

melitta perry

Weaving The Borderlands

April 30 – May 14 2022

Northern Rivers-based Melitta Perry's new body of work evokes a sense of poignancy and hope. Typical of her visual language, sunburnt landscapes stretch to distant ranges under cloudless skies. Abandoned houses and old buildings stand mute in dry grassy fields but native creatures are active, "seemingly exempt from the constraints of time and borders." Perry imparts that the imagery reflects the vistas she experienced when driving the backroads of the NSW and Queensland borderlands with no particular plan other than to see where they led. Albeit she adds, much of her field-tripping was curtailed by enforced border restrictions.



With a deeply poetic sensibility, Perry elucidates the exhibition's title; "I like the metaphorical idea of weaving through the landscape and creating from threads. The landscape becomes the warp and its stories the weft. The temporal interweaves with the cognisant, the mundane with the extraordinary. The glorious disconnect of memory colours the threads of imagination with myth."

"The works are about being absorbed by the stories of the places encountered. There was always an atmosphere - a soulfulness, perhaps an echo, that defied description and was as fleeting and unreliable as memory," Perry furthers. "Weaving stories, real or imagined, into the landscape engenders an interpretation of place."

Perry describes the *Feather Fall* painting as largely imaginative and representative of passing scenes that triggered a powerful emotional response. "A narrative is born from truly wondering about the lives of people," she tells. Beyond the foreground's tall waving grasses a small farmhouse is depicted centre canvas, a spindly tree stands sentinel-like at each edge. Despite the vacant ambience, Perry envisions the folk who once lived there as being bathed in a honey glow pouring in from the coloured glass windows of the 'sleepout'. The floating white feather is her wish for peace, happiness and prosperity to whomever may take up future residence.

An antique grandfather clock dominates the landscape in *Eden Song (Paradise Parrots)*. Its pendulum hangs inert and the clockface is blank. The work is an ode to times past when the Paradise Parrot once thrived in the grassy bushland of the border country. "They were somewhat of a ground bird nesting in old ant hills. Their demise and 'banishment from the Garden' occurred as a result of development and introduced species. Its last confirmed sighting was in 1927," Perry informs. The clock's Roman numerals have tumbled to the earth and are being carried away by ants to their mound. A totemic blue tongue lizard observes. Flying overhead towards the grandfather clock is a Paradise Parrot, a clock-hand secured in its beak. The painting symbolises the 'hand of time' and Perry's fond hope that these birds might still secretly exist.

Motoring far into the Northern Slopes region Perry had come across a cluster of old buildings. The abandoned weatherboard church particularly drew her attention and inspired the *Koreelah Sunday* work. "A locality for gatherings and a place for rites, I wondered about the lifetime milestones recorded in its timber frame. The curious placement of the outhouse also intrigued me," Perry conveys. "Perhaps now, only the bush turkeys and magpies trade morsels of community gossip." The bees swarming around a hive in a nearby gumtree are symbolic of the church's once thriving congregation.

Birdwatching (Regent Honeyeaters) is suffused with a curious sense of quietude. The only apparent movement is that of the critically endangered Regent Honeyeater birds flying in the distance. Languidly posed across an ornate slipper chair the unclothed woman watches them, a pair of antique binoculars in hand. She in turn is watched by a pair of Regent Honeyeaters, one above in a tree and another on the ground behind her. The diagonal alignment between them creates both a symbolic and compositional connection. Several emblematic beehives have been strategically placed in the field. Perry describes this painting as "a contemplation of vulnerability, sovereignty and displacement." She invites the viewer to enter its realm and reflect upon the significance of the imagery depicted therein.

Perry's sensitive renditions of time and place have earned her entry into multiple prestigious awards. She was a Finalist in the Ravenswood Women's Art Prize 2021 and the Calleen Art Prize 2020; an Invited Finalist in the Tattersall's Club Landscape Prize 2019, 2018. Perry was Winner of the Council Acquisitive Prize, Byron Arts Classic 2015; received the William Fletcher Tertiary Grant 2013 and won the Coraki Painting Prize 2013. Country Energy Award for Landscape 2009, 2007; Portia Geach Memorial Award and Metro 5 Art Award 2005.

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