

Maria Cruz

Nothing in this world ...

The title for this exhibition reads to me like a provocative aside, a passing reference to the ambit claim of painting's role as a form of status anxiety. So said, it is being a bit grand and also somewhat self-effacing. It is about the universe of the mind and the power of the imagination. Painting provides a working model for those daily epiphanies that are close and personal, even visionary, but also rather prosaic and unremarkable, easily overlooked by louder claims.

Clearly, this medium is no longer bound by the traditional categories of abstraction, figuration, portraiture or landscape, although in a sense these genres still hold true. Many of the Maria Cruz's works read like exercises in painting clouds or a landscape, and betray the conscious desire to restrict the palette and essentialise forms. Their intensity is both palpable and somewhat offhand, as if it must be done quickly and without fuss. It is as much about learning as unlearning the automatic gestures with which images are created. There are wildcards thrown in too, disrupting any notion of an even-handed approach or restriction to one topic in the predictable passage of information: weaving in perceptible themes and motifs, selective personal references and this other bigger self that is not reliant on biography.

The artist in her studio works from personal photographs and images found in magazines or books that somehow make their way onto the canvas to serve different ends, so there is a sense of the every day and of art-historical tradition that, along with the paint tubes and palettes (both on and off the wall), provide multiple sources of inspiration. In this sense the artist is a cipher, filtering figments of received ideas made manifest through the processes of painting.

Colour provides a ready point of reference as in the suggestive presence of *Brown and Green*. Mindful of Cruz's own origins, I can't help but think of the lush vegetation of the Philippines — at least that explains the green — but the browns and mud-greys as subtle shifts in hue and tone seem to come straight out of Courbet or Corot, summoning up a vision of Europe through painting. In other works that reference the dynamic of colour there is a notable focus on the provocation of red — green's 'other half' — that comes from Goethe's *Farbenlehrer*, in which he has great cause to celebrate the perfect equation of the red-green polarity. One such work is the outlandish small canvas, *Red Dots on Palette*, but there is also the jewel-like miasma of the curious work signposted with the words *No Smoking* in Gothic script that, not unlike her earlier series of colour charts, conjures up alchemical associations.

The signature piece in this exhibition and perhaps the one that most clearly sums up Cruz's vision is *Love forest*, inspired by Robert Indiana's *Love* (1972) that presents the romantic idea of going for a walk through the forest, which is not unlike 'taking a line for a walk' as Paul Klee once put it. But here, a sort of breakdown occurs in the random dissolution of Indiana's familiar typographic letters and the painted foliage to reveal the opaque blue ground like a television screen that denies the aspiration to perfect beauty.

Eve Sullivan June 2004



No Smoking 2004, oil on linen, 55.5 x 55.5 cm

Palette 2004, oil on linen, 46 x 41 cm





Self Portrait 2004, oil on linen, 40.5 x 40.5 cms

Maria Cruz studied Fine Arts in the Philippines before moving to Australia. She pursued further studies in painting at East Sydney Tech and Sydney College of the Arts throughout the 1980s and 1990s, and lived in Germany where she attended the class of Prof. Klaus Rinke at the Staatliche Kunstakademie in Dusseldorf.

From the mid 1980s, Cruz's work has been exhibited widely. She has had solo exhibitions held at Artspace, Sydney (1986, 1987); Photospace, Canberra Institute of the Arts, Canberra (1989); Mori Gallery, Sydney (1990,1991,1992, 1995); Galerie Droscher-Meyer, Dusseldorf (1994); as well as Sarah Cottier Gallery, Sydney from 1997, with exhibitions including *That Occult and Metaphysical Quality of Gravity & Studio Suite* (1999); *Feeling The Space & Approximately Infinite Universe* (2000); *Hard Times are Over* (2001); and *Homesick and Palettes* (2003).

Cruz has participated in selected group exhibitions which include *Freespace*, Provincial Centrum voor Beeldende Kunsten Hasselt, Belgium (2002); *One fine day*, 34K, Berlin (2002); *Painting as Paradox*, Artists' Space, New York (2002); *Strangers/Etrange*, PS1 Clocktower Gallery, New York (2001), and *Art > Music*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney (2001).

In addition, Cruz founded Shangri-La Collective and is a founding member of The Believers (with Mikala Dwyer and Anne Ooms) that have been the focus of exhibitions at Artspace, Sydney; Artspace, Auckland; and the Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney among other venues.

Maria Cruz has been a recipient of numerous awards and residencies, including the PS1 International Studio Program, New York (2000-01), Australia Council Artist Development and Project Grants (2000-01 and 1999), and the Portia Geach Memorial Prize for Portraiture (1999). The artist currently lives and works in Sydney.

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