

judy oakenfull

Wild Coast

October 29 – November 12 2022

Judy Oakenfull's inaugural exhibition at Anthea Polson Art conveys a deep engagement with the natural world. She describes its coastlines and native flora as the 'protagonists' in her paintings. "There seems to be something within that draws us towards the 'untamed' coast," Oakenfull imparts. "My work explores this yearning and aims to capture something of the calming, grounded feeling we derive from being at the ocean's edge."



The Murwillumbah-based artist relates that the *Wild Coast* paintings evolved from an earlier series of botanical works depicting various species of Australian banksia plants and flowers. "Following an exhibition of them at the Tweed Regional Gallery in 2019, I began to focus on the banksia varieties local to Northern NSW and South East Queensland. As these plants are generally found in coastal regimes, it became a logical step to include their surrounds in my current paintings," Oakenfull explains. "Initially, this took the form of ocean glimpses through banksia leaves, but then expanded to portray the seascape beyond. Other types of coastal foliage were introduced and the ocean itself became a main component."

Layers of oil paint across the canvases express Oakenfull's experience of seaside environs. "I appreciate the meditative essence of this medium," she muses. "Painting allows the time and space to grow a type of intimacy with the subject. It is a meeting of observed components and one's inner self." Oakenfull tells that visual interconnections developed between the ocean and the flora she was depicting. "The blue of the sea and the yellows of the flowers are almost complimentary colours, each one intensifying the other and giving resonance to the paintings. Vegetation and panorama are equally important aspects in the works, neither one is the dominant element."

A thoroughly contemporary approach to the seascape genre is evidenced in her carefully balanced colours and subtly geometricised forms. Imagined topographical features are often included for compositional fulfilment. Sweeping crescent shapes invest several of the paintings, *Paradisiacal Yearnings* being a prime example. Here the shoreline's distinctive arc correlates with the overt curvature of grassy landforms and distant hill. The positioning of pandanus and banksia trees encourages the viewer's eye to circle the work and find immersion amidst the horizon's shimmering light.

Oceanic Inflorescence has a similar contemplative ambience. Warm-toned crescents band the sky above the headland. Round hillocks harmoniously grace the foreground and counterpoise the horizontality of sea and small, ochre strip of sand. Prominent yellow banksia flowers stretch up in seeming salutation. It is a consummate composition emanating a sense of wholeness and integration.

In part, Oakenfull credits her remarkable facility of synthesizing landscape and botanical detail to the couple of years she spent in Japan after completing a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree at VCA. "There I became well acquainted with traditional and contemporary Japanese aesthetics and pictorial devices. Ukiyo-e artists, such as Hokusai and Hiroshige, were of particular inspiration." European Post-Impressionists are also cited as having influenced her art making with their unconventional and imaginative responses to the vistas they observed.

"During current times, the wild coast is ever more important in its offering of a spacious and restorative respite from crowded cities and busy lives," Oakenfull opines. "I feel that as a society, we are undergoing a cultural shift towards a greater respect for nature and the environment. Acknowledgement of a coastal site's history and pertinent reclamation are now also in evidence. I hope my work can reflect and celebrate this change."

JACQUELINE HOUGHTON

29 Tedder Avenue, Main Beach, QLD 4217 **Postal Address:** PO Box 985, Main Beach, QLD 4217

Phone: 07 5561 1166 **Email:** info@antheapolsonart.com.au **Web:** www.antheapolsonart.com.au