

A Conditional Cadence: The Art of Lynne Eastaway

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To survey the art of Lynne Eastaway is to experience a painter's conversation with traditions that have demanded of us different ways of seeing. Artists, particularly those attuned to genealogies of the non-objective, will trace a literature of correspondences animated by her experiments in colour, modular configuration, and intimately crafted explorations of material. The fact that, in Australia at least, such correspondences allude to what has largely been a subterranean history in the visual arts will not be lost. When thinking of Eastaway, the invocation of a secret past seems doubly apt for in a fundamental sense her conversation records something of the outsider, having arrived relatively late at non-objective painting. More to the point, a private history lies secreted within her surfaces in that, for all their apparent centredness, they measure an enduring tension. Eastaway is an artist whose resolutely meditative focus achieves cadence by virtue of an unusual sensitivity to the incongruent.

It must be stated at the outset that incongruity is not to be understood through the kinds of declamatory modalities that serve to theatricalise one's subjectivity. To appreciate Eastaway's journey, one might reflect on the painter Agnes Martin, from whom she has much learned. Like Martin, Eastaway seeks to achieve poetic stillness by means of a painterly process that sees her 'back turned from the world'. And like Martin, she came to abstraction slowly, exploring processes and learning to translate patterns circuitously. Lines, whether unsupported or grid-like, need not be seamless; virtue could be discovered in their being blurred or unexpectedly deviant for such irregularities describe someone capable of accepting the hesitant and awkward. Additional devices such as counting systems also proved invaluable, and they need only to be simple for what Eastaway was translating was the unmapped world between forms. Numbers served to ground modernist geometry, preventing form from becoming ethereal. So too the very act of drawing and painting brought not so much aesthetically pleasing arrangements as inaugurate a sense of history in the simple event of a physical mark. Such experiments required time and were better suited to a reduced scale from the large-scale gestural paintings she had made two decades earlier. By the century's end, her method was more typically to work using more delicate materials alongside canvas, such as acrylic gouache and pigmented inks on handmade Japanese paper, laminated linen and cotton duck.

The juxtaposition of irregular processes entailing repeated inscription are important to grasping Eastaway's minimalism. She seeks permutation through a twofold method. Many drawings and some canvases source landscape and figuration. The source itself is less important than how this fragment might lend itself to an experience of pattern. Sketchbooks record forms such as a city rooftop or an outback tree-branch that are then gradually rendered non-figuratively. A series of acrylic and ink works made from the mid-90s originate from aerial perspectives of desert and saltpan lakes across Western Australia. These latter works proved significant, for in her layering procedure she discovered a constitutive beauty in the porousness of texture created through the surface absorption of colour. If this proved correlative with a story of erosion, an environmental record for stains left when lakes absorb salt, a parallel experiment in colour was decidedly self-referential. This entailed the staining of ink on laminated canvas and paper then gently brushed using another colour while the surface remained damp before yet another was introduced and so on. The outcome was akin to what the artist describes as a 'beautiful bleeding'.

Edges become ambiguous zones, surfaces residually porous, capable of accepting another entity with the understanding that mutual transformation will ensue. Eastaway's feminism is never declamatory but it is there, emerging at the material interface of fluidity and form, between Neo-Platonic expressions of harmony and the hand's tactile relation to textile when weaving patterns. In the Cadence paintings edges that bleed record her seeping layers of colour. One outcome of this history is to distend the industrial flatness associated with the Colour Field tradition in favour of a more amorphous, veiled accretion of volume. A different kind of mystery from another set of works might be considered 'horizontal': the squares represented in the 'TILT' series are persistently angled so as to lean and rest not only against their supporting colours but activate our gaze towards spatial relations that play out just beyond the frame. Here lies a quotidian realm of shadow, light and fullness.

Such horizons are not always found at an ostensible boundary; they can sometimes be discovered at the very core of a textile's woof and warp, or, as in the case of the remarkable Constructed Drawings, the juxtaposition of different papers such as architect's draughting paper. These collages employ heavy graphite to create rough-hewn yet controlled textures suggestive of matter painting. However, their overriding quality is

one of translucent delicacy. Vestiges of colour have resulted from the way combination of distinct types of paper has allowed the artist to wash away layers and chronicle the permeable. The architectonic exploration of non-geometrically combined shapes acknowledges Schwitters, but their value is more tangible, the use of paper revealing procedures that have proved conducive to generating new forms and processes.

The artist's relational thinking delights in paradoxes that discover elliptical properties in literal forms or, as displayed in the recent folded Belgian linen works, crumple and crease rough-hewn textures to make charmingly intimate asymmetrical forms that can harmonise with domestic environments. For Eastaway, the fold marks a moment when an accidental line can transform vertical and horizontal spaces into a playful kind of buffer with which she will then persistently tinker. The line thus represents an intervention, sometimes in the guise of a literal diagonal but more often as a metaphor for the unevenness that attends how she paints. A record of the hand's passage, Eastaway's stroke bears traces of somatic irregularities that nonetheless have been lovingly caressed into the surface. Through rituals of continual adjustment and recalibration, hesitant processes gradually accrue through brushstroke so as to achieve non-relational intensities, while simultaneously remembering patterns of human imperfection. In her art the cadence merges not with the Pythagorean spheres but subtly uneven modulations expressive of our conditional existence.

Eastaway's thinking may be considered determinedly pragmatic. Her notebooks describe an effort in which outcomes are consistently less well defined than the interruptions that attend a process of materialising nothing other than what finally lies before one's eyes. The semantic character of these documents is often that of the interrogative: which direction should this line follow? What will be encountered when still wet paint transforms the edge into a space of possibility? How many times is the area of black, red and white to be reworked for the surface to achieve translucence? Can the rectangular room itself become the arbiter for the measure of colour? This continuum of constituent questioning is akin to a visual process of pushing things in and out of balance. We learn that intensity must be worked for; relationships are made, not found; one does not find information so much as learn to find information.

In an age where information is embraced in crudely instrumentalist terms, Eastaway remembers a vastly larger process of inquiry. Her technique of persistent recalibration discloses a research method unwaveringly focused on constitutive outcomes resultant from histories of partial erasure. In this context acts of washing, wiping and veiling are not symptoms of Freudian trauma but the inscription of new possibilities for the establishment of a more resonant experience. Like the functional act of mending and washing materials that might otherwise be disposable, her art invokes an ecological language sensitive to prolonging the life of things. The knowledge woven into her surfaces thus yields its secrets with a slowness that seems apposite. At its heart is a deeply human understanding that the self is never alone. By means of the hand, one connects to a world whose inherent tremulousness is evidence of that moment when history passes through us.