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Interview: Glenys Brookbanks Artist, Auckland

Glenys is an established artist based in Auckland, graduating as a returning student in B.F.A. from Elam School of Fine Arts in 1988.

Her work is held in a wide range of collections in New Zealand including Te Papa, and has been a finalist in many prestigious awards; most recently James Wallace (2000).

She has been in many group and solo shows around the country, the most recent being at 64zero3 Gallery, Christchurch (2004). Since visiting Canada she has embraced her own vision of geometric abstraction.

Describe the history of your art practice since you completed your BFA training.

"In the beginning my painting genre was still life, it was metaphorical for the first four years. I used multimedia based on textile art/fabric and 1980s embroideries. I moved into using oil paints with enriched surfaces, calligraphic marks and glazing techniques. I used a full colour palette.

"Then in the 1990s I created large 2m square acrylic canvases that hung from the wall like tapestries... also smaller motifs around notions of mystery themes that used the metaphor of the purse as a closed object containing personal items."

Which artists' work do you particularly admire, and what inspires you to create artwork?

"I moved to Canada for 9 months and saw Barnett Newman's *Voice of Fire* in the Ottawa Public Gallery (a 30 feet high purpose built gallery). The scale and power of the abstract painting impacted me, and the use of austere reduced motifs to carry message. I became interested in the power of the abstract language of painting.

"I stayed for ten days in central New York and there saw more of Barnett Newman's surface paintings and Sean Scully's fugitive colour - the vocabulary of the abstract. I also saw Agnes Martin in Pace Gallery in private preview. I had a very strong connection with the idea of conveying feelings and impressions using minimalist means. I saw parallels between the fragility and repetitive marks and what I was doing by then. Martin's work conveyed persistent gentle intention, with strong after effect or memorable presence.

"When I got back home to New Zealand I adopted the grid as the simple motif to carry all the myriad sensitivities I wanted to convey. I cut out the sensuality of the paint surface and adopted graphite and tempera as the main

media. I folded paper and pastel using fugitive colours all in an attempt to make work which had the capacity to carry ideas about the interior life and to avoid the presence of the artist as intruder therefore, no reflecting surfaces and colours which could not necessarily be recorded on film or described in language. The work took precedence over the artist but the matt surfaces or flickering graphite was used to bring the attention of the viewer to some lively, quiet focus on the surface. A sort of silent speaking was what I wanted.

'I have made strong connections with St Teresa of Avila in her writings. In *The Castle* she lays out a blueprint for the interior life of devotion to Christ. She describes the progress of one's spiritual life as a journey towards a deeper place, into the interior of a castle - room by room. This is a kind of architecture of the soul, and I have become increasingly aware of the environment around the work and the architectural space in which it hangs. The work feels to me as though it has an interior life of its own and needs to find an equilibrium in its placement in the environment.

I would like my work to bring a gentle and thoughtful focus on the surface as a window through and into the interior world."

Describe your recent work and the process you go through to produce a series of work or individual piece and what are you working towards for 2005?

"I have kept the use of graphite. I like the mobility of the surface and the literal vulnerability that graphite is symbolic of, and that I want the work to facilitate in the viewer. The graphite is carried throughout by the process and clouds the surfaces in random ways. The gleam is very changeable and helps to continue

the liveliness of surface which I want to sustain, but I use it for its subtlety.

'I am making all my own gesso and tempera but also working at present with other media, and painting on 10cm deep supports or other three dimensional panels, and painting the edge continuous to the picture plane. This is to heighten the feeling of the interiority of the work, by making the painting contain space; also the use of perforated surfaces is to carry the sense of permeable surface, and make the interior accessible.

'I am working towards a development of the works of 2004, and I am setting up a series which communicates variability but serialises at the same time. The processes of painting are always evident. The continuous surface carries messages, memories and even feelings of the interior, unseen realities. My current work is under-painted in cyan blue which has a luminosity, and supports the feeling of light coming from within the work rather than the surface. The work is very labour intensive and there is a lot of handling of materials - I paint with my hands and don't use brushes. I pass over the same surfaces again and again with different pressure, and materials, and treatments of surface.

'I would like to show the work which I started in November 2004, and am continuing to work towards a group of works for a solo show at the end of the year - after I get back from Europe and the United Kingdom."

Wendy Grace Allen

Evening and Morning, Glenys Brookbanks, 2004, tempera and acrylic on gesso, 980 x 1200 x 50mm.

