

Ian Fraser ARCA (1933 – 1986)

A sign of greatness within an artist's practice is when he or she does not seek answers, but instead poses further questions about the nature of being. Ian Fraser's prolific career as an artist and lecturer contributed a great deal to the art world, inspiring students and artists alike to explore the potential of creative endeavour.

Fraser's practice was driven with intellect but with a light touch. He engaged with the transitory nature of existence with a steady focus; his love of the landscape was set from a young age, but what seemed to evolve from this, and which seems to run throughout his work, is a sense of structure and pattern, which he found throughout nature. An extract from a poem written by Fraser describes the form of a fossilised sea urchin as a 'matrix of living' – this idea of life as a network feeds into the complexity of some of his paintings, notably his Tranquil Garden series (1980-83). Inspired by the Dorset landscape, these works are formed of clusters of mark-making and fluency of curious forms or motifs, almost like that of symbols and lettering. It seems to read as a form of language developed by Fraser as he immersed himself in the incomprehensible enormity of nature.

His work also engaged in his relationship with landscape in terms of urbanisation. After a period of time spent lecturing in the US, Fraser returned to his London home to paint a series of suburban works (Suburban Landscapes 1974-80). These focused on the growth of architectural construction and the disappearance of green space. They capture a sense of open vastness with a strong sense of human presence and



29.6.86 1986 Oil on linen 26 x 33cm

intervention despite rarely, if ever, featuring any people. They are still set firmly within the context of the landscape offering very still, deeply contemplative, spaces.

The other emphasis in Fraser's work is time, which consistently influenced his practice. This can be seen particularly in his Abstract Block works (1960-70), in which dates are used as titles. These poetic compositions sit as pockets of potential time, soft arrangements of colour, in which Fraser sought tranquillity. He aimed to capture the 'inexhaustible stuff of painting... of light, of life and death'. His earlier abstract works also emphasise his interest in structure and pattern, with a particular focus on geometric

form, colour and perception.

Fraser studied printmaking at the Royal College of Art and worked as a lecturer at Camberwell before being made the head of print at the iconic Hornsey College of Art, later Middlesex University (dates to be confirmed). He was also Visiting Professor at Wisconsin-Parkside, USA. He exhibited around the world and regularly in London.

An important retrospective of his work was held at Middlesex University in November 2016 followed by an exhibition in Bath. All work is available to view by appointment through Axle Arts in Bath.

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