

Jedda Daisy Culley **Imminence**

In *Burn's at the Land's Brim*, a suite of radiant and fugitive new paintings by the artist Jedda Culley, the landscape is realised as an unfixed physical and emotional state. These works might be first understood as palimpsests which hide a curving line of travel the artist made across central Australia, a line that stretches from Wilpena Pound in South Australia to Katherine in the Northern Territory, touching the inland gorges and valleys and the painted desert in between. And though, in a titular way, these paintings might refer to real places on the map—Kings Canyon, Karlu Karlu, Ruby Gap, Jedda Gorge, Palm Valley—they are as much emotional as physical scenes. Like Sidney Nolan and Louise Bourgeois and Billy Benn before her, Jedda is an artist who has tasked herself with representing both the *subject* and the *concept* of being.

With a seemingly effortless authority, these paintings return to us the state of imminence that comes from being in nature. They capture the shifting intensities of seasonal and diurnal time and play out the arcane logic of landscape and the body—in states of birth, near-death and renewal. The notion of ‘being there’ is as present here as the feeling of not being there anymore. That is to say that these paintings map experience after the fact—as the amplitude, but not the affect, of landscape decreases with distance. And so it is that the power of the works in *Burn's at the Land's Brim* lie in the artist's ability to recall: the evanescence of light and shadow, the hooded firmament at the beginning and end of the day, and, most tellingly, the positions of the body as it rotates on its own imaginary axis.

Historically, these works take influence from J.M.W. Turner—painter of light—and Sidney Nolan who saw in the colours of inland Australia a unique power to *defeat the effect of distance & atmosphere*^{*}. There are connections here too to the psychological intensity of artist Louise Bourgeois whose *task was to keep the emotions raw and alive because her sculpture was to make conscious what we all experience unconsciously*[†]. But the light touch, almost-chubby arcs and transparent swathes of colour and line in these paintings will be familiar to audiences who have known Jedda's sculpture [knitted bodies-without-bodies punctuated by tiny pink knots of genitalia] or her weavings [where word play and wool make looping assertions of identity] or her clothing label [as co-designer of Desert Designs which refigures and pays homage to the work and country of the late Walmajarri artist Jimmy Pike]. Jedda exerts an emotional pressure across her varied practice and the miscellany of her materials does not dull the enduring nature of her subjects—landscape, our bodies, and perhaps most of all, sensation—often approached with humour and always brimming with an urgency to connect.

The immateriality of nature becomes embodied at the point we return home. In these works Jedda employs a tactic familiar to the rest of her work; the visual pun—where one part refers to another's whole. A gorge or a womb? A shaft of light or a silver skirted scar? A cinnamon pink rock or the flush of blood close to the surface of the skin? Another poet of the Australian landscape, Judith Wright, powerfully evoked the contradictory feeling of being in nature; of it moving our bodies and yet not being of them, of sites and skies that demand our physical presence and yet are almost impossible to physically recall. Wright, like Jedda, imagined an implicit contract between art and the natural world—to give pleasure, provoke beauty and inspire growth.

*Now my five senses
gather into a meaning
all acts, all presences;
and as a lily gathers
the elements together,
in me this dark and shining,
that stillness and that moving,
these shapes that spring from nothing,
become a rhythm that dances,
a pure design.*

*While I'm in my five senses
they send me spinning
all sounds and silences,
all shape and colour
as thread for that weaver,
whose web within me growing
follows beyond my knowing
some pattern sprung from nothing-
a rhythm that dances/and is not mine.[‡]*

* Geoffrey Smith, ed., *Sidney Nolan: Desert and Drought* (Melbourne : National Gallery of Victoria, 2003), 17. [Nolan writes] “In one sense it [Uluru] resembles an enormous whale placed on the sand. However it resembles nothing. More than anything else it is so itself and will remain so...From the distance, perhaps best of all, the rock is a light pink & this from 70 miles away. No other colour that i have seen could defeat the effect of distance & atmosphere so much.”

† Philip Larratt-Smith, ed., *Louise Bourgeois: The Return of the Repressed* (London: Violette Editions, 2012.)

‡ Judith Wright, “Five Senses”, in *Five Senses: Selected Poems* (Angus and Robertson, 1972)