

Bridges to the Inexpressible –
an introduction to the work of
GENIE
PORETZKY-LEE

To exist is to experience a world of two sides, to inhabit a duality. The polarity of gender is perhaps the most extreme evidence of doubleness in the human universe, yet myriads of opposites illustrate a split in the basic structure of reality. Functioning by analogy representational art is one mechanism we possess for commenting on this familiar duality. When abstraction enters the aesthetic equation it suggests some primary experience outside manifestation still connected with the world of duality by tenuous analogical bridges, bridges that evaporate as they disappear into the inexplicable. In philosophical language abstraction is about pure idea while representation concerns itself with the world of forms and their infinite juxtapositions. Representational art could be described as exploring the dialogue between conscious and unconscious minds, while abstract art concerns itself with superconsciousness. To use a visual metaphor: if we imagine the base of a triangle where two corner-points stand for the comparative process (which likens one thing to another in the experience of duality) then abstract art belongs at the apex, in the world of unity. One more possible way of approaching a definition of the abstract, which by its nature resists definition, is to invoke the relationship between the potter and his form of clay. Perhaps this comparison best analogises the obscure subject of abstraction since it emphasizes the way in which idea must precede form. The *concept* of the vessel is in the domain of pure ideation, while the physical reality of the pot belongs to the world of form. Our symbolic pyroglazer – in his or her wisdom – understands the work of his hands as composed essentially of the empty space *inside* the pot. And this void could be said to correspond to the pure idea outside manifestation. (The more we try to define abstraction the more it slips away from analysis.) The serene presence and enigmatic self-sufficiency of the abstract haunt our complex world.

Genie Poretsky-Lee is aware of the busy plane of analogy but her work remains orientated towards the minimal summit of the non-referential. In her canvases any analogical interpretation of image will be based on subjective response, a reflex based either on texture and colour, or both. Yet the *intention* of the artist must register if there is to be a satisfactory reaction. Perhaps a certain hue may evoke a specific hour of the night or a type of flower which in turn suggests a mood. A density may catalyse a state of mind. In the dark hypnotic canvas entitled *To the Four Directions* we discover a cosmic diagram which suggests a map for the navigation of existence. Here we negotiate blood-soaked walls, corridors of nightmare and claustrophobia twisting and turning. A sombre maze of suffering and paranoia draws us ever deeper into confined spaces. As we are enticed and propelled towards the central field of the painting, the pathways become more compacted, this narrowing possibly representing the exponential difficulties which multiply as one approaches some threshold of liberation. The fabric area of the painting reinforces this impression of a struggle. Here we discover trauma and stress sewn onto canvas as a surgeon might stitch a wound. We imagine a clotted dressing, a bandage of hurt, suddenly grasp that here may be the very material from the which the thread of Ariadne was unwound. Psychological monsters lurk in forgotten corners. Then – miraculously – a window seems to open into another reality and we glimpse a dimension of unity and transparency, a garden of simplicity. It seems that all along it has been the intention of the painter to lead us here, past barriers of impossible crisis, through an endless maze of detours and blind alleys, to this redemptive space at the heart of the cosmos. We seem to have been guided out of some tortured labyrinth of manifestation and into a region of unity, refreshing and unexpected. And talking with Poretsky-Lee about the interpretation of this canvas she speaks of ‘a rejoining internally within a flowering space’.

In the art of Genie Poretsky-Lee a relationship is examined between the nonexistent and the existent. The impact of seeing the world stripped of its details and reduced to its essentials strikes us forcefully. In the vision of this artist every material object elaborating any given work has an independent resonance which attracts the viewer towards a symbolism of essence. (Even if we do not subscribe to the idea, we should bear in mind that representational art has been proscribed in various cultures, banned because it distracts from the contemplation of the abstract truth. And some cultures, as the Tibetan, for instance, have gone so far as to completely prohibit certain artifacts such as the wheel and the mirror.) As we view these paintings, we are invited to step onto a connective platform, a bridge, which takes us towards a realm of Taoist emptiness. Here, a glass is not made of glass. A cup is not constructed in ceramic or clay. Instead, the ‘cupness’ of the object is a function of the space inside the glass, taken for granted. Here, a house is not made of brick-and-mortar walls but arranged around a void space which gradually – surrealistically – becomes a room. In the work of Genie Poretsky-Lee we approach a zone without qualities or definitions – which only limit perception of the absolute – discover suggestions which stimulate a revelation of possibilities. Here we enter a confrontation with significance where lateral and vertical planes – journeys of ascent and descent, journeys into proliferation and multiplicity – can be compared to the mountain-face or ocean-trench faced by the explorer, with the essential difference that in this art-form we penetrate abysses and heights of the invisible.

