

Celia Gullett

Changing Places

14 July - 01 August 2020

*'On Impossibility:
I try to write "automatically"
But keep stopping to look at the sky.
Words are in it
And a great blue silence
That fills the distance between.'*

Suzanne Buffam, *The Irrationalist*, (2010)

How to describe something to you that does not wish to be described? How to tell you what to feel when your feelings will be different than my own? Could the blue painting on the wall be a landscape? Perhaps. Is that a river or a field or a fence? All three of these, together, or none of these at all.

We would prefer certainty, wherever possible. We would prefer to know when things will start or finish: when an uncomfortable moment will come to its end, or when we can throw open a locked door. We would prefer to know how artworks are made, and what they mean, and what the correct response should be. But you won't find certainty in a field of colour; you can only unpick the threads.

For her latest solo exhibition, *Changing Places*, Celia Gullett presents a series of abstract works that refuse definition and clear description. Gullett's paintings vibrate. That is, the act of repeating layer upon layer—obliterating what came before—creates thick surfaces of sensation. Like a poet who describes an object by telling you what it is not, Gullett references memories, places and feelings by negating them. They are reduced to geometrical puzzles or lines or block colours. Gullett speaks to the surface and the surface speaks back: rough canvas requires a palette knife and a heavy sliding hand; wood or slate requires a finer point and delicate individuated brushstrokes. Each iteration develops and builds on the one before, albeit in a different tone or key.

Pay attention to the edges. Paint can leak from a work's borders and sneak around to the side. The longer you look at one of Gullett's paintings, the more you will see. What first appears as a solid wall, made up of a single colour, instead contains several—there are small windows or line breaks that allow past colours to peek through. The surfaces are full of winks and half waves and hints from the occluded layers underneath. Yes, but what is it I'm looking at, you may ask again. Everything and nothing, I might reply.

Because at the centre of *Changing Places* you will find a void—an expanse you can step into, one filled with pauses, hesitations, intimations and silences. In this void lies contradiction: meaning found in absence; fullness found in a nothing-space; love or hope or longing removed, but still present in the brushstrokes. Give in to this feeling of not-knowing, of being awash and unmoored.

'Negations express presence,' writes Wayne Koestenbaum in 'Schuyler's Colours.' 'Such negatives provide the pleasure of an atmosphere half-there, half-gone.' So, although I cannot tell you whether Gullett's works are landscapes or portraits or moods or feelings, I can tell you that they are atmospheres: airspaces or welkins that hover, even as they're attached to the wall.

Words by Naomi Riddle - 2020

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Changing Places is Celia Gullett's first solo exhibition at Jan Murphy Gallery. She has had solo exhibitions since 2002 and participated in group exhibitions since 1996. Gullett has been a repeat finalist in Sydney's Mosman and Paddington Art Prizes (2002-16) and exhibited in Singapore (2013), London (2017, 2018) and Sweden (2017). Her paintings are in the Macquarie University Art Collection and national and international private collections.