



A·K
BELLINGER
· GALLERY ·

DALE RHODES

EARTH AND OCEAN

ALLISON BELLINGER

0439 180 346

AKBELLINGER@OUTLOOK.COM

INSTA AKBELLINGER

WWW.AKBELLINGERGALLERY.COM

Dale Rhodes has had many incarnations. Born in Africa, his first childhood paintings were still lifes. His early natural impulse to make art went unbidden and, in turn, the path back to the studio was long and complex. Training as a zoologist, then working as a photographer and creative director, Rhodes was a private yet constant painter. Eluding art school, he forged the practice of 'deep' drawing and a lucid palette over time. Working to an almost arcane standard, Rhodes chose not to exhibit until he could meet his own calibre: of tone, form, drafting and intensity. Patiently he worked into the paint until the formal elements and finesse became innate, 'like breathing'.

This arc, traditionally, would culminate in technical mastery, and perhaps the cultivation of a single genre. For the Dutch painters of the seventeenth century an entire lifetime would be given to the skin of peaches or the music of clouds. And they were called masters because of their extraordinary focus on singular forms. These painters seemed to belong to distinct guilds dividing an aesthetic bounty into earth, sea or sky. Drilling down into detail with discipline, the sensual tension of genre painting dwelled in the fault line between the laws of description and the fugitive energy of paint.

Superficially the work of Dale Rhodes shares in the meticulous grace of these earlier classical traditions. His work is made very gradually. It is rich in observation and alive to the fall of light. The structure of the faces he paints are built on the scaffolding of finely drawn layers of bone, sinew and flesh. The skin of his oranges have both heft and patina. His trees rustle with a bounty of articulated tiny leaves and branches. It seems, after decades of application, that he can in fact paint and draw any-thing...yet he holds no faith at all in realism and doesn't believe in genres one bit.

As a result, his are pictures that eclipse their own powers of description, inviting the eye to search for shared qualities across forms. Rhodes rails against representation for its own sake, asserting the simple yet radical idea that a painting outlasts and out-strips the concrete reality of its subject. What we feel is real is illusion. What appears concrete is abstract. Fruit dies. Paint endures. That said, Rhodes leans into the crisp power of the descriptive line with fervour.

His portraits are almost visceral in their quiet magnetism. His depictions of crumpled paper bags and fruit, glazed in light and plunged into shadow, compel the eye into a fathomless depth. And his landscapes enclose astonishing detail and emotional charge within apparently minimal compositions. This painter does not rush and visually he does not abbreviate. The pleasure he takes in the evolution of a painting is palpable in every stage:

"Time is my core art material, it's unsatisfying to me to merely suggest, it's nowhere near enough. The more time embroidered into the paint the better. When I put a piece of paint down I'm totally committed to that brushstroke (but not attached, I might well come back and change it completely) and my work is not about depicting reality, it's about using the subject to create an alternative reality in paint. For me the paint is everything and all three genres are the same. I do not draw a distinction or dividing line between the still life, the portrait and the landscape. The subject is not real, the painting is real."

Conceptually I accept this, but Dale Rhodes does summon the physical world. If not for the sake of realism then for the sheer power of presence evoked from forensic observation. Nowhere is this more evident than in his recent landscapes. Some borne of his life in the emerald density of northern NSW and many yielded from a 14000 km trek across the Northern Territory, Kimberley and outback Queensland and New South Wales - these paintings quietly shatter cliché by subverting tradition. Because the fruit of his journey are not scorched offerings caked in red dust but portraits of rare light and distilled solitude.

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Evoking the strange romanticism of Eugene Von Guerard and the low horizons of classical Dutch landscapes, the painter pays close and reverent attention to the sky. And unlike the shorthand of flat bright blue so common to Australian idyls, his skies breathe and ache. Bruised by rain, trailed with pale clouds, stubbornly opaque and overcast or parched and airless, his interpretation of the sky inverts the very idea of above and below. For all the typical narrative of elemental drama and bleak heroism of the land is subdued and held to ransom by the massive scale of the etheric and the infinite. It's as if you can imagine the sky in these paintings to sprawl on without limit, arcing out of our atmosphere and into the encroaching darkness of space. Some might describe this sensation as approaching the sublime, yet very few painters have said this of the Australian desert.

Scale can crush as well as soar. To Rhodes' eye, the experience of spending so much time walking and painting in the wilderness with his painter partner and wife Shaz, yielded fullness rather than emptiness. As he describes it, the ancient interiors of western NSW and the northern deserts were realms of constant mutable change in every detail and every light:

"Some of these works are immediate reactions to unbelievably biblical (desert) landscapes, places so mind numbingly empty that all you can do is stand in silence. There is no response, only being. But it was never empty, it was brimming."

Burrowing into the glazed voids and teeming sprawl of these works I thought about the still lives of this artist and the portraits. Formally, the land is like a table, each tree an object on that surface. Emotionally the landscapes share the intimacy and frontal quality of the portrait encounter yet instead of staring into a human face these works create a sense of gazing out of the painter's own eyes and body, in a deep subjective union with the land. Is this the place where disparate genres fuse? Probably. Hopefully. Because surely the point of formal skill is not a goal but a gate that must be kicked open. What is felt is the source of what is real.

Anna Johnson



East Coast
120 x 180 cm
Oil on Canvas, Framed
\$7500

DALE RHODES
EARTH AND OCEAN

Outback 1



Outback 2



Outback 1
40 x 50 cm
Oil on Board
Framed
\$1650

Outback 2
40 x 50 cm
Oil on Board
Framed
\$1650

Outback 9



Outback 6



Outback 9
20 x 35 cm
Oil on Board
Framed
\$1400

Outback 6
30 x 40 cm
Oil on Board
Framed
\$1400

DALE RHODES
EARTH AND OCEAN

Warning



Renaissance Sky



Warning

76 x 102 cm

Oil on Canvas

Framed

\$3600

Renaissance Sky

76 x 102 cm

Oil on Canvas

Framed

\$3600

Leaden Sky



Leaden Sky

76 x 102 cm

Oil on Canvas

Framed

\$3600

DALE RHODES
EARTH AND OCEAN

Cloud Sun



Flood Plain



Cloud Sun

76 x 102 cm

Oil on Canvas

Framed

\$3600

Flood Plain

76 x 102 cm

Oil on Canvas

Framed

\$3600

Cloud Bank



Cloud Bank

76 x 102 cm

Oil on Canvas

Framed

\$3600

DALE RHODES
EARTH AND OCEAN

Cloud Bank 2



Cloud in Blue Sky



Cloud Bank 2
76 x 102 cm
Oil on Canvas
Framed
\$3600

Cloud in Blue Sky
76 x 102 cm
Oil on Canvas
Framed
\$3600

Blue Sky
76 x 102 cm
Oil on Canvas
Framed
\$3600

Blue Sky



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