

Craig Gough and the mastery of colour

When the intangible is given form, we call it art. Clothed in colour it becomes painting. Of likeness and unlikeness visible, art celebrates the spiritual in the material, the abstract in reality, the profound in the simple. So it is with Craig Gough, whose mastery of colour is the hallmark of his creativity, dwelling among powerful primaries and subtle secondaries. His inspiration lies around him, the peace and pastures of Walmer in Central Victoria where rolling hills harmonize with broad fields as naturally as figuration and abstraction do in his art. Although first impressions are non-figurative, richly hued on a grand scale, the landscape is never far away, as witnessed by *Walmer 3463 No. 5*, 2014. Glorified in all its sunbaked yellows, the postcode '3463' is where Gough lives, gums and kangaroos happily outnumbering humans. Here his painted views are aerial and profiled in planned layout of engaging order. He describes his approach as one of 'considered improvisation'. 'As the paint begins to suggest form, I keep it as loose as possible in opposition to my personality which wants to exercise control. There is always that need for structure and stability on the canvas'. In Gough's world, all is eminently civilized, expressed through the harmony of forms and colours, order of mind and emotion. As red or yellow marks the virgin surface of the canvas, and then grows, 'I gravitate to the higher intensity. The reddest red or yellowest yellow I can muster'.

In the large-scaled *Primary* 2013, the view through the house window to the scene beyond gives metaphoric reference to further harmonies, taking the inside out, bringing the exterior in. The eye, however, is allowed to indulge in the brilliance of the blues burning out from fields of reds, boundaries of blacks defining the figurative. The same-sized *Dialogue* 2014, with its dominant greens and blues, displays an equal mastery over the cooler colours, as again in *Spatial Green (study)* 2008, a slumberous evening, nightscape. The flat, unrolling scene engages in flirtatious interplay between picture surface and tantalizing illusion of depth. Could any of his paintings be more abstract than *Garden Wall* 2009, constructed almost entirely of variations of horizontal greens? Yet, the title tells us that its inspiration is the natural world. As Gough once said, 'Before these works there was the garden, (my garden)'. Genesis is the garden.

Sketches and smaller studies provide a more intimate view of the artist's creativity and its evolution across the paper. As keys to perception, they are invariably fascinating. *Primary Garden (study)*, 2007-8 has a boldness that leaves the viewer no alternative but to pay attention. Colour takes on a resonance that is breathtaking, akin to the bush's myriad sounds of silence. It flows throughout his art, as another individuality – that feeling of being enveloped, as if looking out from within. Identification could not be more total, leading to an inner and peaceful balance. Like Craig Gough himself, his art is gregariously generous.

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