

OF LANDSCAPE & MEMORY KIRRILY HAMMOND

Kirrily Hammond uses the expressive nature of light and space to create hauntingly beautiful prints that invite intense contemplation in their stillness and silence. The enigmatic images are evocative illustrations of inner journeys that have the ominous, slightly disorienting quality of a dream. Hammond works intuitively, using the landscape as a tool to evoke a mood or atmosphere. The works are a response to memory and illustrate imagination and intuition. The emotional vulnerability of the works and the complex layers of memory inherent in them refer not only to the fragility of nature but also the fragility of the human psyche.

In his book *Landscape and Memory*, Simon Schama talks of the craving to find in nature a consolation for our own mortality and forwards the idea that landscape itself is the carrier of memory. "For although we are accustomed to separate nature and human perception into two realms, they are in fact indivisible. Before it can ever be a repose for the senses, landscape is the work of the mind".ⁱ Likewise for Hammond the landscape is a site for a personal, intense, sensory experience. She conjures up a sublime, timeless landscape that has the potential as a vehicle for further projections and explorations of the self. For Hammond, art is a way of making material the imagined landscape of the mind which, like nature, can never be fully mapped or chartered.

In both Eastern and Western religious art, gardens have played a role in depicting encounters with the spiritual, in particular the notion of Paradise. A garden is a boundary between the sacred and the profane; it stakes the frontier between what is natural and what is controlled. Hammond projects her ideas onto a secret or dream garden so that while the images seem to have a certain naivete or innocence they mask an ominous or buried feeling. The Giardino Segreto, or secret garden, an Italian Renaissance design was intimate in scale and often enclosed a semi domestic room that was a secular conversion of the sanctity of the Paradise cloister garden.ⁱⁱ Hammond investigates the possibility of creating architectural spaces from the garden, to the extent that the garden defines the landscape. The vistas of European style courtyards resonate with the unknown and mysterious and imply a sense of something missing. There is presence in the absence, what is excluded is as important as what is included.

Within the courtyards and hedged areas trees act as figures and stand in clusters. Their complex series of interactions serve as a metaphor for the complexity contained within an individual, just as an enclosed garden can be compared to the body. Trees appear as silent actors in the scenery, as there is no indication of humanity in any of the works. The gardens and hedges in her recent aquatints are as much influenced by Hammond's travels in Europe as they are by the highly manicured landscapes around the city of Canberra where she lives.

The motifs of boats and water have appeared constantly in Hammond's work; it is the means by which contact is made with an unknown territory. The boat is a container, it is a refuge and protector against an unknown world, to travel in a boat is to be able to discover the world whilst being sheltered from it. A boat can be both a symbol for departure as well as representing closure or being sealed off from the world. The idea of being in transit whether real or in the imagination is symbolic of restlessness and unspecified desire. For Hammond the pictorial representation of water is a metaphor for exploration but it is also a metaphor for the unknown. The meditative qualities of water are utilised to create another form of landscape, one equally as mysterious as the gardens and realms of the land. Lake Burley Griffin in Canberra has always had a strong influence on Hammond's imagery. Her ideas and the duality in her work can be seen as a reaction to the paradox of Canberra; pristine and calm on the outside but with an underlying disturbing power that comes with being the capital city.ⁱⁱⁱ

Hammond displays great technical skill, she is adept in many printmaking techniques and has taught lithography at Studio One, in Canberra. There is a tension in her work that is offset by the feathery lightness and murky depths in the prints. The aquatinting process is an effective way to achieve a velvety deep rich colour, which is essential for the atmosphere and mood of her work. It is a very direct method for creating light, working the completely black plate to produce a glowing

light. The images are drawn out of darkness, which is analogous to memory and green expanses of silence are illuminated by brilliant light. In Hammond's work light serves as a metaphor for the spiritual, and night and shadow for the mystery aspects of the unknown in the human psyche. Light seems to pulsate and illuminates the intensity of colour and depth of tone. Her handling of space is intrinsic to the success of the works, viewpoints are never stable and the use of fragments is evocative of the way that we view a landscape, not as a whole but as a series of parts.

Hammond studied printmaking and graphic investigation at Canberra School of Art, under Petr Herel and Jorg Schmeisser both of whose sensibilities can be detected in her work. Freedom of imagination is a driving force in Hammond's work and the process of making art is a cathartic experience for her. Influences as diverse as Czech artist Jan Hisek, Odilon Redon, the Surrealists, and the German Romantic tradition all play their role but Hammond is interested more in these artists reasons for making art rather than the works themselves. Hammond's own work is a self-referential journey where personal experiences are translated into lyrical imagery that speaks not only of landscape but of memory.

The exhibition of works *Of landscape and memory* will be on at Warrnambool Art Gallery until June 18 and then at Artspace 71 in Canberra in late July.

Louise Tegart
Curator
Warrnambool Art Gallery
2000

ⁱ Simon Schama *Landscape and Memory* Fontana Press, London 1996

ⁱⁱ Edward Colless *The error of my ways* Art and Australia volume 32 no. 1 1994

ⁱⁱⁱ Interview with the artist 19/4/00