

KEEPING IT FRESH

HELEN McKENZIE GETS TO KNOW CLAIRE HARRIS, DIRECTOR OF ONE OF MELBOURNE'S LONGEST SERVING CONTEMPORARY GALLERIES IN FLINDERS LANE. PORTRAIT BY **KIRSTIN GOLLINGS**.

Claire Harris, director of Flinders Lane Gallery in Melbourne, initially supported her own artistic career working in a commercial gallery. Gradually the pleasure of sourcing artworks for clients and then informing the artists took her away from her personal artistic pursuits and provided what she calls “the momentum and inspiration to make a career of it”. Signing 18 new artists since taking over the helm of Flinders Lane Gallery in 2006 is part of Harris’s job satisfaction. Presenting Aboriginal, emerging and established artists is a role that, after 16 years in the industry, she still finds invigorating.

How do you describe your aesthetic in terms of your gallery today?

A tricky question. The common element to the artists we represent is simply that they all excite, inspire and appeal to me ... There is no particular style, genre or media ... Aside from a gut response to an artist’s work, the gallery is very focused on relationships. **Marise Maas, Kathryn Ryan** and **William Breen** have been with us for over 10 years. Sulman Prize winner **Julie Haas** has been with us since we began in 1989.

How do you engage an artist? Do you find them, or do they find you?

We get approached with 10 to 20 submissions a week – it is quite insane. We have signed on artists that way. But you can’t sign on artists too regularly. We just don’t have the space or capacity. We also run an emerging artists exhibition called *Exploration*. This is our 12th year. A lot of those artists we’ve exhibited have gone on to receive critical acclaim. It’s become quite a strong program in its own right ... We start to collate the show around graduate show time in November

and often take up recommendations from the artists we represent.

Aside from the aesthetic, what are you looking for when you take on an artist?

They need to have a consistent practice. They need to be on top of things in relation to the documentation of their work and communication with the gallery. We give them guidelines to help them – it is a tough game and they need to step up if they want us to promote them properly. Since 1989 Flinders Lane Gallery has made it a mission to promote and exhibit exceptional Indigenous artists. We support a range of communities but in particular Utopia, Maningrida and Warlukurlangu [Yuendumu community].

Do you have traditional representational arrangements with your artists?

Yes we do, however we don’t sign people on for a fixed contract. As far as we are concerned we will not stop representing them, we will discuss matters.

What other galleries do you like?

I very much enjoy looking at the work of the artists represented by **Karen Woodbury**.

Are you going to the Melbourne Art Fair this year?

Yes, but not as exhibitors. We haven’t done it for a few years. We find that where we are located [in Melbourne] we get a lot of people through who are here for the art fair.

What about the use of cyberspace?

We have done a big job on our website. It is all in-house designed and constantly maintained. As well as our exhibitions, which we put up in great detail, we also have our entire stockroom online. •



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PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

HELEN MCKENZIE PRESENTS THE UPCOMING EXHIBITION HIGHLIGHTS AT MELBOURNE'S FLINDERS LANE GALLERY IN 2012.



RICHARD BLACKWELL

UNTIL 7 JULY 2012

Richard Blackwell continues his investigation into the nature of boundaries, inspired by architectural forms and landscapes. "Richard has an extremely active imagination and is able to transform unusual contemporary materials into striking visual conundrums creating optical intrigue. Definitely an artist to pay attention to," says Claire Harris.

Richard Blackwell, *Bronze*, 2012. Inkjet print on acrylic, 150 x 150cm.
COURTESY: THE ARTIST AND FLINDERS LANE GALLERY, MELBOURNE

CHRISTOPHE STIBIO

21 AUGUST – 8 SEPTEMBER 2012

Chinese-trained, French-born artist **Christophe Stibio's** intricate paintings explore ideas of becoming and emergence through an Australian landscape. "Christophe's practice is quite unique. The techniques he learnt in his Chinese training merge with his particular vision of the Australian landscape," says Harris.

Christophe Stibio, *Flesh of Coast Fire Trail*, 2012. Natural pigments on paper & paper strips mounted on cotton duck, 142 x 132cm.
COURTESY: THE ARTIST AND FLINDERS LANE GALLERY, MELBOURNE



TIME & SPACE

10 JULY – 18 AUGUST 2012

Time is a group show exploring experiences of time, from the slow progression of a watched clock, through to the subjective experience of memory, concepts of history and the joy of living in the moment. The companion exhibition *Space* is an investigation into spatial concerns, from the illusionistic to the architectural. Harris says: "This curated and catalogue supported exhibition will be the year's highlight show." It features **Dion Horstmans**, **William Breen** and **Charlie Sheard**, among others, who will be creating new work for the show.

Agneta Ekholm, *Disappearing into Silence*, 2012. Acrylic on canvas, 82 x 112cm.
COURTESY: THE ARTIST AND FLINDERS LANE GALLERY, MELBOURNE