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Within the disarray of fragments of painting parts laid out on the floor, incidental and unforeseen compositional suggestions occur.



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# Julie Poulsen

IT IS THE simple narratives of the everyday that provides the starting point and word play that drive the momentum for my work. Sequential to producing artwork, I write to validate ideas. This literary honing improves, simplifies and substantiates underdeveloped notions and paves the way for ongoing and continued experimentation.

My father was eager for new experiences and, directly after the war, my parents moved to Lae, Papua New Guinea. These first six years of my life established a sequence of lifestyle and climatic changes. Our travels were random, from the wilds of New Guinea to the shiny, bustling Gold Coast and from traditional Toowoomba and the United Kingdom to frontier Cooktown. Each of these moves added and strengthened my ongoing portfolio of visual stories. Photographs and memories from these early years intertwine to sustain and motivate my urge to explore, discover and experiment.

Born in Brisbane and educated there from mid primary school, I spent a year with my family in Cooktown in 1977 before moving to Toowoomba to study a diploma of Creative Arts. It was at the Darling Downs Institute of Advanced Education, in an era exempli-

fied by non-directed arts study and limited formal tuition, that I formulated a mindset of investigation. This uninhibited exploratory three years founded and characterised my future art practice.

In the late 1980s I manoeuvred back into painting, juggling work and motherhood as women typically have to do – sleep deprived, manic but determined that these early works appear to replicate this energy. I painted with a fresh, raw fervour, interweaving brazen colour, multiple layering, painterly child-like images reflecting my children's drawings.

A direct painting method remained the focus until 2002 when the nature of my art practice shifted. My new work became light and open – combining painting, drawing, print-making and stitched assemblage. The change was a return to the source and an extension of work I started at art school. An era of multi-faceted works unfolded: to formulate one final artwork, various painted and woodblock printed (primed and un-primed) canvases were made, laid out on the studio floor, cut, replaced, reworked, reprinted and reassembled through stitching and sewing.

Within the disarray of fragmented painting

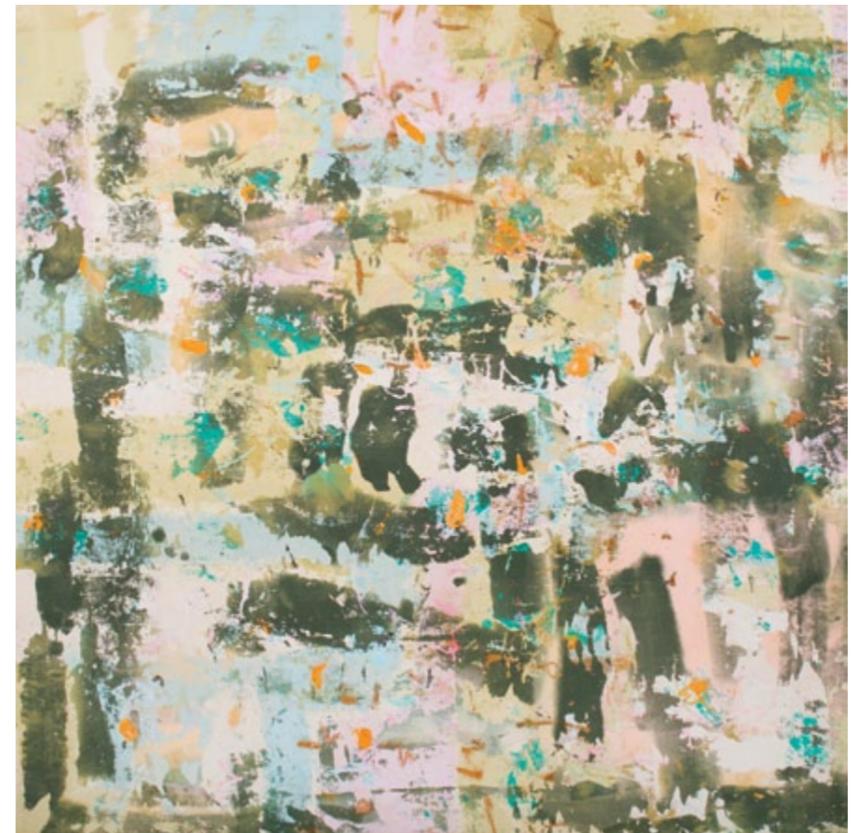
parts laid out on the floor, incidental and unforeseen compositional suggestions occur. It was here that choices took part to adjust and apply a satisfying arrangement; my aim was to retain both obscurity and readability for the final stitched assemblage.

In 2005, an exhibition of new works at Cairns Regional Gallery clarified and established this new direction for me. 'Décor Sermon', my most ambitious exhibition to date was 5000cm of continuous artwork (148cm high) covering the walls of the Loft Art Space. This body of work was a raucous combination of materials – stitched panels, found objects and thought-provoking imagery – presented as 'a playful reinvention of the puffed up notion of the perfect interior décor'.

In 2006, I drew inspiration from commonplace signage to produce a new body of work: 'Menu Board'. Often characteristically tropical, signs such as FROZEN MANGO CHEEKS allowed for playfulness: the text, language and aesthetics of these roadside food stalls and chalkboard café menus were reinvented with a newfound beauty and meaning. By adding my own poetic twist, the signs assumed cultural, geographical and even economic symbolism while retaining



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an intriguing ambiguity. 'Menu Board' was exhibited at KickArts Contemporary Arts in Cairns in 2007.

With encouragement from friend and filmmaker Catherine Hunter, I began the task of exhibiting biannually at Depot Gallery, Danks Street, Sydney.

In 2008, 'House and Land Package' the work addressed the pre-designed formulas that are applied to our lives in modern home building. This was followed by 'House Portraits' and 'The Princess gets to hold the cats', in 2009 and 2011 respectively.

In 2012, I developed new work which represented a significant shift: a move from stitched assemblage on canvases to unpartitioned landscape expanses. The exhibition 'Glimpse', at Cairns Regional Gallery, was a collaboration with artist Jenny Valmadre and film-makers Catherine Hunter and Bruce Inglis who produced a major film, *Savannah Country*.

A return to exhibit at Danks Street in 2013 with exhibition 'Country for Birds' reflects my interest in the contemplative sensation of being in, not simply passing through, the natural environment and acknowledging its particular sentiments. Standing at the southern end of Machans Beach (on the

northern outskirts of Cairns), the beach floats into mudflats, bumping against the mountains bordering Trinity Inlet. This stretch of beach is invariably peppered with birds, spindly and dolloped, loose-limbed and wobbly; their gestures evident even from afar. It is these fragmentary marks against the brown of the sand bar, and purple grey smudges of the sea, that drove my idea for painting birds as an integral part of the landscape.

My search for new visual narratives in elements of the mundane and everyday is a personal challenge but it is this continuing quest that propels me into investigations that take my work into yet unexplored territories. ■

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- 01 Sunlight on mudflats #1, 2013, mixed media on canvas, 106 x 182cm
- 02 James Cook Drive #4, 2014, mixed media on canvas, 121 x 121cm
- 03 Waterbirds, 2013, mixed media on canvas, 111 x 55cm
- 04 James Cook Drive #5, 2014, mixed media on canvas, 121 x 121cm
- 05 Rocky Birdwalk, 2013, mixed media on canvas diptych, 107 x 171cm

Courtesy the artist