

Lara Merrett

Field work

5 – 23 March 2024

Lara Merrett treats the studio as a cauldron of colour. In her latest body of paintings, *Field work*, the artist combines her social practice with a decades-long engagement with the material possibilities of colour field painting. Stemming from a series of cyanotype workshops with the local community in Bendalong, NSW, the works extend her interest in the amorphous potential of paint through washes of diluted acrylic harnessed within fields of deep prussian blue.

A type of cameraless photography, the cyanotype is capable of registering ghostly traces of objects placed directly onto paper in collaboration with available sunlight. Similarly, each painting contains semi-figurative silhouettes of floating bulbs, stems and entangled shapes that Merrett has suspended within a free-flowing dance. Echoing the observational elegance of both Ellsworth Kelly and Ruth Asawa's plant drawings, as well as the cyanotype impressions of minute algae produced by botanist and photographer Anna Atkins from 1843, Merrett reduces background information to isolate luminous, sketch-like poolings of watery movement.

Starting off as messy and intuitive propositions, Merrett guides subtle layers of pigment as they meander, coalesce and form translucent skins across the painting's surface. Like growing habitats of form, the paintings share an alchemic connection to the cyanotype process through their indexing of naturally-forming occurrences, lightness and contrasting figure-ground relationships. Plant structures appearing out of airy washes of leafy green and soft violet become petri dishes of liquefied, shimmering hue. The works appear both formless yet solid, functioning as slippery and dynamic reflections on the natural world filtered through the artist's distinct language of abstraction.

Mason Kimber, 2024

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Born in Melbourne, Lara Merrett currently lives and works between Sydney and Bendalong, NSW. She studied painting abroad at the Circulo de Bellas Artes in Madrid, Spain, before completing a Master of Arts (Painting) at the College of Fine Arts, University of New South Wales.

Merrett has exhibited widely nationally and internationally, including at Goulburn Regional Gallery, NSW (2022-23), Town Hall Gallery, VIC (2022), University of Queensland Art Museum, Brisbane (2019), Museum of Contemporary Art Australia, Sydney (2018), Artspace, Sydney (2017). She has received various grants and awards including the Sense of Place Grant, Shoalhaven City Council (2023) and The Ravenswood Australian Women's Art Prize (2022). Her work is held in numerous public collections including the University of New South Wales, Bundanon Trust, Artbank, Royal Automobile Club of Victoria, Macquarie Bank and UBS.