

**JENNIFER GOODMAN**

Talk for Turner Gallery Show - Inner Responses

March 16, 2019

Hello everyone and thanks for coming today.

Before I begin, I'd like to acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land, the Whadjuk Noongar people, and pay my respect to their Elders, past, present and future.

I'd also like to say thank you to Turner Galleries for showing my work and for being so welcoming, and to the Art Angels and the Northern Metropolitan TAFE for making my residency possible. I'm thrilled to be showing here and am looking forward to an enjoyable and productive time in Perth.

It's also a pleasure, to be accompanied by two wonderful shows in the adjoining galleries.

When planning this show and thinking of a title, I was at first wrestling between two. The first was *Choreography*, and the second was *In Search of Beauty*.

Why would I think of *Choreography* as a title? There's a complex choreography & orchestration of colour and composition that occupy my images and are part of their making. This progression feels like a paced, intense dance step... forwards, backwards, sideways, forwards again, half a step back and then two steps forward. And so it goes!

And then there's the choreography involving the placement of one work with another and one stream with another and how they'll sit together as a body of work.

I moved on from *Choreography* and kept coming back to *In Search of Beauty*. This title is inspired by an essay, 'Beauty is the mystery of life', written in 1987 by the abstract artist Agnes Martin. In her essay, Martin writes, "When I think of art, I think of beauty. Beauty is the mystery of life. It is not in the eye, it is in the mind. In our minds there is awareness of perfection".

I'm inspired by sublime beauty and unapologetically strive towards it in the studio, where I try to create that exciting state.

The title, 'In Search of Beauty', seemed appropriate, but, on further consideration, it seemed too limited in its direction. I settled on 'Inner Responses', which can allude, not only to this striving for beauty, but also to the very personal and sensory experience of working with these abstract forms. It also has the potential to take into consideration, not only my responses, but those of the viewer.

My work is about pure abstraction and is separate from any representational references - it speaks to the legacy of abstraction but is singular in its vision. It's an exploration of colour, tone, line and form, which allows for interpretation through the physical and sensory experience of colour and abstraction. Like music, it can't be explained but needs to be experienced.

My studio time involves my intimate engagement with ideas, inspiration, process and materials. It is the battle of trying to transform my emotions and sensory experience into a visual form.

My work is apolitical, there's no agenda or reaching outward for inspiration, the work searching instead for beauty, tranquility and happiness through the stimulation that comes from an internal dialogue and excavation of ideas.

I'm aware that my finished resolved works can appear effortlessly harmonious, yet they are the result of many weeks and sometimes months of considered work and struggle. It is a journey of much thought and problem solving, with slow progressions and subtle changes. It's a process that I refer to as the Silent Transformation, where the depth and subtlety of the work is revealed slowly with time spent. I feel it's this complexity that allows the work to keep giving over time.

When thinking of my pace of progress when painting, the ballet like action of Tai Chi comes to mind... I picture its slow deliberate movements, gaining strength and becoming more powerful through paced deliberate action. I think the successful progression of a painting advances in a similar way gaining strength as it approaches its completion.

When things are going well for me when painting, I lose awareness of myself, the work gets its own presence and voice, and tells me where it wants to go, often surprising me in the direction that it chooses. It's a total dialogue between the painting and me, without the external interference of the work needing to resemble or represent something existing.

Artists' studios vary enormously. I'm lucky enough to have a purpose built studio in our back yard. Its white walls and pale grey floor provide an ideal neutral space.

Its environment is solitary. I find painting to be a solitary passion. I require clarity of mind, quiet, solitude, peace and time spent in order to tune in to my work.

Practically, there is a general pattern I go through with each work. The painting starts off well, filling me with optimism and anticipation. Just as I feel that this work will go smoothly and will be finished in no time, things start to fall apart. There are days where the work is not going well, where I feel down and feel unsure, but you get to recognize the technical and emotional pattern and rhythm. I hang on and keep working, understanding that this will turn around as it generally does. It is the nature of creativity.

I do get enjoyment in the process and in seeing the magic occur. There is no pleasure like that of being totally happy with a work, stepping back, looking and wondering to myself.. “where did that come from”!

A thing I’m pleased about with this show is the variation between works, and as such, feeling that each piece has its own identity. I was thrilled when a friend in Melbourne, after seeing the work, likened this show to an orchestra, where each instrument is playing its own part but where it all comes together to form a whole.

