



conversations with my aunt
veronica cay | oct 16-30, 2021



cover: riding Marino's pony to Banbury Cross
oil and charcoal on polycotton canvas 120cm x 102cm

above: finding comfort
oil and charcoal on polycotton canvas 120cm x 102cm

all images courtesy of Christine Hall @my_photomotion



above: *Ucello's hat*
oil and charcoal on polycotton canvas 120cm x 102cm



above: the sense memory was a powerful reminder
oil and charcoal on poly cotton canvas
102cm x 120cm



above: somethings are a complete mystery (livedrawing)
mixed media on snowden 300 gsm cartridge paper
100cm x 70cm



above: standing close standing tall
mixed media on snowden 300 gsm cartridge paper 100cm x 70 cm

conversations with my aunt

A conversation may be defined as an exchange of sentiments, observations and ideas. Buderim-based Veronica Cay's new body of works reflects a ruminative dialogue with her materials and subject depiction, as well as certain historical art pieces. The drawings, canvases and ceramic figures portray the imaginary conversations that she'd loved to have shared with an eccentric aunt but never had the opportunity. The aunt had led quite an extraordinary life. In 1936, at the age of 15, she left a very conservative family in Toowoomba to attend Sydney's National Art School. Subsequently becoming a Quaker, she taught art in Tasmania for several years before relocating to Yorkshire, England, where she created paintings and was involved in numerous craftwork activities.

'The characters that populate my work all commence during weekly life drawing sessions,' Cay divulges. 'Life drawing is a very physical process for me, it is where I seek connections, test my resilience and acknowledge my own frailties.' 'I am not particularly interested in an academic transcription,' she continues. 'I employ a range of tools to help evoke a response or excite the imagination. In the last six months I have switched to almost exclusively using a brush attached to a metre-long stick that is dipped into acrylic paint. It definitely ensures a more expressive, less controlled outcome.'

Cay typically draws multiple poses onto a sheet of Snowdon cartridge paper, continuously layering and reworking the surface. 'The resultant marks are endowed with a mutable and powerful presence that belies their passive beginnings,' she explains. The works *my goose to your gander* and *standing close standing tall* are both prime examples of this gestural approach. Amid dense markings, dual figures vie for recognition. The one drawing in the exhibition that was left at its initial stage is *sometimes things are a complete mystery*. 'Rare for me to step back and let a piece breathe of its own accord,' she quips.

'Conversations that begin in the life drawing studio might trigger associations with other artists' works,' Cay furthers. Having a strong background in art history, Early Renaissance works hold a special interest and in particular, those of the 14th century Florentine painter, Paolo Uccello. His enormous *The Battle of San Romano* has been loosely referenced in her canvas, *Uccello's hat*. Rather than the realism of Uccello's battle scene, Cay's abstracted melange of combatants is enmeshed within swathes of vibrant colours. The turban-like headdress worn by the victor is the only identifiable semblance.

Akin in expressive depiction but with a somewhat more subdued palette is *unplanned consequences and a stroll along La Grande Jatte*. Cay recounts that it was a canvas that had been scrubbed and reworked many times. Close to despair, she'd picked up a white oil stick and attacked.



above: unplanned consequences and a stroll along La Grande Jatte
mixed media collage 120cm x150cm

Those radiant white slashings re-energised the work. 'Then things fell into place more easily,' she informs. 'It instantly reminded me of *Seurat's A Sunday on La Grande Jatte*. Whereas Seurat's pointillist painting is a frozen instance in time, my figures juggle for space – body parts appearing and disappearing, merging.' Cay admits that these conversations with another artist's work are often evident only to her.

Another inspirational artist for Cay is the Italian, mid 20th century sculptor, Marino Merini. Her work, *riding Marino's pony to Banbury Cross* features a horse that is similar in shape to those of Merini's stylised oeuvre. With a nod to the old Banbury Cross nursery rhyme, she describes her cropped-headed creature as 'the perfect vehicle for the two lost souls mounted upon it to find their way across the picture plane'.

Moments of unexpected déjà vu are evinced in the *sense – memory was a powerful reminder* painting. Here something has sparked the memory of a past experience that cannot quite be placed. Seated on a chair, the figure gazes out vacantly, her legs in constant motion as she tries to recall. The orange haze of unknowing dribbles onto the tiled floor. A flash of its colour appears amid the moving legs, unifying the composition. The checkerboard floor tacitly acknowledges those painted by Piero della Francesca who was instrumental in developing perspective techniques during the 15th century. Cay's floor however, is deliberately atilt in deference to the scenario's conundrum.

'The *finding comfort* canvas really belongs to my bed series,' Cay tells. 'Another piece from that series is a finalist in this year's Clayton Utz Award.' As the painting's title suggests, the bed is a place of refuge. For children, bedtime ideally involves storytelling and quiet conversations. To each of us the bedroom beckons an escape from the concerns of the everyday world. The finding comfort work illustrates three figures bearing indicative facial expressions. Against the multi-patterned décor, their schematic forms suggest comforting retreat is underway. Legs have morphed into those of a swift animal keen to carry them off on dreamland travels.

Although Cay's pictorial conversations convey personal musings, she hopes that they will also invite an interactive communication with the viewer. Oblique symbolism and figures occupying indeterminate spaces enable the works to be imbued with one's own life experiences.

JACQUELINE HOUGHTON



above: how to peel a mandarine
mixed media collage on linen - diptych 120cm x 204cm



above: keeping the lesson book open
acrylic and charcoal on linen - diptych 120cm x 204cm



detail: my goose to your gander

instagram @ronniecay
web <http://veronicacay.com>
email ronniecay@me.com

antheapolson | a | r | t