

WASH, TRACES OF OTHERNESS-The legacy of watercolour

This exhibition arose through a dialogue between two curators about the mutually observed misplaced significance and attributions surrounding the use of watercolour. Co-curator of **WASH**, Jo Diball noted that the majority of references to water colour as a medium describe it as 'delicate, subtle and feminine'. She also noted that historically, women had commonly practised watercolour. However, when she began to compile a list of noted watercolourists, the vast majority were men.

In 2010 Diball approached a number of women artists inviting them to respond to her findings by making a single work in watercolour for an exhibition. **Other MsConceptions** restricted the artists in both medium and format, resulting in an extraordinary diversity of thematic approaches. A conversation had begun about further investigation into the depth and potential in exploring the contemporary and historical misconceptions tainting the notion of watercolour.

Cassandra Lehman-Schultz similarly observed the oversights in the introduction of watercolour into indigenous arts practice, most notably through the work of Albert Namitjira, from Hermannsburg.

History surrounding the Namitjira legend often overlooks the women artists who travelled to the Lutheran mission at Hermannsburg in the 1930's, bringing watercolour and other western art practises with them. Shortly after seeing the works of Violet Teague, a notable and accomplished artist, Namitjira requested a set of watercolour paints. This implies that he may well have experimented with the medium long before the arrival of his legendary teacher, Rex Batterbee.

Batterbee is attributed as having been influenced by Heidelberg artist, Walter Withers. Only a few references note that he actually received his formal instruction in painting from a women, who, if ever mentioned, is only referred to as 'Batterbee's sister'.

Florinda Batterbee, Rex's sister, ran an art school after herself studying under Walter Withers. She passed her skills on to her brother when he returned injured from the war. Prior to his injury, Batterbee's father saw painting as an unsuitable profession for a man. Oils irritated the injury and so watercolour, by default, was the medium in which Florinda instructed her invalid brother.

Namitjira rose to fame as the first Indigenous artist to bridge and master non-Indigenous art practices. However, he became the target of discrimination and harsh criticism. Without a depth of understanding that his watercolours actually illustrated his traditional song lines and country, Namatjira's work was vastly under rated and misunderstood. His paintings were compared to the superficial observational works made by tourists and eventually sank into the realm of kitsch and the souvenir.

The descendants of Namatjira and others who were exposed to the intense and beautiful qualities unique to watercolour continue to live and practise art in the region today. The woman at Hermannsburg paint their stories, song lines and lives on the vessels they make for a globally appreciative audience. Their works celebrate the ground broken by Namatjira.

Similarly, the group of contemporary urban artists in **WASH**, women from Indigenous and non indigenous backgrounds, trace the influence of otherness and the overlooked, exploring themes of the non sacred, the mundane and the profound in celebration of the efforts of those who came before.