

WANDERING THROUGH THE LANDSCAPE, IN A SUMMER THAT BEGAN WITH BUSHFIRES AND ENDED WITH CORONAVIRUS LOCKDOWN, ALBURY-BASED ARTIST JO DAVENPORT EVOKES EMOTION IN HER AUDIENCE. 'NOW MORE THAN EVER I WANT TO CREATE A VISCERAL BOND,' THE ARTIST SHARES, 'A CONNECTION BETWEEN THE VIEWER AND OUR SUBLIME AUSTRALIAN LANDSCAPE.'

Preview

EMMA-KATE WILSON

Davenport's upcoming exhibition at Flinders Lane Gallery, currently scheduled for October 2020, mirrors the same methodology of 'Red Sky in the Morning' at Arthouse Gallery in Sydney last year. Created before the bushfires of 2019–20, the works now reveal an eerie warning of what was to come.

Reflecting on the current state of Australia's ecology, the artist was recently spurred to use her work to comment on the thousands of Murray cod found lying dead in the stressed river system. 'I didn't want this work to be a protest,' she reflects, 'but I felt that people have to start taking our land seriously; we need to love our landscape so we give back more than we take.' Today, with the world in isolation, Davenport's paintings are a potent reminder of our need for natural environments as the built environment ever more restricts us.

When the artist moved to Melbourne in 2010 to complete her Master of Fine Arts at the Victorian College of the Arts, city living fused her ideology with the country vistas she's always known. 'It's a very



different experience living in a city to living in the bush,' Davenport explains. 'In the bush, you can feel the landscape. You feel it through the soles of your feet; you can feel it rising through you.'

To begin her paintings, Davenport first turns to the materiality of form and traditional techniques; choosing natural Belgian linen, priming each with rabbit skin glue. The artist lies the canvas flat and approaches it through a series of marks in oil paint, leaving residue of her landscape. She comments, 'it's a very layered response, not only physically but emotionally. There's a lot of tipping and spilling – I'm not trying to take total control of them; it's about the very nature of the building up and letting the paint take form.'

Here, the artworks communicate freely without the constraints of object reality, as the artist creates a gestural nod to the scenery around her. 'I am not trying to paint a topographical landscape but create a sense of place. A lot of people try to find a narrative in my work ... I'm more interested in the history of painting, past styles,

techniques, and how the act of painting can still challenge our contemporary discourse,' Davenport explains.

Fundamentally, Davenport's artworks are about the act of painting and the relationship between material, form, balance, colour, negative and positive space. The resulting abstraction becomes a translation of the environment, and her care for it, forged from residual memories of place. The artist is channelling this didactic energy into her upcoming exhibition, to catch a rhythm of nature and in doing so, constructing the canvas as a unique place for the viewer to dwell, and to contemplate.

6 to 30 October 2020
Flinders Lane Gallery, Melbourne

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01 *Winter Wetlands*, 2020, oil on Belgian linen, 168 x 183 cm
Courtesy the artist, Flinders Lane Gallery, Melbourne and Arthouse Gallery, Sydney