

Inventory

Katherine Hattam

Looking at these recent *Walking Tracks/Dog* paintings, sometimes I think inside every figurative artist there's an abstract artist insisting on being let out; at other times it seems simply that the division between abstraction and figuration is a false one – we are all hybrid – a bit of both.

Sitting looking at my sister's window in Brooklyn that has a brightly coloured stained glass strip running round it, I experienced a strong desire to draw and paint it, to incorporate it in my work; then it morphed into the floor and the ground on which the kitchen/work table, dogs and cats stood. I don't work from any theory, that's never my starting point, rather from these vague or strong wishes and desires to depict something, one thing rather than another. It's only later, after the fact, I can read meanings or reasons into the images.

The Brooklyn stained glass window is me looking at and understanding another world, an American world entirely different to the one I come from, yet looking from my family onto my familiar local landscape: Ceres with the chooks, Merri Creek where I walk: powerlines creek bike and walking track – an unfamiliar window onto my familiar world.

Many of these landscapes are viewed across a tabletop framed by walls on which hang things – some actual objects in my house: woven baskets from the Northern territory, a mask from Paris, paintings I remember like Nolan's *Moon Boy* or others I wish I'd painted like John Campbell's *72 Derwents*, or Snakes and Ladders boards – a mixture of the literal and the remembered.

As Kirsty Grant describes in her essay for NGV exhibition *This and Other Worlds* 2005, the objects on the table are intimate inanimate things both from the domestic world of cooking and family life or from that of my studio. Then again there are the dogs Olive and Minnie who live here on loan from my son Charlie, and Melba the cat, all strangely and conveniently in reality and for the purposes of painting black and white.

My interest is in the relationship between things, as Graham Little says in his essay *Seashells and Porcupines* referring to DW Winnicott quoting psychoanalyst and painter Marion Milner in *On not being able to paint* when he talks of 'tremendous significance that there can be in the interplay at the edges of two curtains or the surface of a jug that is placed in front of another jug'.

Feminist art history sees a tradition and perspective of women artists viewing the landscape as peopled, framed - from the verandah. My landscapes are that and my interiors often look out through a window onto an aspect of the outside world but I have never been able to locate myself in that tradition. My view is one where the inside and the outside world colour and inflect one another, coexist: perhaps a psychoanalytic one where the past can pop up in or affect the present. Time and space are not linear and cannot be cleanly compartmentalised - we all have little of Raskolnikov's capacity for projection in us. Or as Morag Fraser in her essay *Layering the Drawing Biennale Drill Hall, Canberra 2000*, 'Hattam doesn't frame a feminine interior (her interiors are androgynous) or look out to the world through a window. Rather her exterior and interior worlds coexist, in tension on the same plane.'

As Jenny Long states in her catalogue essay for *Perfect Day* (an exhibition at Bendigo Art Gallery with Angela Brennan), ‘the house of Katherine Hattam is open to the world, open to networks of information, emotion, energy and culture...Hattam maps the world flowing through her home’. Long argues ‘that in the culture of the twentieth century the house is increasingly an unstable, unsettled and complex location. The onslaught of the information age further troubles the domestic space that has sustained the modern idea of the home as a place separate from the world. It is now inside the house that issues of landscape and power are defined.’ This does seem to describe my pictures to me but I come back to something Eva Hesse said, ‘the desire comes first’. I can’t recall where I read it but it has stayed with me – my intuitive desire is to depict something and understand why: after the fact.