

Stefan Gevers – Natural Order

by D.J. Huppatz

Natural Order, Stefan Gevers' recent series of paintings and sculptures, originated in a road trip to northern Victoria and the resulting paintings reflect particular details of the Australian landscape. However, these are not the picturesque landscapes of tourism advertisements – there are no images of conventionally "beautiful" sights, instead Gevers focuses on overlooked details in the landscape, magnifying evidence of human intervention and presence. In an Australian landscape tradition, these canvases are perhaps related more to the melancholy of Russell Drysdale's abandoned small towns than the mythological bush scenes of Tom Roberts or Arthur Streeton.

There seems an overwhelming feeling of abandonment in the paintings – a stranded car, an old wooden bridge, a crumbling watertank – these might serve as monuments to an abandoned rural past. If we note the absence of people and animals in these images, we are reminded of the flight from farms to the cities, the current drought and water crises along the Murray. As such, a key theme of Gevers' paintings is a reflection on temporality: the temporal nature of our interaction with nature. These functional, man-made artefacts – the car, the caravan, the bridge, the water tank – once essential elements of the infrastructure of rural life, have now become remainders. The excess leftovers are monuments to an age now passed, the remains after humans have taken what they wanted and then left.

While there is a sense of lingering melancholy in these images, their graphic nature reflects a particular artistic practice. The landscape has been abstracted by Gevers, rendered in flat solid blocks in a limited and muted range of colours. The landscape has been stripped back to bare essentials in a process of abstraction in Gevers' reductive aesthetic which is close to screen-printing or contemporary stencil art.

Gevers continues this process of abstraction with the sculptures in which abandoned tree branches are carved into aesthetic objects. Here, the natural world is shaped into abstract form, although it's worth emphasizing that the branches themselves were abandoned by nature – they are an excess leftover just as much as the abandoned car, bridge or water tank.

Finally, the sculptures return us to the paintings with a sense that the divide between nature and culture is not as clear as it first appears. On the one hand, abandoned natural branches have been sculpted into culture, and on the other, hand man-made cultural artefacts (such as the car, caravan, bridge and water tank) are captured in the process of being reclaimed by nature. The natural process of decay taking place in the paintings is short-circuited by the sculpted branches. We ultimately return to the temporal interaction between the products we make and their eventual fate and this seems an appropriate ecological reflection to finish with.

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