

Two Rooms

Gretchen Albrecht
Lighting the Path
17 November – 22 December

P O Box 68643
Victoria Street West
Auckland 1010
New Zealand

16 Putiki Street
info@tworooms.co.nz
tworooms.co.nz
+64 9 360 5900

Nearly forty-five years separates the two groups of paintings in this show. Three, from her *Illuminations* series, which have never been exhibited publically before, date from the late 1970s. The other four are recent works, 2022-2023. Obviously a lot has happened over the years between them and, not surprisingly, the earlier and later paintings manifest clear differences. The *Illuminations* have a more spontaneous, improvised and fluid cast, as if those angular narrow bands of mostly light colour could change direction as we look. Sudden electrical discharges, small explosions, whether in the sky or brain, come to mind. Their titles derive from a set of poems by the precocious French writer Arthur Rimbaud (1854-1891), filtered through a like-inspired musical composition of Benjamin Britten. Rimbaud's *Illuminations* are marked by their visceral, edgy, epiphanic intensities; his words sudden recognitions of acute feeling and wonder. Allowing for the differences of medium, that is also an apt characterisation, not just of Gretchen Albrecht's own *Illuminations*, but also, in part, of the new paintings. The latter, in contrast though, are relatively ordered, stable, harmonious compositions, the colour denser and higher keyed, their formats 'landscape' and hemispherical, the titles signalling more particular inspirational sources in natural and physical phenomena, as experienced by the artist. *Spanish Smoke*, for example, a field a rich yellow and russet brown disturbed by sweeps of black, could evoke a wildfire's aftermath, with a nod to the blacks of Goya and the associations they generate.

For all these paintings are rich in connotations. They are not fixed and predetermined, though, but emerge from our individual experiences and encounters with the paintings. What is also shared by both groups of paintings is that signature characteristic of Albrecht's art, its resplendent and charged colour, a poetics of colour. The orchestrations of blues, violets, reds, golden yellows, purples, umbers, black, for instance, give voice to emotion. Colour, effectively, speaks in shapes and forms that may well help us better accommodate the frequent mess of the world beyond. Back in 1983, Albrecht isolated a primary aim of her art: 'Colour concentrates the feeling...struggling to unite the inner longing with the outer reality'. Forty years that is still in her sights. As an installation comprised of seven parts, the paintings can take on a narrative dimension, enhancing and counterpointing one another, expanding the possibilities of the meanings they generate. Consider one implication. In Hebrew numerology seven represents completion, wholeness. That was absorbed into Christian theology too, and references to aspects of Christian iconography and belief recur in Albrecht's paintings. However, completion and wholeness remain a utopian ideal. *Lighting the Path* suggests that the road is both wondrous and fraught.

Leonard Bell, November 2023