It wasn’t always this way...

My work prior to 2012 was geometric and grid based, with only a few compositions moving into angles and away from the grid. This meant that in general, the compositions were more uniform and shared a similar identity. Breaking out of the grid was extremely difficult. With my gridded work, every line moved to the edge of the canvas and appeared to continue around it. The imagery was metaphorically tied down to the edges and the level of accuracy required was becoming excruciatingly mathematical.

My move to a more bio-morphic, organic composition came because I was truly ready. Moving away from the grid, was like taking a pair of scissors, going around the edge of the canvas, and cutting the metaphoric ties that held it together. The transition acted as an explosion of freedom. Even though my work is still precise, and the compositions still consist of defined flat areas of solid colour, I no longer feel the restrictions that the grid imposed.

The transition has continued into open floating shapes, such as Flight and Float, which create energetic movement as they find their position on the canvas.

Since breaking the grid, the work has kept its unbound freedom, the ties that held down the geometric forms have remained severed, but the more solid form paintings are swinging back somewhat in their compositions to incorporate looser geometric forms. I can see this clearly in Pacific, Notturmo, and Power to the Imagination.

My early geometric work was made up of exclusively subtle, muted colours and tones. As I broke the grid, the work to follow showed its glee at its new found freedom, by its display of exuberant bright colours. I'm finding that my work now, although still joyous to me, has probably found a middle position. Strong tones and bright colours are still used, but generally my palette has become more subtle again. The stronger, brighter colours are now used more selectively often highlighting areas as 'jewels of colour'. ( see Pacific )

There is a particular pendulum of thought and activity, building up momentum as I work on each piece. The work is finished when that pendulum slows and becomes still.

Each artist works in their own idiosyncratic way so I thought I'd let you know what happens in my studio... it may sound extreme!

I use my understanding of colour theory, when mixing paint. My colour choices are intuitive, instinctive, individual and personal. Although I have over one hundred tubes of oil paint of various colours and shades lined up on my table, it is extremely rare for me to use paint straight out of the tube, as it never seems to match the shade and tone that's in my mind's eye. I mix my paint to get the specific hue that's a perfect match to what I imagine.

As I mix up the paint, I record the recipes of colour mixing for each painting. I keep a diary noting, not quantities, but the groupings of pigments that go into making up each colour. This works as a reference for when I'm developing a painting that bounces off another, or for other future work.

I usually have around forty but may have as many as eighty individual shades in a single painting, each being painted on the canvas in a defined area of solid colour. Opera, for example has about 60. To make things easier and more orderly, I've developed my system of bowls and the trolleys that they sit on. As I mix the paint for use, each individually mixed colour is contained in a palm sized ceramic bowl. Having as many as eighty individual shades in a single painting means that I may have up to eighty individual bowls that represent each painting.

These bowls are housed on trolleys. I have about ten trolleys each holding forty, stacked, uniform bowls. Usually a trolley represents the palette of a single painting, although often I overflow onto another.

I like to keep the loaded trolleys around through a few bodies of work as the bowls serve as three dimensional colour charts to which I can refer. When I'm ready to re-use a bowl, in scraping out the bulk of the paint, I'm left with a rim of colour. Interestingly to me, after a few uses of the bowl over a period of time, the leftover multiple rims of paint have their own presence and form little colour histories of my work. I like to fantasise that, by chance, they have the feeling of little round Rothkos.

As I consider my practice, I totally accept that all this may sound unusual, pedantic and even extreme, but to me it's totally normal and integral to my way of working.

It's a personal and individual thing. The orderly nature of my work and studio gives me space and is my way of respecting my work... an idiosyncratic view that was shared by Agnes Martin, who somehow, strangely seemed to think that every artist should hold the same view. She said... 'You must clean and arrange your studio in a way that will forward a quiet state of mind'... And she goes on to say, 'This cautious care of atmosphere is really needed to show respect for the work'.

This happens to work for me but she certainly was pedantic, rigid and generally a fairly strange woman.

My work develops through a slow thoughtful process, where an important component to my technique and to the finished work is the paint surface. I strive towards an immaculate brush free surface where each shape fills its border with solid pools of colour. The paint from my bowls is applied in multiple thin layers, usually with colour adjustments between, using only odourless solvent as my medium. It is the build up of these smooth layers that give the painting its ultimate surface. Although painting in

oils, I generally use soft, water colour brushes in order to avoid the textured mark of the brush.