Amidst enormous tensions brought to bear on the human condition, the artist – the ‘maker’ in Poretsky-Lee’s preferred term – seeks to transform incarnate experience with all its sensate details and limitations. What is unusual here is that the maker is not seeking to impose strictures of orthodox perception. The process conforms to the way of those who seek to transform themselves before expecting to see the transformation of the world. (Rimbaud says: ‘I is another’ before he speaks of ‘Christmas on Earth’ or of the reinvention of love.) Importantly there is nothing formulaic about this process. We are in the realm of an art which speaks for itself, which is so assured and achieved that it does not need to dictate or presuppose or lay down laws. This art is open-minded and non-doctrinaire. We witness a working practice which is neither affiliated nor obligated. Poretsky-Lee says of her quest for authentic vision that she feels closer to the Australian aborigines than to any contemporary art movement. Her work could be described as an attempt to be true to the self through an examination of nature, where nature is understood as a universal force-field permeated by the thought-form of Self.

As a telling example of the interplay between vertical and horizontal planes just referred to, the painting *Jacob’s Ladder* offers a fascinating glimpse of another order of reality. Here we find numerous smudged laterals in a brown-earth hue superimposed on a dark green ground, suggesting perhaps the red clay of the Sumerian Adamu. Pursuing this interpretation we see that these deep-red terrestrial ‘bloodlines’ which stretch out across horizons of life are subverted and transformed. Something happens to these busy laterals. Smudgings and light-spots interrupt their frenetic but regimented identities. Stacked upon one another like so many uniform

experiences of life, suddenly we realize that there is a vertical process at work here. It is as if a rain of light is falling on ladders of existence, and we immediately see the revelation of the perpendicular. (In fact the smudging of the 'rungs' of *Jacob's Ladder* reveals the underlayer, the canvas itself, surely a possible metaphor for the breakthrough to superconsciousness.) Eckhart Tolle, in 'A New Earth' writes 'Time is the horizontal dimension of life, the surface layer of reality. Then there is the vertical dimension of depth, accessible to you only through the portal of the present moment.' And these words could be a commentary on Poretsky-Lee's mysterious and beautiful canvas.

In the vibrational field of any reality intention is paramount. (We are assured by quantum science that the observer alters the conditions of the observed.) So we arrive at the understanding that the intention behind this work is to indicate a profound shift of perspective. At an apocalyptic juncture in human history, this art seeks to move beyond representation of human likeness or landscape. Instead we have arrived at a juncture where the maker's state of mind at the moment of operation is the crucial determining factor. This is an art preoccupied with the observation of parallel realities. So the consciousness of 'the maker' is turned back on itself. Such a process involves collating information derived from inner observation so that higher frequencies of matter are translated into slower spectra where they can become visible as 'made' objects, paintings.

It has been suggested by Scully, Salcedo and others that a main function of abstract art might be to force us to question easy assumptions about a 'reality' anything but real. Thus the 'difficult' nature of abstract art corresponds to our everyday problem in defining what is actual, since we understand we do not see the nature of the world in any absolute sense. Contemporary science insists on a void at the heart of everything we regard as solid and substantial. The argument might be made (invoking the political contexts of Salcedo) that just as we shun the strangeness of the metaphysical 'other' so we create division in society between the insiders and the outsiders, the 'haves' and the 'have-nots.' Abstraction is concerned with breaking down all such definitions. The bravery of the abstract project implies a society without the concept of xenophobia.

Genie Poretsky-Lee describes her aim as sharing a 'walkabout', which in Aborigine terms means an occult journey of discovery. The walkabout links with the idea of pilgrimage as interrupting mechanism which shatters the complacency of the familiar, which breaks habitual myopia and opens us to the wonder of the unexpected and spontaneous. 'I see myself unwinding a skein of attractions through form and materials, weaving a fabric of possibilities until there comes a recognition in each instance of a unique vista.'

We are on the eve of a complete transformation of our reference methods, our architecture of analogy. Materialism has dominated the procedures of art. As many institutions and securities crumble the formula that was relevant to the dynamics of representation is going to change. There now exists an opportunity for a rebalancing or adjustment at the heart of perception. We stand at a brink from which a significant leap may be taken. We walk a bridge which vanishes into the ineffable.

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