

monart
Studio & Gallery presents



earth



by karen hopkins



Exhibition open
30th May - 27th June 2007

EARTH

Paintings and sculptures by
Karen Hopkins
 Monart Studio and Gallery
 129 Waratah Ave, Dalkeith
30 May - 27 June 2007

In 1810, Goethe expressed the idea that colour was not just a natural phenomenon produced by light striking an object, registering on the human retina and then being conveyed to the brain. Goethe proposed that colour could also produce affective responses, that is, it could have psychological effects and it could provoke feelings. These usages of colour make up one's first impression on approaching the paintings in this exhibition. Desert landscapes, golden beaches, deep blue oceans and fiery sunsets are all evoked not through direct representation but by form and colour. Each one creates an atmosphere that communicates not just as an image but also feelings and experiences.

Some of the works refer to specific places such as Uluru, but most of them are not referenced to any particular place. This leaves them free to relate to the vastness of the landscape in general, and to the fact that landscape is not just a place but also an experience that allows us to engage with something much more than physical realities. One painting is actually entitled *Vastness*. The deep reds and purples flow in horizontal waves across the canvas. At the same time the colour variations create an upward movement. Dark reds at the bottom evolve into brighter ones, until there is a strange, mystical light towards the horizon. The light above and below this barely defined horizon sets up a reflective relationship which evokes something beyond natural light. The mysteriousness of the experience is enhanced by the fact that the colour variations occur within a major key.

Also taking us beyond the physical and the immediate is the fact that many of these works refer to the seasons and to those times of day when we are most aware of the changing, transitional light and atmosphere. *Night Magic* is suffused with vibrant, electric reds and blues, with brilliant light, with rich textures and with dynamic rhythms. The depth and intensity of the colour produces a quality that transports the viewer into a different dimension of time and space.

Shoreline and *Living on the Edge* remind us that we inhabit times and spaces that are constantly undergoing change and evolution. *Living on the Edge* shows a forest of leafless trees emerging out of a rich tapestry of earthly shapes and colours and reaching upwards, not just into the sky but beyond it. The suggestion is of a winter landscape, but the rich colours and the trees extending beyond the frame carry the promise of the renewal of life and the ongoing presence of the life force in general.

Uniting Boundaries (acrylic and gold leaf on canvas) presents a coming together of earth, sea and sky. Like many of the works it consists of a series of horizontal panels. Again, the panels extend across the canvas and at the same time they move upwards from rich red and gold earth colours to the blue of the ocean with a glowing, golden horizon line separating the sea from the sky. The repetition of fine bands of red and gold suggest that this process extends well into the infinite.

The delicate figurines of wood and paper clay have some serious titles such as *Desert wanderings* and *Wisdom of the Ages*, but their serious intentions are off-set by their whimsical and playful demeanours and expressions. Their fragility reflects an awareness of the positioning of human life within Nature. We are part of the natural world, but our place is an ambiguous and dangerous one. We have the ability to change and even control our environment, but we are also threatened by its powers at the same time. The figure of a mother carrying a child gives meaning to this message in a particularly poignant manner.

Karen Hopkins has explained some of her ideas in a well written Artist's Statement. Here she expresses her feelings that the earth gives us a "grounding in the physical sense", but also has the "ability to move us spiritually". She underlines these ideas with a powerful quote from William Blake's *Auguries of Innocence*.

"To see a World in a Grain of Sand
 And a Heaven in a Wild Flower,
 Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand
 And Eternity in an hour"

This refers not only to Nature as macrocosm and microcosm, but as a coming together of the two dimensions, mutually reflective and extensive. There is no place specified here because the real space is beyond human imagination, and there is no time specified because the real time is beyond human consciousness. Not all of these paintings succeed in transporting us to other places and spaces, but many of them do. A few minutes contemplating the colours, forms, movements and textures of these works is certain to be rewarded.

- Jan Altmann

