

JELLE VAN DEN BERG & RICHARD HOOK
FLUID MECHANICS

FOREWORD

The Illawarra region is where the dramatic eastern edge of the Australian continent plunges from the escarpment to the swamps and through the various hinterland environments to the beaches. This jagged sandstone curtain is at the same time a protective shield that focuses, perhaps almost forces our attention out into the vastness of the ocean.

Jelle van den Berg and Richard Hook are Illawarra based artists who have chosen the sea as the starting point for a series of abstract meditations about the spaces, energies and mystery of that most powerful force in nature. Here in the exhibition we are presented with an array of essences that relate to corporeal experiences to memory, and to poetry. The marks, surfaces and colours of Van den Berg and Hook's paintings allow audiences to take a journey into and through the other barrier, the other membrane, still largely unknown but always permeable.

Wollongong City Gallery is proud to present "Fluid Mechanics".

Craig Judd

Gallery Director/CEO

FLUID MECHANICS

My titles are always Pacific, partly because it makes me feel calm. Recently, however, I have called the paintings Five Islands after my experience of looking at the islands off the coast at Port Kembla and reflecting on their uncanny position. Five Islands was referred to as the area between what is presently called Wollongong and Berkeley.

A local phenomenon and the culmination of thoughts around it can become a concept for something bigger. The paintings are based on the proximity of the natural environment and the industrial surroundings. The islands are interesting as they are inaccessible to but a few. Similarly to the islands, in the earlier works I pondered the impossibility of getting to the horizon. You can move closer but never reach it. The paintings are mostly about the space between the painter, the horizon and the islands.

People talk about the escarpment but I prefer to look at the islands; they have their own mystique. On a clear day you can see them from a long way off and on cloudy days you can hardly make them out. Sometimes you just see the white foam of the waves breaking on them. They are a constant reassuring presence.

Scribes record bird populations and eggs. In a funny sort of way the painter is a scribe, a note taker and observer of things over a long period of time to work out the underlying patterns, to see what goes on below the surface. Turmoil and paradox keep me painting. The storms are on the ocean.

Jelle van den Berg 2008



(top) Jelle van den Berg, *Pacific (Headlands)*, 2004, oil on canvas, 40 x 55cm
(bottom) Jelle van den Berg, *Five Islands*, 2005, oil on canvas, 50 x 65cm



Jelle van den Berg, *Pacific (2)*, 2005, oil on canvas, 40 x 30cm



Jelle van den Berg, *Pacific (5)*, 2005, oil on canvas, 40 x 30cm



Jelle van den Berg, *Pacific*, 2004, oil on board, 42 x 32cm



Jelle van den Berg, *Pacific*, 2004, oil on canvas, 25.5 x 30.5cm

Lighter than air...the bones of a wing...aerial architecture...skeletons of air and water...fissures in the rock...'patterns that connect'...wing, tower, aerial, cantilever, branch, bough, stem, arm, spine...

Looking through the surface of a coastal landscape to other partly veiled landscapes of analogous structures, forms and processes; trying to discern the relation of our sense of order to the complex matrix of wild nature.

My paintings take the forms of an industrial coast and condense them into webs of energy and growth, elaborated as living systems that layer and merge the organic and architectural into integrated structures: ecologies of a sort. They might be skeletal, vascular, engineering or foliate: the colours are earth, water, branch and blood. Below the surface, blood circulates, bones support and bend, water ebbs and flows, rock fractures and branches push.

The networks in my paintings are linear, a play of gesture and grid, sometimes in opposition, but more often fused or condensed into a new form, suggesting the possibility of a harmonious, productive relation between nature and culture, particularly the more intrusive forms of architecture and engineering. From the process of drawing, layering and building colour forms, a complex, shifting space appears around a linear armature that fuses rock seams, branches or waves with girders, beams and trusses. A kind of liquid architecture emerges in which I try to balance rigidity with flow so that the whole thing looks as though it was built, but also that it might have grown by itself. The paintings speak of elements that are always connected within a natural system and, while individual elements may have emphatic self-presence, they are also part of the larger system of the painting so that the paintings themselves propose an aesthetic based on processes in the natural world.

Mythically, to fathom the sea's depths is to move inside ourselves. In that respect we're all deep-sea divers or submariners, looking for the best fit with a natural world that we're part of yet separate and separated from. I see my work as performing a connection with nature through the gestures and rhythmic work of painting and drawing. I would like people to go with that.

Richard Hook 2008







Richard Hook, *Tidal Pool II* 2008, acrylic on canvas, 164 x 300cm

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