

ALTERNATIVE art spaces are usually associated with difficult, experimental or unusual art forms, from incomprehensible performance and installation art to strange political sculptures made out of bits of string, electric motors and children's toys.

This is at best misleading. At worst it prevents many who might enjoy the work there from even contemplating a visit. When artists form cooperative galleries their intention is to make it possible for themselves and their colleagues to escape the self-serving dogmas of art bureaucrats and the market driven tyranny of the commercial gallery circuit.

It should not therefore be a surprise to find that by far the finest painting currently on view in Perth is at the Jacksue Gallery 486 Murray Street, Perth. Cynthia Ellis's PULSE is all paint. Her brightly coloured canvases and panels in immensely thick, carefully modulated impasto come in all sizes from a blob a few centimetres across to Pulse a three-metre high cascade of pinks and yellows over red.

This is oil painting at its most expansive energetic and indulgent. The paint layer can be two centimetres or more thick. This raises all kinds of possibilities for the elaboration of texture and patterns in relation to colour. Brush strokes are no longer flat marks but slabs of colour with vertical sides or troughs scored into the much thicker strokes beneath or beside them.

This enables the artist to achieve a far more intense, dramatic presence for her marks than would otherwise be possible. The edge between one colour and another need no longer be produced by painting one colour up to another on the same plane; it can be an overhang, the edge of a cliff of deep pink suspended a centimetre or so above a gulch of rich dry red, perhaps.

This technique emphasises the energy and concentration needed to make work of this kind — and the joyous freedom of a disciplined gesture speaks at once for the artist and to the viewer.

In Blue Painting a delicious bright blue stroke in the form of an elongated tick zips across the lower half of a field of thick, muted grey blues. It is counterbalanced by a flash of scarlet in the upper right quadrant of the rectangle. This painting has all the contemplative depth of a work by Auerbach and the resilience of Grey Smith at his freest.

Ellis is very aware of associations and even synaesthesia, the working of one sense on another, in her painting. Depth of paint can also invoke depth of memory. In Memory of Mother, for instance,



Onshow

David Bromfield

the absolute plenitude of some of Ellis's other works.

One's first glance at Pulse is overwhelming. It is like a huge waterfall of glowing pink, running down the canvas from left to right. A little more attention, however, reveals that the subtle deployment of yellow ochre and vermilion underpainting has been arranged so as to achieve this sense of presence. There is almost nothing left visible of the crimson but the fine dry veins in the lower left hand corner are essential to support the glowing energies above.

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A Pulse of rare power

