

Going Places: AMANDA VAN GILS and SIMON COLLINS

First meeting on an Internet forum in 2006, Amanda van Gils and Simon Collins, respectively based in Melbourne and Sydney, soon discovered common interests as artists and the parents of young children. The Going Places exhibition is the result of that ongoing supportive, professional association and a shared artistic sensibility towards the landscape.

With very different painterly approaches, van Gils and Collins explore the importance of nurturing a sense of place beyond the consuming busyness of 'living'. Although painters first and foremost, both source imagery through photography. Those fleeting moments of an ordinary day are freeze-framed and then visually interpreted through the medium of paint back in the studio. In Collins' case, inspiration came during the wintery evenings he spent watching his son's soccer training at a local park. Much further from home territory, van Gils' works present a record of one road trip along Queensland's Bruce Highway.

Multi-layered in its associations, the show's title infers more than family outings or long car journeys. Going Places encompasses the artists' childhood aspirations and subsequent recognition and career achievements. Certainly, both Amanda van Gils and Simon Collins have already received considerable attention with the inclusion of works into some of the nation's most prestigious art prizes, as well as international showings of their paintings.

AMANDA VAN GILS

Hanging side by side, Amanda van Gils' paintings recreate the optical sensations of a landscape fleetingly glimpsed through the windows of a speeding vehicle. These recent works extend a previous series, Views from a Speeding Train, which referenced experiences of Eurail travel across Italy, Spain and France on the way to the opening of her exhibition in Berlin. This time however, the landscape she traverses is thoroughly Australian. The intense greens of Queensland's forests and the rich ochres of its soils shift and blur in the space-time continuum of a single car journey along the state's Bruce Highway.

Notions of landscape and our passage through it have been formulating in van Gils' consciousness since childhood: 'Personally I feel a deep connection to landscape and as an urban dweller, I'm interested in how this might have come about - was it the endless drives up the Hume between home and my grandparents, the long drives to the annual camping spot, or was it more ingrained, something innate even?'

With views filtered by streaky windows and distorted by the speed of the vehicles in which she sat, van Gils mused about the landscapes hurtling past and life in the 21st century: 'It is landscape that continually returns to me, and me to it. I know I am not alone in this sense of connection and the universality is interesting. Of course experiencing 'the land' is quite different in our fast paced society where much of life is only glimpsed or merely sampled. And it is this contemporary sampling of landscape that is currently holding my interest in the studio.'

Speed is pandemic in modern day existence. We rush past, there seems no time to stop and take note of where we are and what we're doing, the boundaries which shape our everyday lives becoming ill-defined in all the busyness of 'having places to go and people to see'. Simulating a continuous stream of movement, van Gils' paintings eloquently confront us with this breathless pace. But underpinning Amanda van Gils' painterly representations of the flow of time and motion, is an oblique reference to fast disappearing ideals and alternative ways of being. In contemplating her works, we find ourselves curiously drawn to the narrative of the unseen person who is looking out the window at the passing scenery. The interplay between movement and stillness, inside and out, past and present, prompts a questioning of one's own sense of place and relationship to the landscape. Perhaps paradoxically, those views which flash by in periphery vision may serve to remind us of slower times, not so long ago, when

the way of life in Australia was tied to that landscape 'out there' - a land once alive and resonating in colourful bush mythology. Ultimately, Amanda van Gils' paintings reveal her delight in the poetic linking of landscape to human experience.

Born 1968, Amanda van Gils lived in Melbourne during the painting of this exhibition but has recently relocated to Hervey Bay in Queensland. She obtained a Graduate Diploma in Visual Arts at the Victorian College of the Arts, 2000 and a Bachelor of Art in Fine Arts, Monash University Melbourne, 1989. Van Gils won the Art Interviews 4th International Online Artist Competition, Berlin in 2006 and the Prize of Excellence - Real-Time Global Art Annual, Artoteque, London that same year. She has been a finalist in a great number of significant national art prizes which include: Whyalla Art Prize, South Australia 2009; Art Kudos International Exhibition 2009; Fleurieu Art Prize, South Australia 2008; John Leslie Art Prize, Gippsland Art Gallery, Victoria 2008; Tattersall's Club Landscape Art Prize, Brisbane 2008; Mosman Art Prize, Sydney 2008; Whyalla Art Prize, South Australia 2007;; Art Kudos International Juried Exhibition 2006; Wyndham City Contemporary Art Prize, Victoria 2004; The Hutchins Art Prize, Hobart 2003; City of Banyule Works on Paper Art Award, Melbourne 2003; Darebin La Trobe Acquisitive Art Prize Melbourne 2003; Wyndham City Contemporary Art Prize 2003; The Smorgon Steel Contemporary Art Prize, Melbourne 2003. Van Gils is the veteran of numerous solo shows in Melbourne, Sydney, Berlin and New York.

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