

In 1912, Anton Kerssemakers, (who was once a student of Vincent van Gogh) recounted in a journal article van Gogh's brief experience with trying to learn to play the piano: He wrote, 'He was always comparing painting with music, and so as to get a better understanding of the gradation of tones, he started to take piano lessons with an old music teacher, who was also an organist, in E[indhoven]. This didn't last long, though, because during the lessons Van Gogh kept comparing the notes of the piano with Prussian blue and dark green or dark ochre to bright cadmium, and so the poor man thought he must be dealing with a madman and became so afraid of him that he stopped the lessons.'

Now thankfully for us van Gogh stuck to painting rather than music and we get to enjoy one of the most vibrant, productive and amazing careers in the history of art. 120 years after van Gogh's death, and about 125 years after those failed music lessons we stand in a contemporary gallery, surrounded by an equally vibrant body of work and continue to draw parallels between the visual arts and music. Some things just never change. For someone like me, who loves both the visual arts and music, there couldn't be a better place to find oneself.

I have often made the comment to friends on leaving a gig that no amount of alcohol, drugs or sex, could at all match the rush you get when you hear and ultimately experience wonderful joyous music. Now for some that may be jazz or classical music, or the blues or just a loud dirty rock n roll band, but what is uniform across of all these is the power of music to move, to take us somewhere else, to make life enjoyable, to pick us up and let us float on that archetypal cloud.

Likewise I have stood in front of a work of art and have been moved to tears, have felt that rush, or have done that thing that entertains others, stood there with a really big silly grin on my face. It could be a painting by an old master, van Gogh's Starry Night or an overwhelming all encompassing Bill Viola video. Like music, it doesn't matter what takes your fancy compared to somebody else's, art just has that power to transform the soul.

Craig Gough has had the ability to do this over a long career. Since the late sixties he has successfully interpreted the world in which he resides into a dance for those who are lucky enough to be invited to the party. In this particular body of work that dance is very much underpinned by that relationship between music and art. Titled Resonance the exhibition makes a very clear connection with this relationship. Craig,

in his artist statement writes how he hopes 'that some form of resonance is present in these works for each viewer and that they somehow 'strike a chord', where the inner and the outer experiences are united in one vital force.'

When I walked into the exhibition this afternoon, after first saying wow and then having that silly grin moment, I was pleased that what I was standing in front of was exactly what I had imagined it would be like while I was driving up here. I thought I would walk into Gough's Chapel, and I did. Although I haven't had the experience of visiting Rothko's Chapel in Texas I have had the privilege to sit in awe and wonder in the midst Rothko's installation at Tate Modern. Now the immediate parallels are not obvious. When you walk into the Tate space it is dark, your eyes need to adjust to the low light levels and the panels are a dark sombre black on maroon. In here it is almost the complete opposite, high lights, bright and vibrant colours. However, what unifies them is the vibrating experience you feel when you stay in the space. At the Tate is it like a slow hum which builds until you feel this constant energy emanating. In here, that energy is apparent earlier but it is by no means shorter lasting. It hums and dances, it wraps itself around you and ultimately it is as welcoming, warm and comforting as Rothko's installation.

Now this is not the only comparison with the past that we can draw. These works are of a direct lineage to those wonderful colourists and modernists like Matisse, Gauguin, Kandinsky, Cezanne, even to the early works of Malevich. However, Craig is not a slave to this history he is an ongoing part of it. He, like all great artists, looks back in order to go forward. But that forward momentum is always in the context of a journey, exploring, experimenting, changing, giving us something new.

I note that in the artist statement printed on the outside wall it states quite beautifully in its simplicity, before these works there was the garden. Craig has not completely eliminated this garden. We can see traces of it in a number of works, The shape of lattice, a vine crawling and wrapping its way along fences, the roof of a pool shed, steps guiding us from the studio through the garden to the house. However, the fact that these tangible objects become secondary speaks volumes for the success of these works. It is the harmony of colour, the balance, the confidence which allows the paintings to take us to that spiritual and personal space.

As Craig notes, we will all bring luggage and memories to the work but it is the resonance inherent in the works, 'the transferred energy and intensification or

amplification of the range' as Craig writes, 'where the viewer gets 'in tune' or 'in sync' with the poetic texture of the artist's work.'

I want to finish not exactly where I started, although van Gogh's comment to his sister that an artist should be able to entertain and bring as much joy as violinist is appropriate, but rather with an artist who in the early 20th century not only produced amazing art but wrote one of the most important books on painting, Wassily Kandinsky,

In his 1912 publication *Concerning the Spiritual in Art* he dedicated a chapter to colour. He like, van Gogh and Craig a century later, understood and believed in the relationship between music and the visual arts. He also perceptively wrote about what colour in art can and should do to the viewer. He wrote:

If you let your eye stray over a palette of colours, you experience two things. In the first place you receive a purely physical effect, namely the eye itself is enchanted by the beauty and other qualities of colour. You experience satisfaction and delight, like a gourmet savoring a delicacy.

However, he warned, 'these are physical sensations limited in duration. They are superficial too, and leave no lasting impression if the soul remains closed. Just as we feel at the touch of ice a sensation of cold, forgotten as soon as the finger becomes warm again, so the physical action of colour is forgotten as soon as the eye turns away. On the other hand, as the physical coldness of ice, upon penetrating more deeply, arouses more complex feelings, and indeed a whole chain of psychological experiences, so may also the superficial impression of colour develop into an experience...

'Only with higher development, he declared, 'does the circle of experience of different beings and objects grow wider. Only in the highest development do they acquire an internal meaning and an inner resonance. It is the same with colour, which makes a momentary and superficial impression on a soul whose sensibility is slightly developed. But even this simplest effect varies in quality....

Continuing, Kandinsky clearly outlined what it is that artists and viewers should seek.

'But to a more sensitive soul the effect of colours is deeper and intensely moving.

And so we come to the second result of looking at colours: their psychological effect. They produce a correspondent spiritual vibration, and it is only as a step towards this spiritual vibration that the physical impression is of importance.'

Undoubtedly over a long career Craig has reached this level of colouristic and spiritual enlightenment of which Kandinsky encourages us to attain. The challenge is for us to do likewise, made all the more easier when we are surrounded and enveloped by amazing installations and exhibitions as we are this evening. If we do so we will become men and women of sensitivity which as Kandinsky so eloquently put it, 'are like good, much-played violins which vibrate at each touch of the bow.'

And with that I enthusiastically and with great honor declare this wonderful exhibition open.

Dr Vincent Alessi Artistic Director LaTrobe University 24th March 2011