

NATIONALACTART REVIEWS

# Celebrating the power of the Australian landscape

By Peter Haynes

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**Whisker's Creek. Kerry McInnis. Form Studio and Gallery, 1/30 Aurora Ave, Queanbeyan, Tuesday to Saturday, 10am to 4pm. Until November 25.**



Kerry McInnis, *The long shadows of Whisker's Creek*.

*Photo: Supplied*

*Whisker's Creek* is the artist's paean to the creek that runs through the property where she has lived for many years - and from which she will soon depart.

The exhibition is a visual chronicle of the creek and its surrounds through the seasons, and the visual and climatic changes that give character and personality to a place loved and experienced over many years.

While the exhibition celebrates "place" there is also present (albeit subtly) an intimation of loss and sadness at moving on. McInnis says in her artist statement: "I will miss this little rivulet when I move away. It has been my constant and generous companion."

The 27 works in the exhibition (the great majority produced in 2018) move the viewer through this loved "place" as it presents at different seasons and times of day. McInnis's style could be characterised as "painterly" and her use of brushstrokes strongly exemplifies her approach to her motif. Structure is achieved through a consummately controlled amalgam of intersecting, abutting and individually delineated brushstrokes. Swathes of paint are activated by sgraffito-like markings that indicate various topographical elements while simultaneously intimating the subdued energies of the natural world that have so clearly seduced and been embraced by the artist.

McInnis' control of paint is consummate. Her ability to indicate (or perhaps suggest) the underlying structures of nature indicates her understanding of her motif and is beautifully exemplified in a number of works in the exhibition.



Kerry McInnis, Snowmelt, detail.

*Photo: Supplied*

In *Morning, Whisker's Creek* (Cat. 16) she achieves a finely tuned balance between figuration and abstraction. Natural forms are recognised but they are not clearly identified as such. The massed areas of paint (brushstrokes) intimate and suggest though never describe. That said we know that the characteristics of the landscape that have captured the artist's imaginative

impulse are delineated in her personal painterly vocabulary.

McInnis' use of colour also reveals her pictorial acuity. The vivid blue of the creek – a slash within the greens and greys of the surrounding bush – gives depth and structure to this striking work. In *Midday summer* (Cat.1) the landscape is suffused in a warm light, at once inviting and comforting. The artist opens the composition by bringing the creek to the front and centre of the image, then moves it back in a serpentine curve through the pictorial space in a meandering wander familiar to anyone who frequents the Australian bush.

McInnis plays with different viewpoints throughout the exhibition. In *Bird's eye view* (Cat. 24) the viewer looks down onto the creek and the rocky outcrops that constitute its banks. Through her controlled use of the tension between abstraction and figuration and the intersection, interaction and abutting of blocked areas and gestural brushstrokes, she captures the contrasting light and shades, solids and linear elements that give character and individuality to our landscape.

The colours of summer are beautifully captured in *Whisker's Creek* (Cat. 4). The golden yellow of the creek banks and the blue of the water speak of the dry heat of summer and the hazy light that so often accompanies it. In *Creek ledge* (Cat. 17) the inherent power of nature is given eloquent expression. Again the actual activity of applying the paint imbues a sense of nature's vitality while the mass of the rock ledge and its solid presence are nicely played off against the reflective lightness of the blue waters of the creek. In this work the wonderfully vital amalgam of painterly activity celebrates the drama of the natural world.



Kerry McInnis, Whisker's Creek, detail.

*Photo: Supplied*

*Wattletime* (Cat. 9) sees the artist's astute understanding of tonal contrasts in the conveying of mood and atmosphere. The yellow of the wattle trees offers vivid contrast to the ochres and greys of the creek and other elements of the surrounding landscape. The retreating line of the creek moving back into the picture plane creates a particularly pleasing journey through the painting. McInnis's understanding and control of brushstrokes and tonal contrast and variation achieve a carefully modulated and nuanced structure, composition, atmosphere and mood.

McInnis' extended journey – spatial, topographic, temporal and emotional – through her beloved Whisker's Creek landscape is both a celebration and a farewell to her muse. There is a sense of spontaneity, an effusive outburst as she encounters (repeatedly) each of the motifs she so vividly pictorialises. Her painterly activity is a wonderful tribute to her deep attachment to the place that so powerfully excited her creative imagination. This is a rich exhibition that eloquently expresses the continuing power of the Australian landscape.