

The Long Wait for the Angel

by Chloé Wolifson

Jennifer Goodman's studio is an oasis. Tucked away in the garden behind her house in a leafy street of Melbourne, the white walls and floor provide an ideal neutral space for the artist to work on the complex orchestrations of colour that occupy her paintings. The play of light through the window shutters and the foliage outside echoes the layered translucency of Goodman's works, which dot the walls like lush multifaceted jewels.

It's a fitting environment considering the nature of Goodman's practice. While her works speak to the legacy of abstraction, they are singular in their vision. Goodman takes an intuitive approach to painting, and her formal compositions have evolved over the years and exhibitions, from strictly gridded, to layered organic shapes, to irregular cut-out forms scattered dynamically across the canvas.

These evolutions occur within and across bodies of work, as the artist uncovers and draws out relationships between paintings. Whether choosing an element of one composition to make up another, using the positive and negative areas of sliced paper shapes in tandem, pairing two works through evocative titles, or reinterpreting a translucently layered structure into one of gridded opacity, the makeup of a final exhibition is constructed of as many complex layers as Goodman's individual paintings themselves.

While the finished works appear effortlessly harmonious, they are the result of weeks of struggle as Goodman, guided by a highly developed yet intuitive understanding of colour theory, mixes paints until the tone matches that in her mind's eye. These individual shades take their place alongside as many as 80 others in a single painting. So specific are these recipes that the artist keeps each in a ceramic bowl, protected with a skin of plastic wrap, on a series of trollies in the studio. Each trolley, stacked neatly full with these uniform bowls, represents the palette of a single painting – serving as three-dimensional colour charts for Goodman to make reference to as she develops one painting off the back of another.

Goodman says that "Painting for me is an intense and methodical process. Creativity can't be summoned," and the orderliness of her studio reflects the artist's control of, and dedication to, the creative process. The title of the exhibition *The Long Wait for the Angel* is a line from the Sylvia Plath poem *Black Rook in Rainy Weather*, in which the poet seeks patience through the mundanity of life as she waits for inspiration to strike. This, along with Vincent Van Gogh's musing that "it requires a certain dose of inspiration, a ray from on high which doesn't belong to us, to do beautiful things," speaks to this paradox of artistic practice – a daily slog punctuated by the occasional, long-sought moment of resolution.

The harmonious surfaces of Goodman's paintings mask a journey that is rarely smooth. The artist almost never discards a painting that is not working – she just keeps going until it does. The apparent ease with which these organic shapes sinuously intersect with perfect tonal balance is a miracle that is only possible through un-miraculous quotidian work. Goodman refers to this process as 'silent transformation', suggesting that if the viewer gives time to the work, echoing the dedication of the artist, it will begin to unmask itself. But while we have the pleasure in revelling in these harmonious compositions from the outset, it is Goodman's long wait for her angel that has made that possible.