

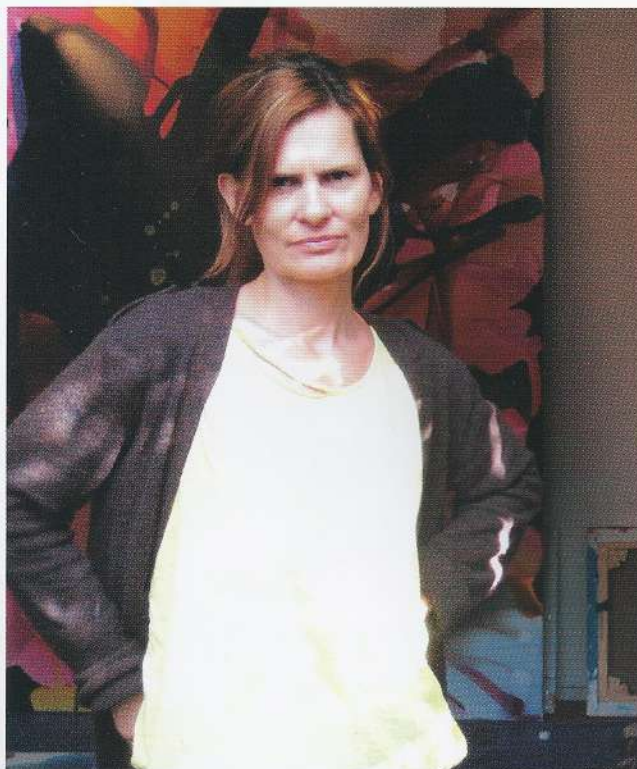
LARA MERRETT

"Although the outcome is colourist abstraction my work is very much about my relationship with the world on many levels. I think that's why the work grew and opened up even more when I had children. I had so many more emotional states to explore. The chaos at home fed the work and still does. I thrive off the sleep deprivation and adrenalin. The urgency to make work seems stronger and more important.

"The darkness is creeping into the new work. I try not to analyse it too much when I'm in the middle of it. It's this instinctual side I want to feed and have confidence in when I'm working. For these new works I'm looking at automatic drawings, spirit paintings and the Japanese concept *wabi-sabi*."

Lara Merrett will be exhibiting new work at Karen Woodbury Gallery in Melbourne from 2 to 26 June 2010.

Lara Merrett, *side by side*, 2010. Synthetic polymer paint & ink on linen, 230 x 185cm. COURTESY THE ARTIST AND KAREN WOODBURY GALLERY, MELBOURNE



02

LARAMERRETT

Story Kate Adams

Lara Merrett's paintings reawaken a romantic sensibility first associated with the lyrical abstraction emerging from 1940's post-war Paris. This current invited personal expression into the previously 'cold' ideal of geometric abstraction. Echoing this lyrical sentiment, whilst clearly rooted in the contemporary, Merrett's paintings offer a thrilling emotional experience. Her images suggest continuous unfolding and evolving rather than detachment or reduction.

Within her paintings exists elements of the sublime; they are beyond the possibilities of our physical world but are equally validated and accepted by our consciousness, owing to our immediate connection and understanding of what we feel as we look.

How do you approach your large-scale ink and acrylic paintings?

I don't start from any preliminary work—I can't work the way I do in small scale. Part of my process is letting go of control over the outcome, even though I do ultimately have the last say. I like to be surprised ... if I have an idea of what something is before I start, then it loses effect. The more contrived they are, the more they lose their magic. [The process] is about trying to recognise something that happens in its own way and responding to that.

In certain works—like *Endless Love*—there are dominant forms, shapes and colours. Are these specific elements predetermined?

Yes. During the time I was making *Endless Love*, I was tuned into that rusty, darker-edged look ... but when I'm in the middle of a

series I can't always describe what I'm doing. It's only when I look back a year later that I recognise one series is quite distinct from another.

