



It is hovering in a zone, between taking form, registering and becoming, while also simultaneously being stubbornly out of reach, slipping from view and residing in a neverland. This is the scape that exists beyond the carriage window, a folding and whirling vaporous mass of tones, depths and wavering lines, which are momentarily interrupted by a set of indexical markers, before once more slipping to the optical margins. By my rough calculations, at least a hazard a guess, my journey has crossed the Scottish southern border. At a more instinctual level I know the glimpses of colour and pockets of nature are inherently familiar, even though I have never seen them or been here before. But even more than these momentary registrations of place, there are unerring qualities in the temperature of light and shifting weather patterns, which give shape to this reality.

Even though I am moving through an indefinite and elusive visual plane, I am not racked by uncertainty, rather I feel a sense of solace in this state of flotsam and jetsam. Maybe it is the singularity of the experience, a sense of giving way to the rapture of being visually untethered and psychologically allowing the unknown to take hold that is strangely comforting rather than distressing. The exaltation of being lost, to lose one's bearings and become aware of your vulnerabilities and to even embrace the indeterminable is a state of mind that I seek when I travel, but it is becoming more and more elusive with our increasing reliance on our devices to place us in our surroundings and to rationalise away any perception of being remote or lonesome.

The memory of this indeterminate land came flooding back to me recently, when I was driving south to Dunedin, more specifically when I reached the Kilmog/Kirimoko, where my vehicle was submerged by a thick misty vapor that erased the road and my surroundings. In an instant I found myself translocated back to the Scottish otherworld that I had experienced years earlier, this enchantment seemed to last an age when in fact it was probably just a fleeting moment. But even more than this it stirred a deep sense of yearning, what the German's call *Sehnsucht*, I was overwhelmed by this unnamable something that fused these two events into a singular emotional disposition. This incident consumed my thoughts over my subsequent days in Dunedin, but I struggled to decode its underlying meaning and account for the way it engulfed my psychological condition. Then in my final day of this trip the weather took a turn, and the entire city became cloaked in a veil of mist that cast a gloomy shadow over everything. The visual dampening left its imprint on everything, and I then recalled the Scottish word *dreich*, which perfectly encapsulated this dreary state of affairs. These climatic circumstances not only

created an atmospheric pall it also seemed to get into your very bones, the psychological effect was burdensome and difficult to shake off. I now saw this city in a new light, it had an atmospheric ambience that shaped its inhabitants' moods, interactions and even their personalities. There is steadfast stoicism that characterises the people who come from this region, and I can now see that it intrinsically connected to the meteorological conditions that shape this sensibility.

These thoughts continued to linger some weeks later, as I took in *Blue Fleur: Airy and Articulate* an exhibition by Sandra Bushby and Natalie Guy at the Ilam Campus Gallery at the University of Canterbury. In this project both artists sought a creative communion with the poetry and paintings of the late artist Joanna Margaret Paul (1945-2003). There was a particular fascination with Paul's *Blue Fleur* (1989) poem and the *Stations of the Cross* (c. 1971) painting commission for St Mary's Star of the Sea in Port Chalmers, Dunedin. These works became a guide or talesman for these artists, both points of contact and sites of departure for their ensuing artworks.

In these artists hands liturgical, linguistic, conceptual and aesthetic references are ever present, but exist at a subterranean level – a tectonic foundation on which these artists construct a new paradigm.

Having said this, there is tangible reverence for Paul's strength of practice and the space she occupies and speaks to as a notable feminist in Aotearoa/New Zealand. In a subsequent conversation with Bushby there is an irrefutable closeness in how she speaks about Paul's work and in particular her unwavering dedication, even fervor, to her art. This sense of connection, across time and place, still echoes in Bushby's paintings, but the antecedent does not determine the pathway for these subsequent artworks. Rather they become another referent in her extended painting repertoire, this material is added to a complex typology of gestures, mark making, layers and patterns. Here poetic verse is realized, or transfigured, into a series of fluctuating horizontal lines that stammer, break and distend across the painting surface in works such as *half open*, *pouring light* and *rhythmic blues*. Or, in *like a promise*, a refrain is lifted from Paul's *Blue Fleur* to become the title for one of Bushby's works. In this painting, we find rhythmic vertical lines and horizontal bands of various widths and shades sketching out a rough frame-like structure, there is the suggestion of view to something beyond in the central gap that is left ajar and yet nothing is present except the canvas support, and so the painting offers us the chance to think back on the very act of its



construction. But beyond this, the painter also provides another speculative space and that is to return to the original poem and to seek out the words and imagery that surround this excerpt, and in this way the painting becomes visual footnote to another reading.

There is an underlying coherency to the suite of paintings that makes up *Pouring Light*, they echo with similar visual cues and seem to tap into a well-honed set of pictorial possibilities. Bushby describes her approach as perseverative, this sees her generating an inordinate number of drawings to work out or through a set of mark making procedures. This seemingly nihilistic process is not about producing resolution through a series of repetitive acts, but rather it is about getting into a visual rhythm that can be transferred into her subsequent paintings. Here the painting as a repetitive action is practiced, while underlying this approach or methodology is a constant determination to resist falling into a set of preconceived endings. You could describe this exhibition as a set of painting exercises, which are constantly in the throes of a self-referential investigation, the painter seeks to disrupt their very own activities so that they do not slip into a series of easily identifiable tropes.

So, as you move through this show what becomes apparent is firstly the singularity of each painting: it is determined by the coordinates of each decision within its own logical structure, and secondly their interconnectedness: they are all bound by an interrogation of the application and reception processes. It in this space that these paintings start to do something curious, they become less about being something to look at and respond to and more something to look through and beyond. There is the nagging sense that they are visibly and conceptually not fixed, but rather

still in state of emergence or mutability. Vertical lines dissect, cut through and disrupt the visual plane and yet on closer viewing they barely keep their shape as they wobble and stutter into place. With *morning light* and *bright light* we are given clear linguistic signals to work with and yet these paintings resist being easily delineated, in equal measure they seem to be on a visual precipice – either burning into registration and falling out of focus. In this sense Bushby seems to be giving form to a series of distinct corporeal memories or associations, whether these are tactile experiences, psychological manifestations or texts, which are elucidated

through a set of pictorial deliberations. And it is here that I recognize the mystifying moments on the train, being spellbound on the Kilmog and sense of isolation in Dunedin, they all speak to a profound sense of *Sehnsucht*. That is what *Pouring Light* elicits, at once an indescribable state of being visibly nowhere, while simultaneously recognizing with unshakeable certainty that you are right now here.

(nowhere / now here), 2024.  
— Aaron Kreisler