



Woven Images

Lorraine Rastorfer's *Wanderlust*

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You could be forgiven for pigeonholing Lorraine Rastorfer's paintings into a wave of New Zealand sensibility—the gestural combing of Judy Millar, the undulating hills of a landscape once envisaged by Colin McCahon, the sculptural stasis created by the mesh-like formations of Neil Miller. Art has a habit of sparking associations; and the 13 paintings included in the *Wanderlust* exhibition at Orexart are ripe with possible connections because of their innate ambiguity. They have a familiar quality that, when viewed as a collective, makes them seem pretty similar at a glance, still their presence begs a sense of intrigue that is at once melancholic and jaunty.

Dispensing altogether with representational figuration, Rastorfer covers her canvases with energetically modulated linear systems of pigment, forming iridescent patterns and labyrinthine layers. Being a full-time abstract painter is a difficult feat to achieve within New Zealand's relatively small art market, embracing a genre that to some was considered 'dead' 40 years ago,¹ yet Rastorfer has recently been able to give up her post as a tertiary lecturer at Whitireia Polytechnic to do just that. She is confident in her approach to painting, and it is clear from the breadth of this exhibition that she is utterly dedicated to exploring the possibilities of the

'combing' technique that she has developed over the past ten years.

Wanderlust is an aptly titled retrospective that spans nine years of Rastorfer's practice. On entry into the space at Orexart it seems as if the exhibition setting was made for this group of paintings—the clouds on the concrete floor tie in beautifully with the mesh-like waves in the works. The title conveys a desire to explore, and if you walk in looking for an adventure then you might well be able to find one. Many of the paintings are named in German, a hark back to the artist's first language (Rastorfer was born in Austria). Titles such as *Salzberg* and *Mosque* evoke a sense of place. There is no central focus to the works, rather Rastorfer builds a region of painterly dexterity that, although gestural in its execution, is so featherweight and precise that it seems almost as if the pieces have been finished by a machine.

Despite the abstract nature of the paintings there is an evocation of landscape, reinforced by her titles. The azure licks and swirls in *Pursuit* appear to conjure movement through water or a fantastical sky—the trail left behind from a hunt rather than the chase itself. Vertical drips running down the surface of *The Fates I* and *III* appear like representations of magnificent waterfalls or stalactite-stricken caves. Much of the written commentary on Rastorfer's art also describes her paintings as being depictions of