

SYBIL CURTIS



Cylinders

CYLINDERS

When travelling through the flat, monotonous country of inland Australia, agricultural and mining structures are often visible for a considerable distance, rising like giant sculptures out of a flat plain: three-dimensional forms intersecting with horizontal lines. One of the forms encountered repeatedly are cylinders, most conspicuously as tanks or drums for water and fuel. In rural areas, silos are cylindrical icons. Almost all industrial processing plants, including power stations, have chimneys that tower above the landscape. Pipes are everywhere and even wire is a long thin cylinder.

Although the paintings appear realistic, they are an imaginative construct, often combining different elements from different sites to make a coherent and satisfying artwork. It does not matter that the paintings are not accurate representations of an actual place or time, as most sites no longer exist.

The most recent paintings are based on the remains of the Hampden Smelter at Kuridala near Cloncurry (1911-1920). Mt Isa Mines purchased the operation in 1924 and relocated it to Mt Isa. Kuridala once had a thriving town of over 2 000 inhabitants. Now all that remains is a graveyard and a gigantic decaying smelter which is slowly being reclaimed by the scrub.

Another failed enterprise set in the hot, dry, unforgiving environment of Central Australia is the original Ghan Railway line connecting Adelaide to Alice Springs. It started in 1878 and part of the line ran alongside Kati Thanda/Lake Eyre. Its earliest locomotives were steam-powered and required fresh water. The ruins of water tanks, desalination towers and railway stations mark the old route.

I have returned again and again to coal-fires power stations, the most recent being the now closed one at Glebe in Sydney. As with the Power House in Brisbane on which I based an exhibition, it will be repurposed as an arts centre. Coal is a magical material but in the light of the damage caused by its profligate burning I have abandoned it as a source of inspiration. The very last coal painting was *Dots and dashes* based on the washing plant at Peak Downs in 2012.

One of the remote and inhospitable places to which I am attracted is the Antarctic. In the absence of moisture, the atmosphere is crystal clear and it is difficult to judge scale and distance as everything becomes flattened. To capture the penetrating cold I needed to replace my usual pallet of iron oxides, reds and oranges with cool blues and greens. Even in the Antarctic there are many different forms of cylinders.

Sybil Curtis 2023



Furnace 2022, 125 × 125 cm



Binned 2023, 35 × 35 cm



Funneled 2023, 35 × 35 cm



Iron to Iron Oxide 2023, 35 × 35 cm



On Fire 2023, 35 × 35 cm



Kurdimurka, Kati Thanda 2019, 125 × 125 cm



By Twos 2023, 100 × 150 cm



Dots and dashes 2012, 109.5 × 154.5 cm



Keep out 2020, 100 × 100 cm



Bedford Truck 2020, 80 × 100 cm



Aurora Australis at Sea 2018, 150 × 48 cm



Wind and Ice 2019, 150 × 48 cm



What are They Storing? 2018, 90 × 120 cm



Tanks and Red Dirt 2017, 35 × 35 cm

front cover image: *All that Remains* 2022, 125 × 125 cm

A selection of oil on linen artworks from Sybil Curtis's exhibition, 'Cylinders'

3 October – 21 October 2023

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Woolloongabba Art Gallery (Gallery 2)

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