Silencing the Chaos. Sheila Whittam.

In recent years my art practice has taken me on a journey using materials that broadened my ideas about art making, and then led me to a deeper understanding of formal elements like shape, colour, line, direction, and texture. The work that I had been producing – hot plate encaustic, monotypes and other mixed media materials had moved me towards abstraction which opened up the possibility of expanding my perception.

The crux of this series of work, called Silencing the Chaos, is not simply the application of paint, but rather is the representation and extension of ideas brought about by the opportunities that the material itself allows.

These non-objective abstractions do not convey direct visual responses to nature or the built environment. They contain no hidden symbolism or political content, it is by layering of mixed media materials which reveals the merging of the conceptual with the formative. Surfaces undone, reworked and remade – juxtaposition and realignments of the varied materials are all pivotal to my practice. In this process imperfections and [un]intentional irregularities evolve that are fundamental to my aesthetic and compositional considerations, which impacted me, and the viewer, at a visceral level.

Simultaneously to my work in this new direction, our world dramatically slid into a time that startled us by its intensity. Chaos was real in the most basic way and, in my studio, I also engaged with turmoil by allowing an impulsive and unruly play stage to take place - a network of undercurrents and tangled webs of the unknown. However, disorder tends towards order and with flourish I worked towards a resolution.

In this unfolding arena, I found it essential to partially cover the unruly with layer upon layer of ordered thinking. In my research I read Richard Diebenkorn’s ideas about non - objective abstraction and how to follow the process: ‘Do search, but in order to find other than what is searched for.’ ‘Don’t discover a subject – of any kind, take it from your mind’ and, ‘Tolerate chaos.’[[1]](#endnote-1)

The process uses recurring forms and themes in unexpected new directions of expression where the representation of an 'idea' about painting evolves by the fortuity that the material itself represents.

The work has taken me into a deep-seated knowing about working without making references – I paint and the process takes me into chaos – I then work to silence it.

1. Richard Diebenkorn.

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