

Chance elements

It is a risky proposition to propose an exhibition that relies on making work whilst traveling overseas or soon after returning to the studio. The potential freedom and challenge of such conditions may have had an impact on the unexpected range of works Helga Groves presents in *Chance elements*. In addition to her hallmark abstract paintings – the visual evocations of conditions of earthly phenomena and their energies – time in Europe has inspired the development of new paintings, photographic and installation works.

The painting *Night air* connects with Groves' previous paintings while also introducing the idea of change to be encountered within *Chance elements*. Reminiscent of Groves' paintings of recent years in form and technique, which comprising layers of coloured under-painting and the soft geometric patterning of final brush marks, in its sonorous dark tones and evocation of atmospheric breeze the painting also signals a departure. However, Groves' interest in aqueous realms alluded to in previous paintings continues, with two contrasting works: *Ship of water* and *Heavy rain (broken and unbroken lines)*.

Both are striking illusions to a characteristic now residing almost universally in the psyche: dreams of water or nightmares of its absence. Arising from its support like a mirage, the container ship that transported 19,000 m³ of water to Barcelona to alleviate drought becomes the ghost of human conceit. It suggests a parody of the arc of salvation, the ships of fools paying the price for disregarding the value of water as a resource. Haptic as well as visual in its material sensuousness, *Heavy rain (broken and unbroken lines)* by contrast reflects the salvation of unpredictable downpours breaking Barcelona's water shortage. Knitted with fishing line from Barcelona and evoking sheets of water in which droplets change colour in the light, *Heavy rain* resonates across northern and southern climatic zones and seasons.

Ciudad encantada (Enchanted city) is the work most determined by Groves' travel to Spain, recording a surreal geographical feature of the country. These small gems, each one a curiosity, document Groves' response to a naturally eroded limestone forms, located in the centre of Spain. Drawing on a long held desire to see them first hand, and seen through recollection and the photographic eye, Groves's *Enchanted City* becomes a watery, otherworldly zone. This boxed set of miniature memories and wonders is a testament to her interest in geophysical processes.

An unpredicted outcome of traveling are Groves' photographs *Interstitial forms*, taken in Japan, Spain and France and displayed to suggest their genesis in the structures of city streetscapes. Creating parallels between industrial mesh, transparent fabrics and gossamer spider webs, Groves' photos connect to earlier abstract works which weave together light, images and sensations. The ability of material to define and alter space, as well describe as built form in these images acknowledges the power of the overlooked and serendipity of chance.

A sense of gravitas yet deliberate indeterminacy underlies what could be considered the most significant work in this group, *Elevations with low moon*. While painted in the blue tones familiar from Groves' palette, it is untypical in representing a recognisable landscape, albeit abstracted. This mysterious image is a carrier of unspecified portent. Pictorially it relates to the outlook from the artist's family residence in Queensland;

artistically the image pays homage to the moon paintings of Howard Taylor; and the work contains a subtle protest at the destruction of native bush at the hands of mining and industry. The panels brim over with content, of art, relationships and experiences both the past and future, especially the joys of lives lived and now the lowering light cast over the uncertain futures of both land and loved ones.

Chance elements reveals Groves being both instrumental in pursuing her established interests, and taking the opportunity for the potential innovations that changing circumstances have offered. Perceptively responding to the physical world – both the urban fabric and natural landscape – and the connections between the environment and physical, metaphorical and metaphysical realms, this body of work demonstrates the constant mutual pursuit of enquiry and thought within Groves practice. Born from an ongoing quest to experience and understand more about the world she lives in, this body of work is rich and unique synthesis of analysis and imagination, chance and intention.

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