Some parts of my paintings appear to have veils of transparent or translucent colour adding to the complex layering of the image, but they are actually carefully mixed opaque tones that give the illusion of transparency. When creating this effect, the tone needs to be correct but there's leeway with the choice of colour. Sometimes using unexpected colour in this situation can add interest and create some visual tension.

I decided early on not to use masking tape in the making of my work. In principle, I have no problem with its use, but I prefer to use a free-hand brush. I believe the viewer's eye sees the line as straight but their brain feels its wobbliness, which gives the work a more organic feel and a slower visual uptake.

Despite my normal practice of mixing colours to match that illusive one in my imagination, some areas of art practice don't allow this. I'm thinking of collages and my general use of pre coloured paper.

I use bought coloured paper a lot, both when planning my work and when problem solving. It's both a medium I use, and a support to my paintings, and has been instrumental in my investigation of colour relationships.

I can test colour combinations with paper. To me it is like a found object. The colour is found. It's existing hues haven't been mixed to match that colour chart in my head, so being forced to use what's available, kick starts me out of my comfort zone and encourages my palette to broaden.



Many of my paintings are made using my collages as studies and many of my collages are made using my painted compositions in their inception.

My floating or fractured work, came about unexpectedly when making collages to use as preparatory studies for my paintings. As I was cutting the rounded organic shapes, which were to make up my solid colour compositions, I found I was left with the coloured offcuts, which formed the negative shapes of my original forms.

I decided to use these corresponding shapes to make their own collages and these also served as studies for further paintings. Since then I have pushed these fractured floating works further by having overlapping transparent and veiled shapes adding to the compositions.

Contemporary artists working with textile art is not a new thing. 2019 happens to be the 100 year anniversary of the opening of the Bauhaus, where the 1920s and 30s saw artists including Anni Albers and Paul Klee aiming to bring together art, handcrafts and architecture into the one single synthesis of the arts.

Outside the Bauhaus, Picasso, Matisse, Miro, Leger and Calder are only a few of those who worked with tapestry. Today, artists - Gerhard Richter, Grayson Perry, Keith Tyler, and Australians, Polly Borland, Narelle Jubelin and Michelle Hamer are some, amongst many others who have blurred the lines between art and craft as they present their tapestries.

As you can imagine, needlepoint tapestries take a very long time to make and this can become an obstacle when trying to create a

large body of work. Polly Borland recently had a large series of needlepoint tapestries, based on her photographic portraits, shown as part of her survey show at the NGV. I was fascinated and impressed with her handling of the time required for tapestry production. Laterally thinking, she had male inmates at a prison in the UK make the work for her.

I have a vision of a room full of threatening prisoners delicately involved in their needlepoint. These tough but dainty inmates did a fine job and the problem was well solved!

In 2016, I was fortunate to undertake a residency at the Australian Tapestry Workshop in Melbourne. This gave me the opportunity to explore, what was for me, a totally different medium - working with woollen thread and felt. I completed two needlepoint and felt tapestries while there ( Lana 1 and 2 ) and have recently completed a third ( Lana 3 ). It was pointed out to me that my approach to tapestry demands an obsessive perfectionism in each stitch, as is shared by the demands of each indiscernible brushstroke that makes up my painting.

Recently I enjoyed reading a Gagosian Gallery catalogue on Gerhard Richter's tapestries, where it speaks of 'the act of painting itself, passing into a parallel tactile realm'.

The use of felt came to me as a natural material to combine with the woollen thread. Just like the forms in my painting, it has a smooth unwoven texture and displays a clearly, defined border when shaped. To me the material feels like a translation of paint into textile.

Another thing that appealed to me when approaching my tapestries was the vast array of coloured thread available through the tapestry workshop. Nearly 400 colours and yet, as with my tubes of paint, it's difficult to match that colour I can see in my head.

Not finding the exact match can be a positive. Just as with my collages, where I'm limited with a restricted selection of paper, here, I'm forced to use 'found' colours or tones of thread that may not be my first choice. This ricochets me on to using a slightly different palette thus pushing me in new directions in my practice.

Finally, 'Cosmos', is the only print in this show and, to me, forms a bridge or conduit between the tapestries and paintings due to the fuzzy sensation of felt and fabric that it evokes due to its pixilation.

Putting my thoughts on paper has clarified so much for me about how I work and my practice in general.

I hope its been of interest to you.