

Going Somewhere Else - new works by Peter Sharp

'Expectation prevents discovery'.¹

In Bruce Springsteen's 2019 song *Hitch Hikin'*, the singer describes a solitary figure, thumbing his way along from one place to another, happy to be on the open road, heading somewhere else. There is no sense of urgency, and destination is eschewed in favour of discovery; a promise of time alone with your thoughts and with yourself. In artist Peter Sharp's most recent body of work there is that familiar/unfamiliar feeling that comes from taking a detour away from a known path and travelling a byway instead.

The works in *Going Somewhere Else* propose a different route. While the paintings contain remnants of his 10-year engagement with the ubiquitous Australian eucalypt, the artist is moving on, curious to see where the road might take him, happy not to answer questions but to pose them instead. Though he still employs the same methods of observation and deconstruction he has in the past (the artist is known for his idiosyncratic charcoal drawings of the natural world), these new paintings emphasise the unexpected encounters that occur through his reconstructive processes.

In the new works, Sharp has abandoned his concern for mnemonic referents through which an audience might link forms and shapes back to their eucalypt source. Instead he is more concerned with the materiality of the paint and the hard, fuzzy, spikey, flat textures and raw 'object-ness' of the natural world that underscores his practice. This is evident in Sharp's approach to his paintings where inky voids contrast gum grey arabesques of line that reference the charcoal drawings but refuse mimetic representation; teasingly buried under areas of flat colour that no longer sample the eucalypt directly, but obliquely reference their source. Salmon hued orange fragments stretch across bark-like textures in dark greys and weathered blues, while minty green, hard-edged arcs push against organic forms creating delicious tensions that seem familiar but are not. Sharp's customary circles, here in musk stick pink, punctuate the compositions like signposts on a road and generate a gentle rhythm linking one work to the next.

Long admired by Sharp, the late American abstractionist Thomas Nozkowski had a habit of walking to work via a different route each time. He did this because he 'loved to take walks [and] always wanted to find something new. He had a kind of voracious curiosity'.² Interested in what he might find along the way, this anecdote provides a perfect analogy for the approach that Sharp has taken with this new body of work. Like Nozkowski, Sharp is always alert to the possibilities that lie within the rectangular constraints of his linen supports, resisting the familiar in favour of chance encounter.

Michelle Cawthorn, July 2020

¹ Suri Hustvedt, 2005, *Mysteries of the Rectangle*, Princeton Architectural Press, New York, p xix

² John Yau in conversation with Hrag Vartanian, podcast EP68, *Hyperallergic*, 15 May 2020

<<https://hyperallergic.com/564592/art-critic-john-yau/>> accessed 20 July 2020