

## **2021 // TRANSFORMER: essay by Kate Hendry**

Sue Beyer's exhibition Transformer at fortyfivedownstairs is vibrant and arresting. It hooks you in with dynamic gridded blocks of colour dancing across paintings in the small gallery space. But it is also a show which rewards you for slowing down and spending time to consider the concepts that underpin the vibrant play of colour.

Beyer is a multidisciplinary artist, working in painting and digital works. In this exhibition one central digital work Transformer, Glitch, Red Rock, Magic Flute and Solomon, after Arthur Boyd, 2021 offers an ongoing projection that references the paintings that surround it. But in this referencing the work also seems to offer a critique of the way in which so much of what we experience is mediated through digital representation. This work stands like a sentinel relaying a visual stream of consciousness. This work seems to lead a viewer to reach a saturation point of connectivity between things we are seeing and those things we've seen before. The title of the exhibition 'Transformer' suggests the development process behind the artworks. However, like the artworks themselves it also invites one to consider the history of painting and the narratives constructed through it. Beyer's works are derived from Arthur Boyd's landscape paintings, with the original artworks abstracted as though simplified to 8-bit images. Beyer painstakingly grids, colour matches and paints from the digitised image. The result is a long way from the facile cartoon-like quality of a typical low-res image. These are luscious blocks of colour distilled from the original Boyd artwork.

Such a process could certainly result in works that are overly slick or formulaic, but here the opposite is true. The textural quality and the artist hand evidenced in the brushwork and edging speaks of the business of painting and its materiality. Your eye notes the imperfections and can see the process of transforming the surface to a sumptuous layer of colour from the abstracted Australian landscape.

Australian painting since colonisation has a long history of imagining and reimagining images of a nation. Our understanding of Australia is heavily influenced by the artworks of the past two hundred and fifty years, our shared narratives of the bush illuminated by

the paintings of Roberts, Streeton and McCubbin.

Beyer has selected the works of Arthur Boyd, an Angry Penguin now canonised within the history of Australian Painting, as the landscapes to 'transform'. Boyd painted allegorical scenes set in the Australian bush which developed universal themes of love, loss and shame as experienced in a 'young' nation. His paintings challenged the political and social dynamics of modern Australia and he captured a sense of place through the accuracy of his colour palette.

Standing in the gallery space these works invite you to reflect on how and why we paint, on the ways in which stories about place are central to our identity. The canvas works are luminous and painterly offering solidity and visual coherence to the overall exhibition. The mirrored surface paintings are clever - they have a different depth and quality that provides a kind of bridge between the paintings and the central digital artwork. They offer you glimpses of your fractured reflection as you move in front of the artworks, again inviting you to think about painting, and narratives, of surface and ways of seeing.

Beyer presents a reconfigured Australian landscape with great authenticity of colour which is unmistakably of this continent. 'Transformer' asks us to slow down and make connections between Beyer's contemporary abstract paintings and the paintings that have come before. Boyd's critique of Australia still resonates today but it sits underneath a new layered surface. Beyer has taken Boyd's critique and transformed and mediated it through a digitised process and the magic of a screen, akin to how most of us see the country in which we live. However, Beyer reinstates the hand and heart through her oil painting of these pixelated landscapes, inviting us to think on what has come before whilst simultaneously luring us in with a surface that remakes our vision and the story we see.