



**KATHRYN DOLBY**  
*Room to move*



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Trade &  
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KATHRYN DOLBY  
***Room to move***

Gallery Upstairs  
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Essay by Luke Sciberras, Australian Artist

There's a wonderful free-falling 'body memory' aspect to making a painting. The physical act of remembering a place, its pace and tone seems to come very naturally when one has spent time studying a particular subject. In my case the landscape generally is the subject that provides all of the painterly elements with which I am able to compose an abstracted, essential work. It is in this essence that a painting goes on to become as much about the painting, the moment and the physical act of the making, as it is about the source or subject; a purely sensual, sensory immersion in a series of moments and movements.

It is in these poetic, nuanced moments, almost dreamed, that a wonderfully authentic expression becomes a clear and intuited image. Kathryn Dolby's paintings are not designed or cogitated, not planned or academically constructed, but expressed by feel. With the body as much as with the brain responding to the viscosity and substance of paint, the work is as much as composed from a plain air drawing, a found subject or memory.

There are always many and various forms of stimulus that activate the terrain a painter travels: plein air studies, watercolours, found objects, leaves, notes, stones, highways, detritus, and of course memory all pool together when even the most abstract work is being wrested. That is to say that in my view there is very little in painting that is in fact abstract. There is so much in our honed eye and in our learned manual inflection that I'm sure every mark, tone and choice of colour has a meaning and consequence.



Therefore we have faith and confidence that somewhere and for some reason even the slightest work or mark in a work can inform the next.

As the eye travels through a painting there are balanced or discordant elements formed and resolved. And at a certain point in the making of a painting it seems as though the work itself informs the artist. This is required, and an organic tension and a character all its own begins to form, just as an entire body of work does. When a studio begins to fill with a series of paintings, roughly painted in the same period of time, they seem to become like the curated



ingredients in a well-balanced meal. Sweet, sour, salty, spicy, wet, dry, loud, soft, hot, cool and on it goes. They populate a space, and the imagination as do a room full of like-minded people.

These works that form a series, or an exhibition, seem to chart a journey and the affections of the artist. Each suite of paintings that are gestated over time in a studio is a kind of travelogue, which documents a period of time in an artist's life.

In her wanderings and dreamings, following the rigors of



academia, Kathryn Dolby has found herself, musing, with a pace and reflection all her own. And in this most personal way she is embarking on a very authentic body of work. It can take a bit of doing, unraveling the structures and idioms of academia and turn, as one must, to one's own inflection and nuance. That is to find one's self caught out by a moment or subject that arrests the eye. Here is where Dolby has found her own timbre, giving herself over to visual and poetic stimulus and reflecting upon them. This shows the signs of an artist's maturity, finding the confidence to reflect and react and then to curate and verbalise.



Just as Morandi could paint variations on his same still life objects for decades, I feel that one could paint the same river bend dozens of times and with a different tone each time. If it weren't for the restless greedy eye most artists are blessed with a painter could easily render paintings and drawings of the most repetitious and seemingly banal of subjects.

If it weren't for the instinct to daydream we may miss the found object that captures our eye and by serendipity and an open mind changes the way we think of what a painting's subject is or should be. If art were a 'look and put' routine



images  
cover: *Finding Gauguin in Winter* 2015 (detail), acrylic on board, 40 x 31cm  
inside fold: *Room to Move* 2015 (detail), acrylic and oil on board, 90 x 61cm  
left: *Build* 2015, acrylic and oil on board, 51 x 41cm  
centre (left): *On the Train South* 2015, acrylic, oil and graphite on board, 61 x 45cm  
centre (right): *Sublet* 2015, acrylic on board, 30 x 23cm  
right: *Wattle We Do* 2015, acrylic on board, 41 x 31cm

images reproduced courtesy the artist

or a cerebral gimmick we may all die of boredom. Thank heavens art and the making of it is so much more than that.

There is a lightness of touch and whimsy in Dolby's paintings, and a joyful promise in her responses to some of the most humanising subjects: the sulphuric yellow of wattle season, or a vibrant found object beaming at her on a glum day. After all what is capital 'A' Art if not a human visual response combined with emotional content, expressed for the sympathetic audience. This is not philosophy, no universal answers, rather a painterly response to the world around her. This process is not without its challenges – far from it, but like any felt expression or any honed craft there is a push and a pull, a dance, that some of us cannot live without.

Kathryn Dolby was granted this exhibition as the winner of the *2014 Lismore Regional Gallery Graduate Award*. The prize is presented annually to a student graduating from Visual Arts at Southern Cross University.