

SHIFTING ELEMENTS

Andrew Cherniavsky and Mark Johnston have known each other since late 2001, when they first met. Andrew wrote the introduction to the catalogue that accompanied the exhibition *New Aspects of Drawing* held at the Ingo Fincke Gallery, in 2004. Here he talks to Mark about his latest exhibition.

AC Looking at your painting, I see changes in tonal quality, new moods. It is as if the nature of your painting is shifting.

MJ I think what you're seeing is me trying to find the 'perfect' balance between my more broken brushstrokes and the accumulation of what are in essence 'dissolving' tones. Of course, what I'm seeking is impossible. There are only possibilities.

AC I remember describing your more 'energetic' brushstrokes and marks as 'cris de coeur'. To me that's still the case, but now I sense the inherent energy is more dissipated, creating a tension which is more subtle. How do you react to what I'm saying?

MJ My work is a two-pronged process. The more vigorous gestures you talk about stem from the immediacy of water colour or oil sketches, usually painted outdoors, but also in the studio. On the other hand, the more delicate glazes which underpin much of my work take a lot of time to build up and technique; this is entirely studio based.

The secret is achieving a balance between the two, it takes years of practice. It evolves. It's instinctive.

AC The overall effect, I feel, is to give much of your work an almost ethereal quality.

I've spent a fair amount of time in your studio, talking and looking, and can see how one painting informs another.

MJ They do. This is why I need to hold on to certain pieces which encapsulate where I am, and where I'm going. I can only let work go when I'm ready.

AC Changing tack, which artists' work has been influencing you recently?

MJ I would say De Kooning and Titian.

AC Presumably De Kooning provides the freshness of mark-making, and stimulates the anarchic in you, whereas the masterly Titian relates more to your layering of paint and maybe acts as an anchor. I know that you've been spending quite a lot of time gazing at his paintings in the National Gallery lately. You talk about Titian a lot.

MJ Yes. The National Gallery's 'Flight into Egypt' exhibition has ended; I was studying Titian's *Rest on the Flight to Egypt* which normally lives in Longleat and also the *Holy Family in a Landscape*, which some attribute to Giorgione and call the *Adoration of the Christ Child*. I will have to visit the Hermitage to see this painting again!

I think De Kooning and Titian complement each other.

AC What matters is, in your hands, they somehow work together and enrich your work.

I've no idea where your work will go from here. I find that notion exciting!