



***about a river***

Jennifer Stuerzl



*River intervals: the air about me 1* 2020, Synthetic polymer paint on Arches paper, 114 × 84 cm



*River intervals: between sky and earth* 2020, Synthetic polymer paint on board, 60 × 80 cm

## ***river being within***

Paper is a bed. Like a river bed. Wood pulped, soaked and pressed into sheets, the mat of fibres like sedimentary layers forming new ground. The forest extracted and laid down. Paint poured across its surface is absorbed and resisted and the dry trails of pigments are memories of the artist's efforts – a record of the invisible passage between hand and eye, between idea and enunciation, of a river being within. Gathering from a catchment, finding a course, and running to an oceanic end.

Stuerzl's sequence of abstract paintings on paper storyboard a river portrait. *River intervals* pulls you in and the sequence pulls you along. Each work offers a doorway into entangled niches of habitat, while the sequence connects, renews, recycles and builds the bigger picture. Abiding river – life giver. Sinking into the paintings of black and brown, like tree roots along a river bank, like a platypus nuzzling its way into its burrow between those slimy roots, you emerge covered in a film of mud, a second skin of becoming to see feelingly through the river's blind eyes.

Paper is a skin. A peeled off surface. Like a river's surface – moving with currents or tidal flows, elastic light bouncing and dancing in all directions. The river is an impenetrable mirror reflecting all around, carrying all on its back. Floating on the paintings of white and pink, ribbons of swirling pigment dip and dive like the sky-borne journeys of birds, suspended between earth and sky. Stuerzl's artmaking is a push and pull, folding material inquiry into felt revelation. Paintings on board and canvas distil differently in textural brushwork, like a river's variations across seasons and landforms. River and country felt together.

Rivers are gifted between sky and earth, the living memories of rain, the surge of underground springs. Outpourings - cry us a river! They reveal the lie of the land – force and form coursing its way in life lines. Like our own life journeys. Run-off from cleared land, industrial emissions, litter and detritus all find their way into these great carriers. The artist thinks through the conditions of making, and these works are the haptic effects of Stuerzl's mindful presence, inflicted carriages of consciousness. What is it to be a river? So much to bear.

Rivers are beings. And being is a river – the continuum of existence. They slither and slide on their bellies until met by an even greater body of water. The salty oceans accept and resist, in and out, forever and always. Our own river beings will also one day surrender to that oceanic ending which we may fear as nothingness and total absence but which is surely a greater presence. Stuerzl's artmaking is a surrender – an invitation to scramble down that steep bank through the long grasses, praying the snakes are well away, throw off our shoes and slide into thick waters where we cannot see the bottom, swim out against the current, hang off a log and feel ourselves inseparable from the river that sustains us.

*Beth Jackson*  
curator, arts writer



*River intervals: inflow* 2020, Synthetic polymer paint on Arches paper, 114 × 84 cm

Front image (detail): *River intervals: movements* 2020, Synthetic polymer paint & mixed media on paper, 150 × 100 cm

Exhibition dates  
**13 October – 24 October 2020**

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