

Spirit of Abstraction, inhabiting uncertainty

Uncertainty, it seems, is everywhere. Our usual routines of life have been interrupted and the very fate of the planet is unknown. Most of us tend to view uncertainty as a transition state over which we must triumph and wrest control.

However, artists often seek to enter and inhabit a state of uncertainty. To bring new work to life, they must walk a tightrope between spontaneity and control, performing a balancing act. The creative process calls for originality whereby the artist is charting new ground, synthesising ideas, and making novel connections. Unknowns abound, like a puzzle waiting to be unlocked, and the artist must decide which process to use, what composition to employ, and judge if the outcome captures the original intent.

Even while undertaking the work the artist must dwell in uncertainty. The process is held in an ebb and flow of the artist's conscious and unconscious states. Psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi proposed that the very act of creation wherein the participant is completely absorbed is where an "optimal experience" or "flow" state is achieved [1]. In her book, *The Luminous Solution*, author Charlotte Wood [2] describes the intersection between the unconscious and the conscious as integral to the artist's process, stating that, "... the indistinct space, the gap or overlap or blur, is where creativity actually lives."

Artist Joanna Pinkiewicz invites the viewer to explore these ambiguous and transcendent states in *Spirit of Abstraction*. Rather than drawing on representation, Pinkiewicz uses the language of abstraction, allowing the form, symbol, colour and materiality of the works to move the viewer beyond a simple narrative and open a "dialogue with the unknown" [3]. These works draw influences from early abstract artists such as Swedish artist, Hilma af Klimt (1862-1944) who sought, "...to express abstract concepts beyond what the eye can see" [4].

Seeking to expand my understanding of creativity I interviewed several artists finding that their accounts highlighted the many nuances of creative practice. These interviews and accompanying articles were developed as part of a Graduate Certificate in Tourism, Environmental and Cultural Heritage at The University of Tasmania. When conversing with Pinkiewicz [5] I learnt of her interest in Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's alternative colour theory which encompasses the viewers' perception of colour. She notes how visitors respond to her paintings and her interest in the work's shifting hues which change across the day.

Such observations form part of Pinkiewicz's ongoing research practice also informed by her experience teaching colour theory. The surface of the paintings like *Gold Inner Diamond* 2021 seems to ripple and vibrate, an effect which is achieved by the selection of colours displayed in differing chroma. While her previous works on paper were often muted, these works have been intensified.

Further, for *Spirit of Abstraction* Pinkiewicz has developed a vocabulary of symbols that connect to the themes of intelligence, infinity, space, and creation. Pinkiewicz draws on symbology which traces its origins back to old European and goddess centred cultures. Symbols such as the lozenge are linked to female fertility and while these ancient symbols may not be fully decoded by the viewer, we are left free to respond personally rather than have the meaning ascribed.

Yes, this uncertainty can be uncomfortable, but if we can meet this ambiguity, Pinkiewicz offers us space for deeper exploration. *Spirit of Abstraction* invites us to step onto the artist's path and look towards where the abstract and the symbolic can lead us.

- Kerry Turnbull
Director, Engage Arts

References

1. Gordon, J.S., *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience*, in *Atlantic*. 1991. p. 115+.
2. Wood, C., *The Luminous Solution*. 2021: Allen & Unwin.
3. Pinkiewicz, J., *Spirit of Abstraction exhibition catalogue*. 2022: Tasmania.
4. Guggenheim. *Hilma af Klint*. 2018 [27.10.2021]; Available from: <https://www.guggenheim.org/video/hilma-af-klint>.
5. Turnbull, K. *Colour and creativity*. 2021 [27.0.21]; Available from: <https://engagearts.com.au/blog/>.