



IN TOWN - HOMETOWN

Clementine Belle McIntosh

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Puzzle Gallery

www.puzzlegallery.online

19 - 25 Wellington Street, Chippendale

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Clementine Belle McIntosh's art practice takes place on the land of the Wiradjuri, Wailwan and Kamilaroi people in the New South Wales town of Gilgandra. Clementine and I met on Zoom where, streaming through to her studio, I observed shelving filled with rows of fabrics which have been salvaged, cut and dyed to form her textural palette. McIntosh's practice is decidedly cyclical: everything evolves from the land and the local community, and ultimately returns.

McIntosh began as a landscape painter; a sensibility which is reflected in the artworks she creates today. An experience of severe drought in her hometown drew her focus squarely on life in Gilgandra, the people, and the nuances of place. Throughout the making of her work, McIntosh shares her practice with and consults with local First Nations people and knowledge-holders.

In her body of work for Puzzle, McIntosh has drawn on materials connected to local industry including raw sheep's wool, spilled harvest grains, found metals and rusted farming equipment. The fabrics central to her work are collected from neighbours, family and friends, and aren't always the types of materials you'd expect. In one recent case, a large-scale tarp used to protect harvested grains was donated by a local farmer. This tarp itself was salvaged, having blown off a McDonald's billboard some years ago in rough weather. This tarp has assumed a third life as part of the largest work in the exhibition.

On the walls external to the main space, we are greeted by a series of gloriously pulpy handmade paper works. Inside the Puzzle space, her fabrics hang like tableau, suspended from salvaged farming materials. These diverse hangings are stained, adorned, patched, cut and dyed. For this series, McIntosh has used a combination of

metals oxidised in white vinegar and water dyed with old coins to create an ink that has infused her materials with a copper blue. This technique takes a slight departure from dyeing methods the artist employs using plant matter such as eucalyptus, invasive weeds and fruit skins. In this series, and others, the artist attaches meandering lines of decorative grains and spun wool which outline and embellish the amorphous shapes that sweep the surface of her fabrics.

The colours which infuse her artworks are consistently gentle, earthy and natural. It is not uncommon for McIntosh to soak her fabrics in the local Castlereagh River or farm dams, to run them through earth, attach them to trees or hang them from farm fencing to bleach in the sun. Sometimes, she even allows them to begin the process of decomposing. Indeed, it is important that the natural environment is an active participant in the making of her work, shaping and directing the tones, appearance and composition of her fabrics and supporting the intuitive nature of her practice. In this way, she is not only communicating with people, but with an essence of place and with the gradual movement of time. Although in the dyeing process the fabrics on display take a mechanical detour, McIntosh's artworks are as membranes which have grown from place itself.

As McIntosh's practice grows, so too does the investment of her community. While at first her work might have seemed unusual, it soon progressed to become a way in which to communicate and connect on local issues in abstracted and non-linear ways. The opinions, feedback and support of Gilgandra infuse the works and contribute to a discussion about how artmaking may be situated within an Australian milieu other than the dominant art world. McIntosh demonstrates that the making of art, despite all stereotypes and appearances, doesn't have to occur in isolation.

Artmaking in areas considered to be 'regional' is vital. With Australia's art centres unofficially proclaimed as its major cities (namely Sydney and Melbourne if rumour is to be believed) it is important to break through and look to the land beyond. Artists from towns and cities distant from major centres face challenges in contextualising and situating their work for urban audiences who face dislocation from nature, agriculture, industry, land and this complex interrelationship. For McIntosh, key questions lie in understanding the seesaw between the economic pressures of living on the land and the needs of the natural environment; having an art practice in Gilgandra, and presenting this within a city context; making art, yet resisting commercialisation.

As McIntosh explains, her interest lies in 'creating dialogues between neighbour and stranger, erosion and growth and producer and consumer.' She achieves a mindful and sustainable connection to Gilgandra while bringing us along on the journey, from her inland home to Sydney's shores. McIntosh spoke to me about a key influence on her honours research, philosopher Val Plumwood, who once asserted: '... the problem is not primarily about more knowledge and technology; it is about developing an environmental culture that values and fully acknowledges the non-human sphere and our dependency on it.' Vitally, while McIntosh's works speak a language of abstraction, they also speak to a genuine experience of nature, place and people. She proves that the human and non human collaboration Plumwood speaks of is not only possible, but alive and well.

Emma McLean

Emma McLean is deputy editor of Look magazine. She lives and works on Gadigal Land.

1. Gil Weekly 2024

Recycled Gilgandra Weekly, Wellington and District Leader, Nyngan Weekly and Warren Star newspaper, raw wool fleece, paddock stubble, copper ink, rust water and eucalyptus and onion skin ink and wheat paste

2. Fleece Tile 2024

Raw Wool Fleece, Rabbit Skin Glue and found metal

3. Debutante 2024

Cut up nylon wool pack, weilding rods, jewellery pearls, thread and eucalyptus dye

4. Strapping (Big and Strong) 2024

Nancyes old cotton sheets, eucalyptus dye, rust water, onion skin dyed merino yarn, merino yarn, rabbit skin glue, thread and pallet strapping

5. Ewe 2024

Sheep jaw bone, childhood ribbon, merino yarn, eucalyptus dyed raw merino fleece

6. Fava Bean Embellishments 2024

Fava Beans, Mum's old jewellery, vinnies fabric, marigold flower dye, copper ink, eucalptus dye, rust water, a shell from my studio and rabbit skin glue

7. GrainCorp 2024

Salvaged Mcdonald's billboard tarp gifted by Doug, dirt, snake skin gifted by Sofie, rabbit skin glue, fava beans, Nancye's old cotten sheet, rust water, pokeberry ink, eucayptus dye, rosemary dye and blackberry nightshade ink

8. Grazing Stubble 2024

Crop stubble, sheep bone, corrugated metal cut-off, wood, wool yarn label and paddock dirt

9. Counting Sheep 2024

Kate's gifted fabric, Nancye's old cotton sheet, copper ink, eucalyptus dye, raw wool sleece, merino yarn and thread

10. 100% Merino Wool Made In Australia 2024

Raw Merino Fleece, Nylon Wool Pack, Childhood Ribbons, Vinnies Stained Glass Box, Shotgun casing and sheep bone

11. Wool Shed Floor 2024

Rosemary dye, eucalyptus dye and rust water on Nancye's old cotton sheet

