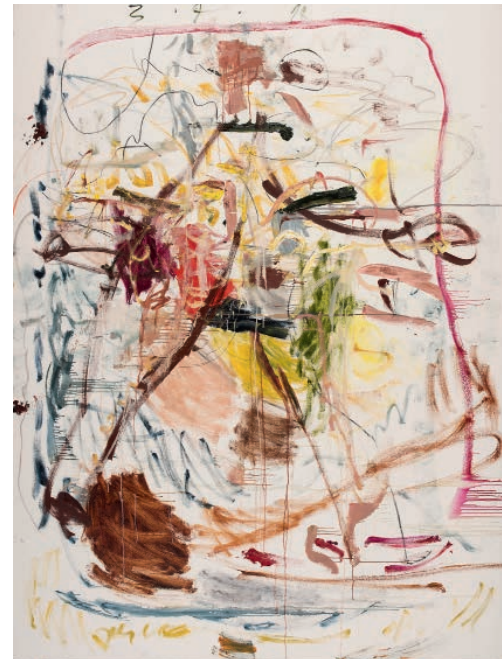


JAMES DRINKWATER



Your earliest paintings were quite faithful to form, but over the past 15 years you've honed a signature style that oscillates between abstraction and figuration, often hovering in between. How do you know when to stop – what tells you a work is complete?

Whether figurative or abstract, it makes no difference to me. I don't set out to arrive at one or the other. Form, however, is always there. Both abstraction and figuration provide solutions for me at different times. It comes down to location; place drives the whole thing. One can only respond to life when confronted by it; we seldom know we exist until our existence is textured by an event. As far as the act of painting goes I never really know where I am going to be beached. I'm just following a series of impulses, moving between the gears of what I see then what I feel.

In the past you've worked with sculpture and found materials, and you completed a large-scale commission with Melbourne's Monash University engineers – Walking with Giants – that's now permanently in the Monash collection. Can you see yourself collaborating in that way again? Can you see a time where you would only work in sculpture?

I can't see a time when I wouldn't be painting, but as time goes on I find myself making more

and more sculpture. I look at more sculpture today than I do pictures and furthermore I find more solutions to my paintings by referencing three-dimensional works. I have all this figurative sculpture in my studio on dollies, so I can just wheel them out and work directly from them. I can't bear the idea of selling one, because I'm not finished with them, they provide too much to let them go.

Your work is riddled with intimacy, micro or macro. The completed body is more like an essay – one long love letter (to a memory, person, place or time) broken into parts, accompanied by a poem. Will you continue this with your next series? What can we expect?

It's true the works are like documents – journal entries, snapshots – unashamedly romantic because that's how I view the world, enthusiasm is the lens I've chosen. They are also letters to my heroes and conversations with those I love. I have written a poem for this new body of work, not because I thought I should, it sounds trite but when the poems come about they sort of just happen to me. It's a way to decode my world, to reduce it.

This new series is called *Looking for Urchins and Louis Ferrari*. *Captain Louis Ferrari* is my maternal grandfather, an enigma of my child-

hood. He was an Italian doctor who went to Hiroshima to serve just after the bomb. He was exposed to radiation whilst there and died back in Newcastle shortly after. My mum was 11. After his death she would go to his wardrobe and immerse herself in his clothing, they smelt of tobacco, of aftershave, of him. It just breaks my heart. His wife **Marie Ferrari** was the matron at the hospital on Newcastle beach and their lives were orientated around the sea and places that I now inhabit. The most meaningful thing I do with my children and [my wife, artist] **Lottie [Consalvo]** is explore the rock pools, looking for crabs, octopi, anything. Sometimes we find an urchin, it's like I find a piece of him. Life is beautiful but it's also tragic, sharp and complex.

Imagine you're 80 and looking back on your life's work. What do you hope to have achieved through painting and art?

Honesty. That I've adequately celebrated the ones that I love and that I've had a meaningful conversation with art history, one of value.

Ineke Dane

JAMES DRINKWATER'S *LOOKING FOR URCHINS AND LOUIS FERRARI* SHOWS AT NANDA\HOBBS CONTEMPORARY, SYDNEY, FROM 11 OCTOBER TO 3 NOVEMBER 2018.

OPPOSITE FROM RIGHT: James Drinkwater, *The Sea Calls me by Name*, 2018. Oil on canvas, 240 x 180cm.

James Drinkwater, *Girl in Park under the Fort*, 2018. Oil on canvas, 240 x 180cm.

THIS PAGE: James Drinkwater, *Hester in The French Polynesia*, 2017. Corten steel and enamel, 240 x 1,300 x 800cm.

COURTESY: THE ARTIST AND NANDA\HOBBS CONTEMPORARY, SYDNEY. PHOTO: DEAN BELETICH.

