

GEOFF THORNLEY

The fate of Nick Cave's Elisa Day was grim. Down by the river bank "where the wild roses grow, so sweet and scarlet and free", Elisa met a grisly end. In Cave's gothic melodrama it is often the case that "all beauty must die" as he re-casts his own brand of sacrificial theatre in his bleak, yet knowing tones.

In John Everett Millais's *Ophelia*, her lips too "are the colour of roses" and like Elisa she is unwittingly trapped. Much of Ophelia's body already victim to the weight of water, captive in her extravagant garments - the combination of which is gently but surely pulling her beneath the water's surface. It has been said of this image that it presents a "la petite mort", her body ceding to a temporary and blissful "release" but the seductive colour in the garlands of flowers speak to a larger, irreconcilable liberation.

As viewers we wilfully share in Ophelia's naivety allowing ourselves the diversion of her beauty and the false allure of the setting to ignore her imminent demise. Even if it is only a heartbeat away, such is the delicacy of the image that we too feel more dreamy than endangered.

That margin between the meniscus atop liquid and the shallow space that light penetrates before it is defrayed and reduced amidst the weight of water, is not fixed.



With Division #24, 2001 - 2002
Oil on canvas on board
200 x 122cm



In all of Geoff Thornley's paintings this volume isn't fixed either. Between the very surface of the paintings and their inferred depth we can sense light and colour like a series of shallow breaths entangled in the swirling reed-like gestures. This is the shadow space of Tanizaki and it is the zone Thornley prefers.

Like Ophelia, they might rise to the surface briefly, the weave of gesture visible, form and structure momentarily tangible and yet more often than not he is inclined to submerge these attributes in a shallow space that is slow and fluid. Only with patience can we move through this relative closure and constraint to the point where the paintings slowly open and breathe more easily.

The earliest painting in this exhibition is *With Division #24*. Having much in common with the celebrated *Voice of Mimesis*, *With Division* alters the implied topographical viewpoint of the *Mimesis* paintings by dividing the painting into two portions along a horizontal axis. It is as if the painting itself were being lowered into a denser atmosphere where the open chromatic range is compressed and intensified in the heavier climate of the lower portion.

White Line No. 9, painted some four or so years later, brings a much closer tonal range to its larger surface. The arcing calligraphic gesture is more regular and held in greater balance between the four edges that sit just half a gesture away from the folded edge of the stretcher. Like *With Division*, and indeed the newer *Untitled* and *First Sight* paintings, we see this careful adjustment of edges, one painted, one structural. Thornley deals with the quandary of edge by re-asserting the painted field. In doing so he reminds us of the plastic responsibility painting ought to maintain, whilst allowing us a mimetic experience of nature but whose material self is specific unto itself.

In *White Line No. 9* the pervading soft blue is more ethereal – a pale sky blue stained by traces of lavender and ochre. It is an uncommonly beautiful painting. Its colour and tone are balanced beautifully with the scale and cadence of his gesture.

In *Untitled No. 6* and *Untitled No. 18* we see the beginning of a new progression. There is a greater buoyancy to the colour, and a vivacity in the revealed brushstrokes. The tooth of the linen he has selected, seems in part, to invite this more viscous response. We can see more clearly the layering of pigment and structure. The volume has been turned up. Colour is exposed and with it gesture, material - even the support is more revealed. These newer works maintain the refinement that characterise his every move but they bring a rawness and vivacity. The paintings seem to be move from demure to ardent.



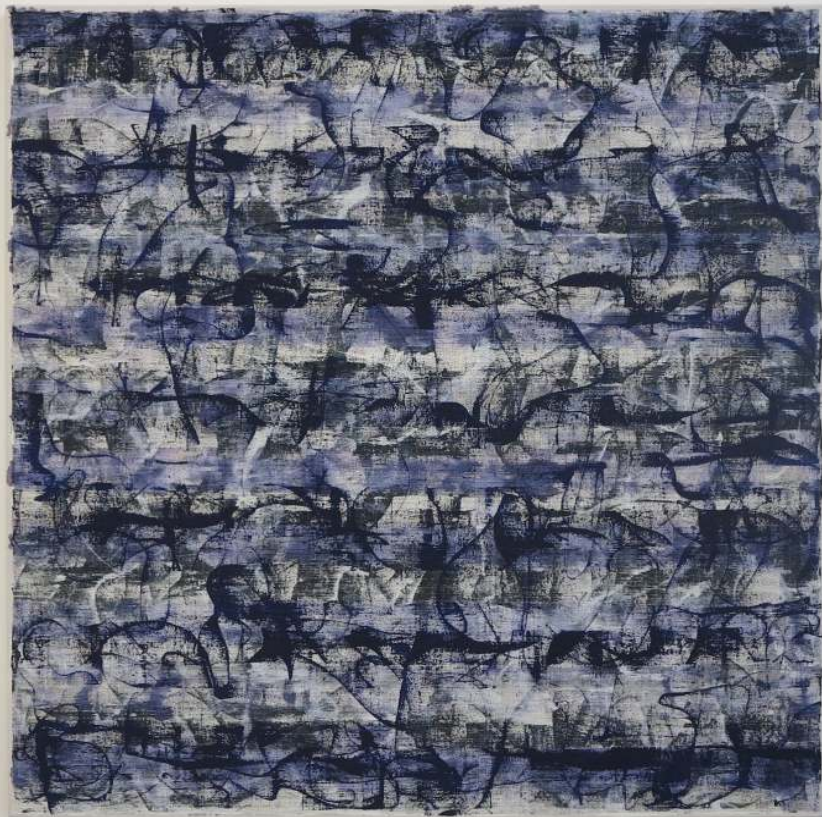
White Lines No. 9, 2006 - 2007
Oil on canvas on board
195 x 195cm

And though colour is central to Geoff's vocabulary, it is part of a larger equation. The fundamentalism of the Monochrome position and that of Formalism would never answer the requirements that Thornley himself has for his art-making and those he desires for his audience. He demands that painting deliver a sensate experience.

From *With Division* to *First Sight &* it is clear that the underpinnings of Thornley's paintings are personal. No painting seeks to demonstrate a truth or a mythology other than its own. His paintings don't suffer under the weight of imposed theory or rhetoric, rather they quietly make their own.

Overburdened as we are with images and with so much painting is capitulating to illustration to try and keep up Thornley continues to swim upstream. He will always make paintings that resist the faulty obligations of contemporary culture in favour of making paintings that simply need to be painted.

Andrew Jensen, September 2015



Untitled No. 6, 2010
Oil on canvas on board
122 x 122cm





Untitled No. 6, 2010
Oil on canvas on board
166 x 166 cm

With Division #24, 2001 – 2002

Oil on canvas on board, 200 x 122 cm

White Lines No. 9, 2006 – 2007

Oil on canvas on board, 195 x 195 cm

first sight No. 15, 2011

Oil on canvas on board, 122 x 122 cm

Untitled No. 6, 2010

Oil on canvas on board, 166 x 166 cm

Untitled No. 18, 2010

Oil on canvas on board, 122 x 122cm

FOX/JENSEN
10 PUTIKI STREET
AUCKLAND
NEW ZEALAND

JAWPRESS 2015