

Evan Woodruffe in the Studio, July 2017



Evan Woodruffe at Akepiro Street Studios. IMG X Alex Plumb.

Accessing the creative mind of an artist such as Evan Woodruffe starts with the hand and the eye, continues with a focus on surface, scale and material then develops into the kind of visual thinking which balances a sort of formal logic with intuitive, impulsive mark making actions unfolding in time. “A balance of chaos and order,” says the artist. “I try to feel what my hand wants to do with the brush and materials, let my hand interact with the surface, enact movements it has done a million times – I know I can rely on it.”

Born in 1965, Woodruffe grew up in a creative family and developed a strong love of music and live performance as a teenager before moving several years later into the visual arts, holding his first solo exhibition in 2003. Completing a 2014 MFA (1st Class Honours) at Elam School of Fine Arts, at the University of Auckland, Woodruffe sought new directions for his work, triggering a significant move from figuration to abstraction as seen in his works exhibited with PAULNACHE at Spring 1883 and the Auckland Art Fair in 2016. His 2015 project, *Dodge*, as part of *Rear Window*, at Dunedin Public Art Gallery, saw him significantly increase the scale of his work across a sequence of large glass panels.

Working in his Auckland studio in the lead up to the 2017 Sydney Contemporary Art Fair, surrounded by art materials from acrylic inks, drawers full of magnificent brushes, paints and paint-filled markers, fabric offcuts and even a bag of earth waiting to be mixed into a liquid, Woodruffe is again reflecting on scale. New works such as the nine panelled *April-June 2017*, and the four panelled work *15th-18th November 2016* are to be exhibited at Sydney Contemporary 2017. Both these and several smaller works will be installed together as a 300cm x 500cm vista loosely based on the Fibonacci grid.

The multi-panelled works are opening up new possibilities – rich in dynamic visual pathways built up with collage and accumulating marks to become a visual and distinctly musical amalgamation of rhythms, patterns, textures and colour. The viewer takes on an active role – becoming part of the energy of the work, seeking associative meaning within a dense visual field, letting the eye wander with the mind across swaths of repeating dots, feeling the weightiness or the lightness of line and tracing the clusters of forming and un-forming shapes across the painting’s surface.

Woodruffe is himself aware of a kind of mindlessness achieved while working in the studio. “I enjoy the process of mind wandering where you can move out of conscious thought and move back into cognitive thought patterns again – a kind of push/pull effect - it happens without prioritising one over the other. It

is possible to reveal, through the paintings, different kinds of thinking and their physical realisations. As soon as I try to think too hard, and let conscious thoughts creep in too much, it interrupts the fluid kind of process. I love the fluidity of paint and want to feel part of that fluidity in my thinking.”

Woodruffe is also considering what is in front of him – formal elements such as the edges of the canvas, the building of layers of collaged fabric and layers of paint, the start and finish of a mark, the interplay between spatial depth and surface activity, the gaps starting to be left as breathing spaces, the building up of painted membranes or filters, by which details are partially obscured, disrupting a reading of the surface. A move from primed white canvas to the more organic surface of linen is giving the works a new softness.

Fascinated by the soft movement of fabric and possibilities for fabric design, Woodruffe’s love of fashion is translated into recent experiments where his works transition from canvas to silk – enabling the network of colours and lines to wrap gently around a body. Printed at 1 m x 2 m, the flowing landscapes of paint on silk will also feature at Sydney Contemporary.

Sue Gardiner

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Evan Woodruffe through Limited Edition Silk. IMG X Alex Plumb.