The threads connecting works only become clear in retrospect?

Yes, otherwise it's superficial if I establish similarities at the time [of painting]. I suppose that's why I'm interested in automatic painting at the moment. We know that different parts of our brain are responsible for our different actions, and I really like to think that through automatic painting you're releasing 'something else'.

When you reflect on past works, do they reveal anything to you about what you were feeling or going through at the time you were making them?

Oh definitely. And I think that's what I need from painting—it gives me certain things when I need them at certain times. Like when I start to feel the repetitive nature of life, I'll go into the studio and feel like I want to be taken to another space altogether; be loud, be woken up ... then there are other times, like when I was painting *Endless Love*. It has lots of circles around the edge and I actually couldn't move much at that time because I was very pregnant. At that time I wanted something repetitive.

So whatever your mind and body is going through, that comes out in the work.

Yeah. At the end of the day it's got to be work that I'm engaging with. If it's not doing it for me, it's not going to for the audience.

What do you hope to inspire in the viewer?

I do work to communicate things. Even though the end result is abstract, each work has its own intimate narrative, place and time. Of course the specifics won't translate directly to the viewer, but they will have their own experience.



03



04



05

The titles of your works are perplexing. Do you use titles to anchor a meaning or generate ambiguity?

The ambiguity is there because I don't want to 'own' the work. And also it's just fun at the end of the day. 'Untitled' for me is so heavily loaded; it has a whole history attached to it. It comes down to the style of painting I do; to use 'untitled' would be to link myself with abstract expressionism.

In your 2006 exhibition *Too Soon To Tell* and in works produced since 2008, you seemed to have abandoned the last shadows of figuration that we see in your work prior to 2005 (your 2007 *Soft Rock* exhibition being an exception). What happened at this point?

It relates to what we were discussing before; I wanted to take my hand out of the work. I felt painting with a brush can become contrived ... and it is associated with so much painting that has come before it and the history of it. Not that my materials paint themselves, but I try to take myself out as much as possible.

“ I like knowing I'm about to do something that is going to make or break everything. ”

So it's a kind of liberation from having someone 'read' your brushstroke?

Exactly, it's like reading someone's handwriting. [My technique] is a way for it to happen without putting paint onto brush onto canvas—like by using a dropper for example.

Considering the spontaneity of your application of paint, do you feel you have firm control over the direction a painting will take, or can each new layer make or break the work?

If it comes too easily, there will be no depth. I feel you have to go through the struggles to get results ... I don't like working with a formula, still it is hard to reinvent all the time. I like to feel like I'm standing at the edge of a cliff, to feel nervous. I like knowing I'm about to do something that is going to make or break everything—it's only in those moments that you're risking everything you've done before it. It's important for me to know I'm taking it to a place where I might have to chuck it in the bin. ■

Born 1971 in Melbourne, Lara Merrett studied painting at Circulo de Bellas Artes, Madrid, before completing her BFA and MA (Painting) at the College of Fine Arts, UNSW, Sydney. Merrett is represented by Karen Woodbury Gallery, Melbourne, and Kaliman Gallery, Sydney.

www.kwgallery.com
www.kalimangallery.com

EXHIBITION
 Karen Woodbury Gallery at
 Melbourne Art Fair 2010
 4 Aug - 8 Aug 2010
www.artfair.com.au

- 01 **In your face**, 2010, synthetic polymer paint and ink on linen, 230 x 185cm
 - 02 **Lara Merrett**, photo: Jacqui Stockdale
 - 03 **Untitled**, 2009, synthetic polymer paint and ink on linen, 183 x 167cm
 - 04 **Water me slowly**, 2007, synthetic polymer paint and ink on linen, 183 x 167cm
 - 05 **Walk this way**, 2007, synthetic polymer paint and ink on linen, 183 x 167cm
- Courtesy the artist and Karen Woodbury Gallery, Melbourne.