



sullivan+strumpf FINE ART  
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Tuesday–Friday 10am–6pm  
Saturday 11am–5pm  
Sunday 2–5pm, or by appointment

cover:  
*Mass* 2007  
150 x 120 cm  
above:  
*Flow* 2007  
30 x 40 cm  
*Mirror Matter* 2007  
120 x 90 cm (3)  
all acrylic and resin on board



sullivan+strumpf  
FINE ART

KATE SHAW  
HELL AND HIGHWATER

Opening  
Tuesday 29 May 6–8pm

29 MAY – 17 JUNE 2007



### *Hell and Highwater*

Shaw began her painting career by refusing traditional painting. Using a spray gun rather than a brush, her early work comprised images of urban and interior architectural environments with a leaning towards the psychedelic. But after discovering some bizarre landforms while travelling through Central Australia (2005)<sup>1</sup> she sought a new way of working, and soon developed the technique for producing images out of what she calls 'paint-pours'<sup>2</sup>. These stimulate her imagination to find the suggestive forms from which her extraordinary visions and vistas are produced.

I imagine US art critic Clement Greenberg<sup>3</sup> approving the formal relationships Shaw explores between abstraction and materiality in the first phase of her art production. His view that the true critical potential of painting lay in the possibility of its 'autonomy' is supported by each 'paint-pour' as they demonstrate '... the

only condition of painting shared with no other art': a 'two dimensionality' that's determined by the 'properties of the pigment' (the paint) and its confinement within 'the shape of the support'<sup>4</sup> (the paper).

When experimenting, Shaw treats paint like a medium of the unconscious; select colours are poured and prompted to flow across the paper's surface with little control. Like one of the earliest renegade painters, Max Ernst<sup>5</sup>, whose frottages were derived out of the patterns in a timber floor eg. *The Grey Forest* 1926 and *Petrified City* 1937, Shaw's accidental and random acts are transformed into her own unique imagery through a process of 'looking' – as done in a Rorschach test (alluded to in her mirrored images).

But as she opens optical illusion to the possibility of three-dimensional space, Greenberg would either need to question his position on painting, or his approval would end...

Shaw's next phase produces an apparent contradiction – or dialectical tension – between abstraction and the pictorial. Once cut-out, her suggestive forms are collaged to produce vivid three-dimensional illusions that resemble landscapes; snow-covered mountains loom behind unusual rock formations that surround and are reflected in a lake (*Surface Tension* 2007; *Mirror Matter* 2007); searing larva flows between melting hills (*Flow* 2007) and an iceberg – from tip to surreal base – sits suspended in an ocean (*Mass* 2007).

While the colour-palette of Shaw's landscapes infer an hallucinogenic allusion to the realistic rather than realistic illusion, visual relationships are drawn between the materiality of her suggested forms and the effects of mixed paint: the marbling appears like sedimentary rock or the bark of a ghost-gum; tiny branch-like structures look like lichen on rock or a symbiotic growth on a tree; the orange-red flow of paint looks like boiling

larva... and lets not forget her use of the spray gun to produce her skies – the use of air capturing the sense of air...

In allowing the medium of paint to create its own form, Shaw has become an expert in the exploitation of chance effects to express the hidden content of the paint itself whence new and hidden worlds are formed.

© Kirsten Rann  
Independent curator and writer, Melbourne  
2007

<sup>1</sup> interview with the author, April 2007

<sup>2</sup> *ibid*

<sup>3</sup> author of the famous *Modernist Painting* (1961), seen to typify the Modernist critical position on the visual arts

<sup>4</sup> Greenberg, Clement, 'Modernist Painting', revised, *Art & Literature*, No. 4, New York, Spring 1965

<sup>5</sup> one of the founders of the Dadaist group in Cologne, Germany

*Surface Tension* 2007  
70 x 180 cm  
acrylic and resin on board