

5 February - 6 March 2021

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Light Breaks features new paintings by Gretchen Albrecht made during the 2020 lockdown in which the artist also returned to working at a monumental scale. Though confined to painting in her home studio, isolation afforded Albrecht an extended period of research, reflection and space to work to her own rhythm, finding the experience liberating and immensely productive. From this prolific period, the artist has selected two significant works for an exhibition which comprises only four paintings.

Here, while familiar, celebrated hemispherical forms reappear, their potential meanings are, in part, recast in observance of the great silence of isolation and the many who have passed away. In this context, light breaking out of darkness can be seen as a metaphor for transformation, new horizons and new possibilities.

The exhibition's centrepiece is *Wave (light breaks)*, whose dramatic scale, energetic strokes and luxurious colour command a striking presence. Inspired by Piha on Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland's wild west coast, "the real world of sea and sky, and its changing behaviour" are evoked in an experience unique to painting.¹ Arcs of bright white appear as towering waves surging and crashing against an abstracted shoreline, and ascending into the celestial sphere. Albrecht's rhythmic markings echo those of the tide, wind and light, while alluding to deeper internal or cosmic rhythms – "all time and no time" the artist notes.²

The liminal zone of the shore, where land, sea and sky converge, has historically endeared it to artists, film makers, writers and others as places to explore the immaterial – as portals to other realms. Here, set against a shifting sky of deep blues, purples and blacks, cycles of death and rebirth, the divine and unseen are analogised in the sea constantly painting and repainting the shore anew.

Wave (light breaks) finds a companion and counterpoint in *Small Study towards 'The Great Silence'*, whose gestural white and grey strokes set against a pale cerulean blue-grey backdrop may also evoke the movement of clouds. In this work, two grey and white formations unusually mirror one another.

The painting's motivation, however, originated in a different observational impulse. 'The great silence' is observed in some monastic lives, where, following a series of incantations, no further speech is uttered. In such rituals, an expansive space is opened to contemplate both inner voices and outward sounds. In the context of the lockdown, the painting can also be seen to reference the amplification of natural sounds – such as those produced by the wind and birds – made possible by such a remarkable, sustained silence.

Emil McAvoy, February 2021

¹ Gretchen Albrecht, conversation with the artist, January 25, 2021.

² Ibid.