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TRISH CLARK GALLERY



HEATHER STRAKA | Paintings

3 April – 26 April 2025

Press Release

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION AND IMAGES CONTACT THE GALLERY info@trishclark.co.nz

142 Great North Road, Grey Lynn, Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland 1021, Aotearoa New Zealand



Trish Clark Gallery is pleased to present a select exhibition of Heather Straka's paintings, including a number of new works alongside important older works that further her long-time investigation of identity/cultural politics. Having devoted a number of years to her parallel photographic practice, and produced two significant bodies of work both exhibited at the gallery, Straka is once again deeply immersed in her painting practice. With qualifications in Sculpture and Film, Straka's unique cross-disciplinary approach delivers painterly cinematic photographs and paintings anchored in sculptural space.

Recent paintings are marked by a commingling of what were previously two entirely separate impulses: her long-time engagement with the subtleties and intricacies of portraiture, and how reductive a portrait can be; and her acerbic Defenders of New Zealand landscapes. Sara Ahmed's *Strange Encounters: Embodied Others in Post-Coloniality* was one of the prompts for Straka's consideration of the notion of 'the stranger' – ineluctably referenced back to her own origins and those of the colonial culture in which she matured. A post-colonial assessment of her painting antecedents in the territory of landscape brings rich content to the portraits, equally othered by their back-facing stances. Various adorned with religious /political / cross-cultural references; and mindful of the identity politics and historic idealism inherent in current global preoccupations, Straka now delivers us a moody exploration of prospects.

Straka's broad and insightful explorations over decades into perceptions of socio-political and cultural lives have created significant bodies of compelling and sometimes controversial work. Everything is grist to Straka's mill, with no apology. Unafraid to confront racist and sexist stereotypes, Straka engages with such debate as a meaningful part of her practice. All are rendered via a finely modulated painting approach, making objects of beauty from contentious subject matter, her caustic gaze deftly questioning tradition, challenging the politically correct, and subverting expectations.

Studying sculpture at the University of Auckland's Elam School of Fine Arts in the early 90s, Straka honed an acute attention to detail that she later carried through to her painting practice, a shift made while working as Julia Morison's assistant in France. Scarcity of sculptural materials and proximity to the great paintings of Europe informed the refocus of her practice to painting.

Straka returned to New Zealand and exhibited her first painting show in 1998, later graduating with an MFA in Film from Canterbury University in 2000. Since then Straka has been awarded several scholarships and residencies. In 2002 she was presented the Pierce Low Award for Excellence in Painting from the Royal Overseas League, London. Straka was awarded New Zealand's esteemed Frances Hodgkins Fellowship in 2008, and the William Hodges Fellowship in 2011. Her work is held in all of New Zealand's major public collections.

Straka lives and works in Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland. Aotearoa New Zealand