

River

Water flows through Kerry McInnis's new exhibition, 'River'. It not only ripples through the exhibition's title but also courses through her works. Since McInnis was a child in Guatemala, the river's undertow has pulled at her—always looming with the promise of the unknown. It is this feeling of liquid magnetism that the artist captures in her work and shares with us. Here, arterial waterways pump life into both the outback and the canvas—animating the land and the painted ground in the same gesture, and the same brushstroke. “The river is a device for moving freely through the landscape but also through the painting,” McInnis explains. “The waterway compositionally pulls the viewer in, so that they are on a journey, so that they stand on the embankment.”

But McInnis' works represent more than just the specificities of a particular landscape. While the artist often works *en plein air*, directly engaging with the environment, her studies seem to capture an emotional landscape as much as they do a physical one. Indeed, even if you have never stood at the point where the water meets the land, her works suggest something of that intangible feeling—something that moves beyond its mere physicality. These are spaces of openness that invite the mind, as well as the eye, to explore. “I'm becoming more interested in making a universal landscape,” McInnis says. “I want the viewer to see something that is familiar to them, even if it is not the place that I'm painting.”

While McInnis' works are landscapes, they do not present the safe or picturesque scenes that we have seen before. Instead, these bodies of water hold a gravity and retain a raw immediacy. The almost psychic force of McInnis' works find their origins in her initial studies—which the artist executes alone in the landscape, kilometres away from the world of other humans. “I like the feeling of being alone in the bush. I'm slightly fearful much of the time, but I feel alive and connected,” explains McInnis. “I work a little bit frantically, there is this kind of edge of fear and mystery.” Almost like the movement of water, this primal beauty seeps its way into her paintings, osmotically moving from the artist to the artwork. Here, we still find serenity, yet it is a charged quietness that has somehow been rendered more intense.

The intensity of McInnis' subject is matched by the rawness of her application. In 'River', we witness the artist's practice moving closer to abstraction, as she blurs the lines between the legible landscape and the free movement of the brush. McInnis' masterful hand shapes the artwork with an experienced touch that negotiates the movement of every drop of paint—even as it slides and spills over the canvas. Her works hum with the kinetic possibilities of the paint, which retain an unapologetic dynamism. Throughout 'River', McInnis repeatedly pushes her medium, stretching the possibilities of the paint in her journey down the river.

Words by Tai Mitsuji