

**Buried Light, Robyn Sweeney and
Bernadette Boscacci**
Pet Sounds, Mary Fokes
Umbrella Studio, Townsville
2 – 28 January 2011

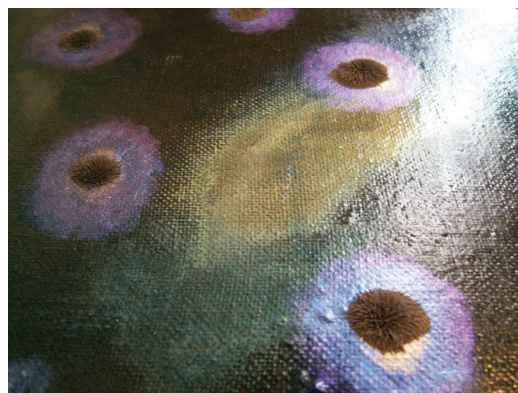
With the Renew Townsville project in full swing in the inner city, Umbrella Studio is suddenly surrounded by little galleries, studios and all manner of arts related enterprises, mainly driven by young graduates and emerging professionals. One could say Umbrella has competition in its own genre, making it even more important that its program remains outstanding. *Buried Light* is a dialogue between Robyn Sweeney and Bernadette Boscacci, artists who have been working in a creative partnership since 2000. *Pet Sounds* is a solo exhibition by emerging artist, Mary Fokes. The two exhibitions—entirely different in appearance—interrelate subtly in the joined exhibition space.

In *Buried Light* Sweeney and Boscacci show a large number of mostly medium and small works and sculptural pieces, with an emphasis on conceptual interrogation and visual experimentation. Both artists aim for abstraction. While their end results show confluences in form and use of materials—from antique Chinese gold thread to magnets, wood, found objects, minerals, agar as well as print and more conventional media—their pathways towards this are divergent.

Sweeney's part includes three series of work: the *Lissajous*, *Nano* and *Movement of fluids* suites. The *Lissajous* curve, named after a 19th century French mathematician, is the driver of her investigation in the first set. Lissajous experimented with light and sound to create specific harmonic intervals. From this he derived mathematical formulae that—among many other forms—create curves made by pendulums. These are looped lines without end. Too often theoretical considerations truncate rather than further creativity, but in the *Lissajous* suite we witness a fruitful partnership. The artist uses her own body movement as both momentum and limitation of the perimeter of the looped lines, in various media from spidery webs to delicate charcoal movements reminiscent of Brett Whiteley's fluid line. But also the work Luce Irigaray comes to mind; Sweeney has created a self referential system of mark making. One of the works is titled *I, pendulum*; a subtle variation on I-Pod.

In *Nano* and *Movement of Fluids* Sweeney acts more as an alchemist, allowing crystals to develop on the canvas in, for instance, *Ferric afterglow* and *Nano ephemera*. Prompted by seeing her crystals in the studio turn to dust, she weaves ecological concerns related to technology and waste into her *Nano* works, for instance in the subtly stated *Mappa mundi – undermine*. In *Fluids* she is more a 'magister ludi' examining the processes of creation. She throws various elements into the ring: minerals, earth pigments, oil and water allowing their viscosity and mutual repulsion to interact.

Where Sweeney's work is metaphorical and existential Boscacci's work is more referential, showing us the process of moving from observation toward a personal signification. Boscacci also experiments with media, engaging in similar processes but working from the representational towards the abstract. She gradually eliminates narrative and anecdotal elements in her work, or 'zooms-in' until familiar references disappear, as in *Dish head – Water bearer*—the surface of a wet dish where a head is reflected in each tiny drop. The emphasis is on the abstraction; the work becomes



a sign for the human condition. Boscacci's concern and focus on ecological considerations is clearly stated. In works on paper, for instance *Eucalyptus Platyphylla Woodland 2 – development site*, *Rocky Springs* and *Burning Season*, she experiments with the sharp carved marks so suited to lino-cuts where images of trees and bush-fires are clearly recognisable: the slashed lines are almost an imitation of the snapping sound of burning wood. In her sculptures there is a further emphasis on letting go, looking for quirky combinations and evocative forms such as *Labyrinthine Heart* and *Soothsayer – Grim Chimera*. In *Thunderstorm* Boscacci utilises the behaviour of water to create a fluid, ambiguous image as much a cloud as a metaphor for fluidity. This is where the two artists come closest together.

Two exquisitely crafted 3-D pieces *There There, Head on sticks for odd occasions* mark the entrance to Mary Fokes's exhibition, suggesting that this may well be that odd occasion. This lies in the works' clever combination of fairy tale magic, cartoons and domestic pets. The title itself alludes to a now defunct music store—once in the Townsville Mall that is undergoing the aforementioned renewal process—as well as denoting the artist's favourite music and her love of animals. Word and image-play characterise many of Fokes's medium and larger paintings, studies and 3-D pieces. In *Subterranean Homesick Alien (Radiohead)* she paints the subject of the song who was left behind; she creates *Yoshimi fighting the pink robots* very differently



clockwise from top left: Mary Fokes, *Yoshimi Battles the Pink Robots*, 2010. Oil on canvas, 140 x 99cm; Bernadette Boscacci, *Life (Vita)*, 2010. Collage and mixed media on canvas, 20 x 20cm; Robyn Sweeney, *Ferric afterglow (detail)*, 2010. Acrylic, magnets, ferrous powder on canvas, 30 x 30cm.
Courtesy the artists.

from the Flaming Lips album cover. *Happiness* is two feet rubbing together (*Goldfrapp*); *A good flying bird (Guided by Voices)* has an anti-gravity device strapped on. The artist confesses to a love of kitsch, cartoons, manga, album covers and popular culture in general. Always painting to music, the lyrics and sound become her departure points. She re-creates a mood based on the music. Her invented figures seduce with beautifully painted large eyes, as in *White Unicorn (Wolfmother)* inviting the viewer into their emotional world of interaction with lambs, dogs, unicorns humans or robots. Fokes's work sits firmly in the present, comfortably straddling the domains of Western and Asian pop culture.

Nature has a voice in all these artists' works, taking the form of abstracted landscapes, the imaginary interaction between humans and animals, reverence for natural process and ecological concerns. This is not surprising because all artists have a long history of living in north Queensland, a place where nature cannot be ignored. It is perhaps the third person in everyone's dialogue in this region. It comes knocking on the door, literally, in the form of cyclones and floods. But there are also pristine rainforests and the vast inland plains and ranges. Depicting nature can result in romantic or heroic landscapes, a 'look and put' engagement with scenery, or a more amateur edge in 'tourist' pictures. It is refreshing to see an exhibition that shows these connections in a conceptually engaged manner.

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