

# ARUSHA

GALLERY

## Soul Making: Kate Walters' Love Paintings

(Dreaming the World into Being)

Sometimes when you wake in the morning the dream you were in is still clung around your thoughts. So you know you haven't quite left it. Mostly you can feel it. And if you try to remember it, or remember more than the very last bit of it, you can follow it back. Just about. Bits will be fading. The feeling will be getting gently bleached. But the words you use to tell yourself the narrative of the dream don't quite fit. And as you become more awake the richness of the dreamscape recedes from rich oils through pastel colours and water colour impressions to a blank canvas. It is as if the waters have covered it over and it was never there. The dream seems to have gone and left you with only intimations which nevertheless linger on through the day. It's as if we had met someone on a train, at random, and had an unexpectedly intimate conversation during which we had the conviction that we really understood each other, really, if only for a moment, knew each other. As if, during that conversation, we had relaxed and the envelope of our being had loosened and stretched and we had found ourselves expanding towards them. And when we walked home from the station having arrived at our destination and waved goodbye, we realised we didn't know their name. And as the days pass, we become less and less sure that the conversation as we recall the feeling of it really took place. We can hardly imagine it. It becomes less and less real. And the sense we had of ourselves as we stretched and expanded towards them no longer seems real. And so the reality of who we were, or are, in the dream, or with that person on the train, also fades and we gradually dismiss it. Even if we remember bits of the conversation, or bits of the dream, we let it fall away.

There is nothing to show for it.

Kate Walters does the opposite to this with her Love Paintings. And when we stand in front of them, it is as if we are drawn back into the dreamscape, or back into the chance encounter with someone who got us, right under our skin. She gives form to the dream world so it gets into the light of day and doesn't get fractured by language. In Ancient Greece anyone who could speak Greek could participate in the Eleusinian Mysteries. It was open to all. And yet none who did could speak of their experience. It was as if it could not be spoken of; as if it was beyond words and words would bleach it. Going into a room with these Love Paintings is like being a participant who has returned to their Eleusinian Mystery. The paintings are not representations of what happened. They do not speak of it. But the pictorial forms, the pigment's intensity, texture and movement, call you back to the experience. If you can let go your grip on material reality and, as it were, close your eyes, you can open yourself again to your dream experience. And we all dream. We just don't all remember.

No one knows what took place in the Eleusinian Mystery cult. But it appears that it involved an ecstatic experience of some kind that resulted in the arrival of new life in the form of a boy child. It was epiphanic and those who took part felt rejuvenated. We may imagine the sense of aliveness coursing through them as they returned to the daylight world from the firelit darkness inside the temple. It was a ritual of ecstatic renewal. Falling in love, if only for a short while, is maybe similar in the way it is intoxicating. All love stories tell of intoxication and renewal. Sometimes they are homely and the lovers set up happy domestic lives with new born babies. Sometimes they are

cosmic where categories of subjectivity are erased or blown apart. Sometimes they are so intense you think there must be something divine or demonic going on, as if there is a spirit world under and around this material world and it has suddenly broken through.

Kate Walters' Love Paintings give us portals to step through the material world into the spirit world. She takes us into the oldest love story of all: the story of the Sumerian Goddess Inanna and her lover Dumuzi. The Love Paintings and the ancient text tell the story with such intensity that the body's flesh becomes incandescent with divine spirit, and the divine spirit becomes richly textured with sensuous embodiment and exhilaration. An urgency courses through the work as the figures communicate in their ecstasy and also in the fullness of their repose.

If we allow ourselves a moment of awareness, we will notice that the new life that is born out of this intensity takes different forms. We can identify in these paintings various different literal forms of new life. Some are more conventional than others, such as the new relationship, or the new baby, or a renewed aliveness and energy for life. And then there is the new life that is apparent not for the new form that is taken but for the new category of life that is created. In the story of Inanna the category of life that is being created is the world of the imagination. Through the creation, the telling and retelling of the story, the rich reality of the world around us is revealed through the way it is seen and thought about. How we think about and understand the world around us has become infused with meaning, so we can experience it with exhilarating beauty and devastating horror. The Great Inanna, Goddess of Love and Beauty, calls him, Dumuzi, to plough her vulva for he is the one whom her womb loves best, he can caress her thighs, be taken to her bed and plant himself in the garden of her body. And the world flourishes. This is not only literal. This ritual act does not only make the barley grow high or the peach swell with sweet juices or the body ache with desire. It also creates the psychic reality that enables us to know all of this and to share in the experience of it with awareness. This is not a new form for life to show itself in. It is a new category of life.

The new category of life that has been created is the world of symbolic reality. It is what Coleman writes about in *Act and Image*, and he says that its continued existence is dependent on the dedicated activity of human awareness. Keats called it Soul-making. It is similar to Heidegger's description of Dasein being World-creating. It is what Berger writes about in *On Drawing* and *here is where we meet*. It is what depth Psychology means by Psychic reality. It is the world in which we grow our being and in which our being-ness flourishes or dies.

These Love Paintings break down the categories of time, space, materiality and spirituality. They are both sacred and profane or someplace between where the two are woven together. These Love Paintings release the libidinal life forces to flow into the fleshly human from the plant, animal and spirit world, and through the human body back up into the plant, animal and spirit forms. These Love Paintings weave into our awareness a world of symbolic reality, and it is a world in which we are connected equally with the material and non-material.

Kate Walters' Love Paintings are what happens when our bodies burst into flower and flow with the juice of peaches and figs, when milk erupts from our hearts and eyes and gold flows from unknown apertures through to our souls. Kate Walters' Love Paintings are moments of healing of the fracture of presence. They are instances of soul making.

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