

"Kiss me.....I want you to kiss me like a stranger once again"

Peter Sharp - *How to paint trees*

Beyond my window is a sinuous Jackwood that is gently brushing the glass pane. I have known this tree for 13 years and yet, on days like today when the rain lightly falls, and the pale green lichen is luminous in the grey light, I wonder again at this beauty I am so familiar with. For me, that moment of wonder is enough, but for artist Peter Sharp, it is a provocation. The more familiar that Sharp becomes with a subject, the more determined he is to interrogate it, to know it beyond the superficial, to re-cognise it anew. But how do you make the familiar pulse with the thrill of first discovery? How do you convey that seduction of colour and shape, the smells and sounds of first encounter?

This is a challenge that Sharp relishes in his practice. For the body of work presented here, the subject of his interrogation are the trees of Fowlers Gap, an arid zone at the edge of the Strzelecki desert in far western New South Wales, a site he has visited many times over the years. While some would be tempted to render this landscape in its entirety, Sharp's is an intimate approach, concerned with the minutia, foregoing the whole for the sum of its parts.

His investigation begins with drawing; swiftly noting shape and form with a gestural ease that belies the rigorous process of observation and recording that informs each one. The drawing is active and exploratory; purposely disrupting the connection between eye and paper through a process of rubbing that creates a friction; generating a tension in the drawings that is conveyed both literally and metaphorically.

But this is only part of a process that constitutes Sharp's re-cognising of his subject. For Sharp the drawings are like specimens collected in the field and they hold the key to his way into the paintings. From them he extracts forms which he then transposes onto canvas with acrylic paint in loose and languid lines. The marks are made quickly, as they are with the drawings, but the method of application mediates his control, the drips and drops of the paint falling where they may through this process of transference. But for Sharp, this is not enough.

There's line from a Tom Waits song that goes like this;

"Kiss me

I want you to kiss me

Like a stranger once again"

Waits is talking about his desire to feel anew the frisson of first touch attached to something long loved. This is analogous to Sharp's relationship with the subject of these works. In his desire to portray his experience of a landscape he has known for more than half his life he

seeks to reimagine those first encounters. It is a going to it rather than an it coming to you; not passive but active.

For Sharp, the act painting itself is a provocation, a dynamic thing. He does not underestimate the viewer nor does he make apology for the fact that the viewer must work to make connections between the forms, textures and colours in his work. This equates to a transference of his experience to the viewer, that sense of discovery that Sharp himself experiences each time he steps out into the field.

Michelle Cawthorn, June 2018

ⁱ *Bad As Me* 2011, 'Kiss Me', Tom Waits and ANTI Records,
http://www.tomwaits.com/songs/song/369/Kiss_Me/