

Taking it in

Kylie Spear

It is a hot midsummer afternoon as I wind my way down the gravel road towards the Guide Hut Studios. I pass a shadowy wall of monstera along the way, and am greeted by a looming silver dollar bush before parking my car. I open the door and am filled by the sun's glare and the call of cicadas. Bridie descends the stairs at the entrance of her modest studio and we immediately head off to see the little creek that runs through the bush just a few minutes walk away. As we stroll we discuss our surroundings: the origins of the stream; the native vines encasing the gums; a group of trees that she thinks of as sisters; a twisted eucalypt that resembles a limb. It is clear that Bridie has developed an affinity for this place that she has been keenly observing since she arrived in May 2018.

Bridie Gillman is a contemporary artist based in Brisbane. Her practice spans photography, installation, audio-visual works, and painting. No matter the medium, Bridie's work communicates physical and emotional responses to various 'in-between' spaces. She has looked extensively at her many intercultural experiences, including childhood years spent in Indonesia through to recent residencies in Malaysia and Java.

Bridie's installations are playful and sometimes awkward constructions that combine found and made objects. Her photographic works act as more immediate responses to a place and highlight Bridie's command of light, colour and form. These works capture the subtle beauty of daily human activities, such as an elegantly twisted length of hose, piles of bricks or coconuts, a hot-pink plastic chair sunken into the sand.

Painting is unique in her practice as it reduces any recognisable forms down to just colour, gesture and texture. The abstracted combinations of these elements speak in a more raw and tactile way. It is this medium that Bridie has been focusing on most intensely in her recent months at Tarragindi.

As we return and enter the small wooden hut perched at the Southern end of the recreation Reserve Bridie begins to talk me through her recent paintings. Her studio windows look directly out over the surrounding forest. It is deceptively remote here, easy to forget this small plot of land sits within a busy suburb. She lifts one canvas away from a stack of works and places it on the wall. Amongst the fields of gestural muddy greens, stormy hues and faint jacaranda purples light patches of chartreuse peek through from the layer beneath. Bridie tells me that this work, titled *The sun has set, but the light remains* was made in response to her early days on site. She remembers walking out from the studio just after the sun had set. While the light was fading she was struck by the intense colour of the sky when viewed in isolated patches. She returned to the studio to write about the event in her journal, returning some time later to these words before creating the work.

This is the process Bridie followed to create the series shown in *Wide Eyed*. Her considered observations developed into a detailed log of her surroundings, recording small moments like the location of the trees she has seen flowering, the colour of bark as it changes in the rain, the hue of new grass as the season changes. She refers to these records as field studies as well as meditations. For this exhibition Bridie has purposely focused on representing the memory of such events, and will only begin a painting some time after the original observation. She likes to see how memory changes things, and will venture back out of the studio afterwards to compare her work with the real thing.

Bridie concedes that she does not feel entirely comfortable in this bushy environment, though she wants to. The title of her show refers to this feeling of uneasiness, as well as to the awe she experiences in the presence of her surroundings. She has embraced these opposing sensations equally, breathing it all in as vital parts of her experience. The sense of caution she feels translates into physical habits. She will routinely squint her eyes and blur her vision while looking into the growth to watch for the telltale movements of snakes. On our earlier walk I noticed her stomping through the scrubby paths, assumably to ward off any nearby creatures. Bridie tells me she does feel fear in this place due to both the perceived threat of dangerous animals but also as a woman alone in this setting. This stirs the familiar 'no place for a woman' postcolonial legacy [1]. However, her process of slow, detailed observation of everyday moments in the bush represents a working method to reconcile this disquiet.

Bridie clears away a few more canvases to reveal the next work up for conversation. The scale of *A warm breeze* is larger, taller than the artist, and enveloping. A long stretch of murky green rides down the side of the work, and opens up into vast shades of pink. We had talk about a tree at the top of the gravel path that had been flowering heavily some months ago. This work is based on her memory of that tree. By focusing in on such details this work, and indeed all the works in *Wide Eyed*, memorialises a quiet moment elegantly skewed by her recollection and generous brushstrokes.

She moves the next canvas along the floor and rotates it to sit as a landscape, elevated by two empty paint tins. The vibrant burnt orange in *Flowering, fiery*. 2019 is lifted by hints of surrounding blush pink and olive green. She points from the work out the window to the African Tulip tree, an introduced species, still flowering that same orange hue in the distance.

[1] Schaffer, K. (1988). *Women and the bush*. Sydney: Cambridge University Press.

Bridie and Kylie wish to acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land on which we live, learn and work in central Brisbane. We pay our respects to both the Jagera people and the Turrbul people and their Elders, past, present and emerging.