

## **Betwixt & Between – 2014**

### **Spiro Grace Art Rooms, Brisbane**

Compelled by an intriguing combination of painting, roller-skating and motor biking, Sue Beyer's practice investigates place as a fluid and shifting set of experiences. Beyer utilises the comfortable, familiar and simple vocabulary of cartography to construct sensitive allegorical reflections on navigation, location and subjectivity within contemporary urban spaces. Beyer's creative process allows her to incorporate the language of mapping that traditionally gives structure to vast geographies. The topographical line work of this media is transcribed over dynamic blocks of colour and abstract forms. This layering process translates the language and universal structure of cartography into hand painted and intuitive expressions. Through this method Beyer decontextualises mapping and personalises the geographical terrain whilst bringing it into focus.

Beyer's work extends the responsibility of the geographer by acknowledging the personal histories and imaginings that create the feelings and impressions of a place. 'Betwixt and Between' is designed to surround the gallery space and immerse the viewer. The site-specific arrangement indicates a continuous journey with no departure or arrival point. Following the meanderings of the Brisbane River, the viewer is invited to identify familiar locations within the work whilst affording a feeling of the location by being situated within it. We know how it is to comprehend and locate ourselves within this city. Thus we know how to be acquainted with Beyer's landscape as a lived and embodied experience. Through this collection of paintings, Beyer prompts a consideration of where we are and importantly, what it is like to be here.

The map of town planning provides a readymade source of information that becomes the raw material of the work. The design of the original map evolves during the transfer process to become slightly altered rather than imitative. This element of alteration is comparable to the continual mapping and remapping of locations within contemporary culture. Consequently, Beyer's work renegotiates the traditional process of mapping to incorporate the notion of an active landscape continuously renewed by urban developments.

Similarly, Beyer's work extends the responsibility of the geographer by acknowledging the personal histories and imaginings that create the feelings and impressions of a place. Rather than simply re-presenting the collective knowledge and language of geography, 'Betwixt and Between' provides an amalgamation of information and illusion. With particular details such as street names deliberately excluded, the paintings maintain a balance between representation and abstraction. Whilst the work proposes

new functions and meanings for geographical maps it invokes the psychological complexities of our understanding and relationship to place. Metaphorically, Beyer's bold technicolour camouflage corresponds with the notion that our surroundings are imbued with more layers of history and connections to meaning than can ordinarily be seen.

We continually orientate ourselves within our environment via our instinctive capacity for cognitive mapping. All maps, physical or otherwise, depend on the use of the imagination to be experienced. Beyer draws attention to these fragmentary mental processes by constructing a correlation between mapping and her own imagination and memory. Subsequently, the works echo an interior and singularly expressive perception of place that is at once charted on earth and yet free from geographical constraint.

A distinct connection to this concept can be identified within the work via the areas of white negative space. This space fragments the landscape, asking the viewer to recompose the missing information. This formal element correlates with a gap in the memory system. We are reminded of how experience is translated into thought, how memories are layered and how dreams jumble reality. The visual journey across Beyer's landscape is, in this sense, as shifting as a recollected experience.

Additionally, Beyer's energetic interplay of line, shape and negative space evokes a formal similarity to military camouflage. Camouflage is both a fashionable and functional device used as an ambiguous instrument of concealment. Metaphorically, Beyer's bold technicolour camouflage corresponds with the notion that our surroundings are imbued with more layers of history and connections to meaning than can ordinarily be seen. Whilst similarly accentuating the idea that a map has the ability to reveal as well as conceal the history of the land that it claims to represent.

Whilst city development endeavors to define our sense of place by imposing boundaries and parameters, 'Betwixt and Between' reinstates the significance of a lived experience of place in shaping our understanding and sense of belonging. Beyer's balance of colour combined with shifts in tone constructs a sensation of movement throughout the landscape. The artist's intuitive colour composition could be viewed to encapsulate her lived and reminisced experience of skating or biking through Brisbane's suburbia. Catching glimpses of sky in between green foliage, the red of a sign interrupting a brief view of the river and interpenetrating the psychology of experience.

However, Beyer's indistinct forms could just as likely be employed to confuse diverse structures of mapping. They could be precipitation forms or storm fronts taken from radar descriptions. They could be topographical lines representing land formations. This

element of ambiguity within Beyer's paintings is perpetually compelling and attractive. The well-known visual language of mapping is contrasted and complimented by an almost familiar and yet decidedly mysterious form of abstraction.

This allows 'Betwixt and Between' to be simultaneously abstract and pictorial, fluid and fixed, comforting, familiar, simple and yet multifaceted. 'Betwixt and Between' surrounds us in an approximation of a unified other world in between lived and imagined observation. Where the finite space of lived experience is distinguished by the infinite space of the imaginary.

*Essay written by Michelle Eskola*