

Christophe Stibio is not primarily a representational painter, though his works are never abstract. All are firmly grounded in an actuality, but just as importantly they are grounded also in his thought process and technique.

'What you see,' he says, 'is not always what actually is.' This is a way of telling us that our thoughts about what we see are at least as important as the things that give rise to them. This is a simple enough idea but his exploration of its implications can be complex.

Christophe lived in France for the first 25 years of his life. He exemplifies that aspect of French culture, which takes very seriously the activities of the mind and insists on a form of courageous logic, progressing along the path discovered and/or created by the mind's processes. This will stay with him all his life.

From France, he went to China to steep himself in another tradition. He says, 'That is where I learned how to hold the brush and "stain" the paper, not with the brush but with the mind.' Of all he learned in China, this is central- that it is the mind that leads, and the brush, which follows its impulses. Impulses? Is this illogical? Perhaps, but instinct and impulse have to give a work of art its life, and the mind must exercise a discipline: freedom and necessity go hand in hand, whether they like it or not!

After China, he came to Australia, to receive a third gift, or influence. This is partly a matter of respect for aboriginal traditions, and their use of local materials to colour their

bodies and more recently their pictures, but more importantly it is the lack, here, of a strongly controlling tradition which gives him the opportunity to develop what he absorbed from Europe and China before he took himself somewhere else. Australia is that somewhere else and we are his viewers, addressed by him in characteristic style.

Christophe says, "When I paint cornfields and Waterholes, the topic is not cornfields and waterholes. The topic is how to look at them." His pictures call for spontaneity and discipline in the viewer as well as in the artist. They call for both reflection and sudden impulse of appreciation and insight. They deny us the simple approach of asking, 'What is that a painting of?' and ask us to examine the thoughts we have when looking at them. If this is demanding it also makes the viewing of Christophe Stibio's paintings unusually stimulating.

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