

KEN SMITH: Recent Landscape and Still Life Images.
Flinders Lane Gallery, Melbourne, 2015.

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Looking out with an impartial gaze, a vast blue sky announces a bright day ahead. From this elevated position the eye can see for miles and everything is crisp. Looking in toward a private interrogation; soft light and velvet tones conjure up a curious arrangement of things.

Ken Smith's landscape and still life paintings are full of calm horizons; delicate glimpses of a world seen in equal measure. While they are unapologetically straightforward in their choice of subject matter and repeated iteration of visual elements, their underlying design reveals a complex and systematic exploration of light and its reception. Observe the endlessly nuanced shades of blue present within any one of Smith's airy landscapes full of sky, sea and glassy reflections. The sheer range of azure present signals the tireless determination of an artist in search of ocular truth.

Principally motivated by the incisive question, "How does light reveal the forms, colours and atmospheres of the visible world"¹ Smith has dedicated years to capturing something of the tonal nuances created by natural and artificial light. Working directly on site, out in weather or from the controlled environment of his studio, Smith maintains a constant focus on the essence of an event, letting details of surface and tone respond to the shine and shadow of light falling across it. Seen with utter clarity there is nothing tentative or uncertain within his treatment, nothing clashing or jarring. Each image possesses an even tempo, reflecting a considered moment in time.

These wide horizons, be they the intersect of ocean meeting sky or the clear surface of a table top and the void beyond, offer an experience of stillness, of slowing down and simplification. Within the layers of weather, ocean, landmass and the man-made, there is no suggestion of the highly emotive, sentimental or aggrandizing. Rather, Smith's images adhere quietly to an ethos of clear-sighted, objective examination.

The factual is systematically and discretely broken down into a series of geometric elements, temporarily suspending their reality in an effort to accurately document what is present. Whether addressing the variously textured elements of a coastal panorama or the smooth curvature of a cylinder, his images reflect a rigorous and sustained interest in perception. Inside this seen and speculative instant, Smith interrogates its "underlying sense of structure and order"². With a keen sense of patience Smith navigates the tension between visual assumption and concrete reality, before meticulously reconstructing the parts back into a stable and unified whole.

Fluctuating between spacious outward views and a more intimate meditation, these meticulous works draw attention to a felt experience of subtlety, both within the act of looking and within the mind's eye. It is a pleasant space to inhabit, and one in which Smith invites us to linger.

¹ Interview with the artist July 2015

² *ibid*

