



GENIUS LOCI, SPIRIT OF PLACE

Shelley Cowper, Haya Hagit Cohen and Elmarie Steyn

20 May - 16 July 2023

FOREWORD

In *Genius Loci, Spirit of Place*, artists Shelley Cowper, Haya Hagit Cohen and Elmar Steyn explore the intricate ties between place, space, feelings and emotions, translating ideas through printmaking techniques and mixed media works.

Humans throughout time and across the globe have been fascinated by the intangible qualities of 'place' that mark out a locations unique essence. These pervasive yet often elusive characteristics extend beyond geography and ecology, reaching deep into our individual and

collective psyches. The 'spirit of place' rests as much between things as within things. As much between us as within us. Attempting to capture and communicate these qualities of the transient and invisible has been a perpetual and compelling challenge for visual



artists across millennia. With no singular story of place, each locale offers a prism of possibilities. The viewpoint of the 'local' may be markedly different to that of the 'outsider'. The layering of experience yielding ever more nuanced folds of meaning.

Printmakers Shelley Cowper, Elmar Steyn and Haya Hagit Cohen all call WA home, but have each traversed differing paths across the globe to arrive and settle. Insight garnered from their journeys has informed and inspired their practice of curiosity about the connections we make to the places we move through, leave behind and inhabit. For them, the meaning of 'place' is a complex combination of spiritual ties that lie between spaces, sensations and emotions where the heart and mind work together to register memory, longing and belonging.

Shelley Cowper draws on personal experience to explore the ephemeral worlds of water, sky and memory through the 'porthole' and 'portal' of time spent sailing circumnavigating Australian waters. Quiet times alone while on watch allowed her mind to travel between previous and future destinations. These

suspended moments in motion allowed for deeply embedded memories to be recalled.

Similarly, solitary, still and tranquil moments are the genesis of Elmar Steyn's evocative works. Small fragments of time set aside to remember the strongest of memories - memories of past homes, places of gatherings, of stories told, of love and shared existence. These poetic re-imaginings are glimpses through time and space, where spirits coalesce and linger.

While the experience of being an immigrant is common to all three artists, the feeling of being caught between places, cultures, stories and people is an abiding focus for Haya Hagit Cohen's storytelling. Connections and extended relationships between place, space, body, bodies, and the environment are examined here through the lens of identity, continuity and community.

Fiona Sinclair

Fiona's twenty-five-year professional practice (artist, curator, gallery manager etc) has been devoted to place and placemaking.

SHELLEY COWPER

Shelley Cowper migrated from New Zealand in 1986. Relocating temporarily to Scotland and graduating from Robert Gordon University in 2001 with a BFA (Hons) she has since been lecturing at North Metropolitan TAFE while concurrently pursuing her arts practice. Combining print, drawing and mixed media, her work draws on personal experience to interweave themes of site and place, while exploring the ephemeral worlds of water, sky and colour through the 'porthole/portal' of time spent sailing circumnavigating Australia.

HAYA HAGIT COHEN

After emigrating from Israel with her family in 1997, Haya Hagit Cohen completed her PhD in visual arts and cultural industries at Griffith University, Queensland. As an arts practitioner, Cohen's main focus is on the continual processes of material thinking, thinking through materials, and the relationships between body/self/environment. Her work draws from interdisciplinary areas focusing on intersections between philosophy, biology, cognitive science, anthropology and art. Cohen has exhibited internationally and across Australia, and published academic papers in interdisciplinary journals and books.

ELMARI STEYN

Elmari Steyn was born in Namibia, where her early career included fashion and product design; retail businesses in art, craft and jewellery; and the tourism sector. In Australia since 2012, Steyn's love of the arts continues as an active printmaker, focussing on copper-plate etching and jewellery making.

Steyn regards printmaking as a state of being. Stories and fragments of memories begin on the bare metal, where drawing the first lines into the ground finds a connection. Her stories are told on paper through multiple small, hand-sawn plates used as symbols and words. When printed, over-printed with chine-collé and hand-coloured, they give life to the final story.

IMAGES

Cover: Elmari Steyn, *Story Tree* (detail), 2022, multi-plate viscosity etching, 107 x 70 x 3 cm. Photograph courtesy of the artist.

1. Haya Hagit Cohen, *Now fly*, 2023, etching, watercolour, dimensions variable. Photograph courtesy of the artist.
2. Shelley Cowper, *Seagrass Meadow*, 2023, collagraph, etching woodblock, 50 x 135 cm. Photograph courtesy of the artist.

ISBN 978-0-9944097-5-1



7190 Great Eastern Highway Mundaring WA 6073

T: 08 9295 3991 | info@mundaringartscentre.com.au

Open Wed - Fri 10am - 5pm, Sat - Sun 11am - 3pm | Closed Mon, Tue & Public Holidays

MUNDARINGARTSCENTRE.COM.AU



Mundaring Arts Centre respectfully acknowledges the traditional owners and custodians of the land on which we operate, the Whadjuk people, as well as other First Australians connected with this land. We pay our respects to Elders both past and present.