



Marise Maas, 2011, *Beam I*, oil on canvas.

Simplicity / Space / Beauty

Todd Manzanares

Continuing her long-standing relationship with Flinders Lane Gallery, Marise Maas will exhibit new work once again this month. Her new pieces continue along known and travelled lines – Maas is an artist who, by her own confession, does not chop and change. The new paintings on display represent a continuity of both idea and purpose, images grounded in the everyday but bursting out along parallel tracks of small scale eccentricity and concentrated, often childlike observation.

“I paint whatever really fascinates me”, she tells us when we meet days before the opening, “but I must say it usually deals with pretty common stuff, the everyday. Usually the more common, the better. I see grander things in the common.”

Maas’ starting point is a removal of thought and its tricky handmaiden, analysis. She clears the mental decks, opening up the spaces that are later reflected in the beautiful planes of colour and light that characterise her work, along with those everyday items, transformed by their new contexts into a luminous and curious originality.

The canvas is treated almost as a sketchbook, where mistakes are made. Some never see the further light of day; some live on with the power of the serendipitous. “I don’t have a plan before I start, but I have the aesthetic pleasures within myself, so I start in a fairly meditative way, and from that emerges all the beauty that comes when you’re not thinking about yourself.” A lack of self-awareness then, which is vitally also a lack of ego, allows Maas to paint with the spontaneity of the child.

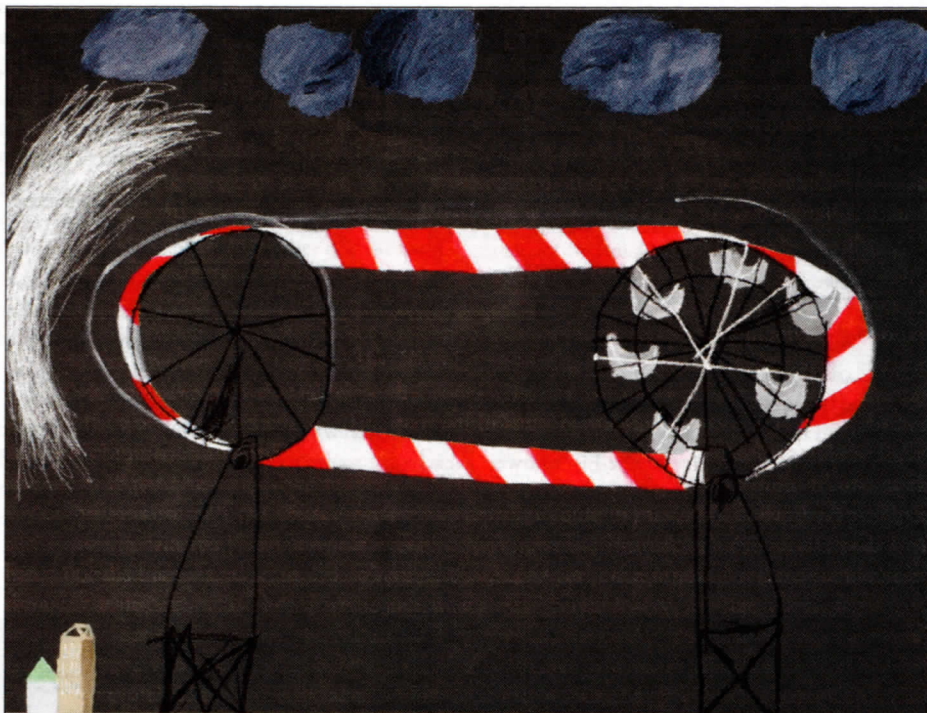
But there is skill beneath the simplicity, needless to say. There is the key moment when Maas stands back to evaluate, and here the years of study and draughtsmanship come to the fore. Knowing when a piece is finished is, as Maas says, “the trick of the whole game, the thing that blows my mind. That’s also a reason why I work on quite a lot of pieces all at once, up to 10.” They do not necessarily reference each other, however, for the simple reason Maas’ studio is not big enough for such luxuries. “Within

one body of work the palettes tend to complement each other,” she adds. They reflect what may be a prevalent mood of a period of months. A great frustration is when she realises she’s gone too far, and has to “turn the bastard around to face the wall, not to be looked at for a couple of months. It might resolve itself when you see it later, but it can be really upsetting.”

Not that Maas is not aware that such problems are good ones to have. “It’s all a very self-centred occupation to be doing, and to be so upset about something like that, considering we’re only talking about a picture. But I do find the overworking is unsettling.” So less is quite definitely more. “Clarity and simplicity tend to come across as smarter.”

With simplicity, however, comes the need to fend off the tedious accusations of “my five-year-old could have done that.” Maas is aware this comes with the territory, and brushes this aside as an inevitable hazard. Those who love her work tend to be attracted by the positive looseness of style – a legacy of years of print making – along with the combination of space and spontaneous line work, tender uses of form and the innocent beauty of the commonplace. There is no stridency of message: Maas’ works are joyous whispers. “I don’t feel I have to stress about the realism of the shapes, nor do I feel I have to research to achieve accuracy. There is no obsession with how things are supposed to look. Years of believing that you can leave things out have given me confidence. With time and experience you realise you don’t have to show off all your skills in the one painting.”

With that appreciation of the power of simplicity comes, inevitably, a healthy dose of modesty: “It’s actually a beautiful luxury to be sitting there with these empty spaces in front of you that you can start filling in. I do get embarrassed sometimes thinking about how self-centred the whole occupation (of painter) is. But I do like to be alone a lot, which helped when I fell into this profession. There’s something of the Diva about not wanting to be disturbed! Having said that, being a person without much religion or spirituality, those moments in front of the painting, just doing it, and then to stand back and see how all my fascinations have been arranged... that’s as close as I come.”



MARISE MAAS

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