. The vibrancy of the high-key notes in these works reflects the spectacular moment when nature flips into an extreme version of itself. This is the transition we sometimes witness in sunsets or storms: the surprising instance when colour becomes too surreal to be seen as 'natural'. Davenport encourages these disjunctions to metamorphose the terrestrial Australian wilderness into a vision of nature that is both localised yet dreamlike.

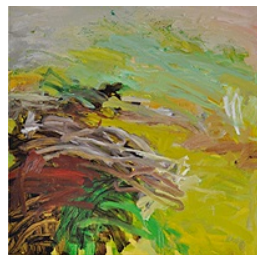
In these new paintings, Jo Davenport abandons a mere representation of landscape to envisage the natural environment as an endlessly activated moment. As the time inherent in this space is seen as both ancient and fleeting, it is through an abstract process that the artist is best able to map her memories of this terrain. However, as this mnemonic process is simultaneously imaginative and forgetful, the landscape that emerges is a distinctly spiritualised one: a natural space we enter into, only to lose ourselves along the way.



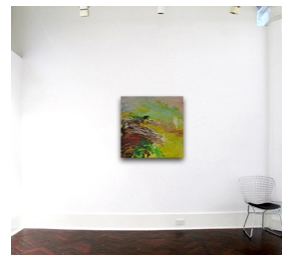
River View, Bridge Evening Reflection 2012
 oil on Belgian linen
 91 x 91cm



in-situ on 3.7m wall



Perhaps Rain 2012
 oil on Belgian linen
 91 x 91cm



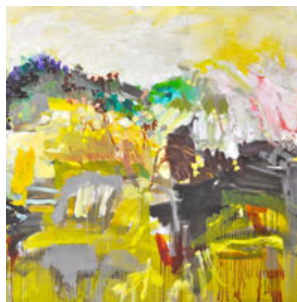
in-situ on 3.7m wall



Rainy Sundays 2012
 oil on Belgian linen
 152 x 152cm



in-situ on 3.5m wall
(interior by Greg Natale Designs)



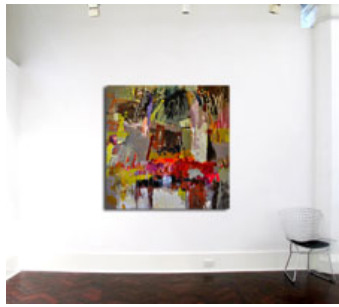
Midsummer Hills 2012
 oil on Belgian linen
 152 x 152cm



in-situ on 3m wall
(Cororate interior by Greg Natale Designs)



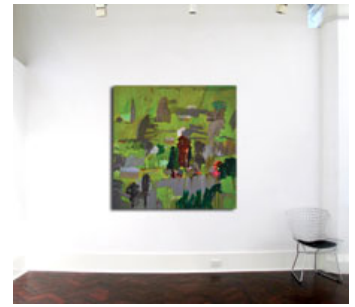
River Mooring 2012
oil on Belgian linen
152 x 152cm



in-situ on 3.7m wall



Green Vale 2012
oil on Belgian linen
152 x 152cm



in-situ on 3.7m wall



Morning Has Broken 2012
oil on Belgian linen
152 x 152cm



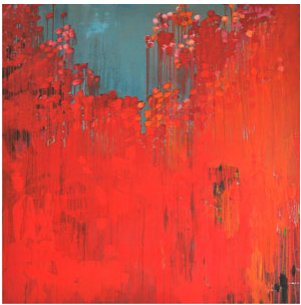
in-situ on 3.5m wall
(Beachhouse interior by Greg Natale Designs)



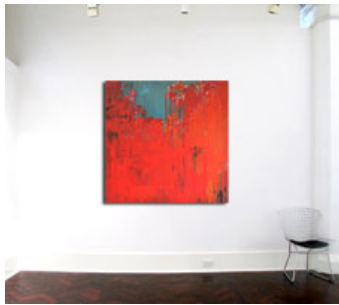
Spring at Splitters 2012
oil on Belgian linen
152 x 152cm



in-situ on 4m wall (Dining Room interior by Greg Natale Designs)



Blue Skies
oil on Belgian linen
152 x 152cm



in-situ on 3.7m wall



For the First Time 2012
oil on Belgian linen
183 x 168cm



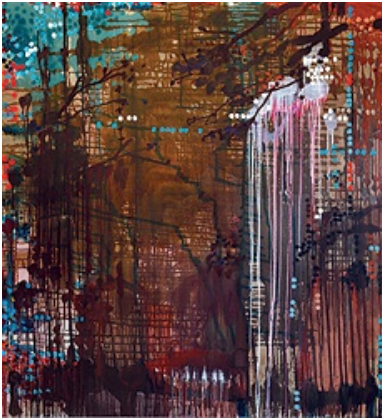
in-situ on 3.7m wall



Sunshine on the River 2012
oil on Belgian linen
183 x 168cm



*in-situ on 3.5m wall (Beachhouse interior
by Greg Natale Designs)*



Flow 2012
oil on Belgian linen
183 x 168cm



in-situ on 3.7m wall