

pompom

Evelyn Malgil

Winniper

24 June - 19 July 2020

From left to right:

1.

Winniper Springs 2, 2015

acrylic paint on canvas, 120 x 180 cm

2.

Elsie Cliff, Bedford Downs Country, 2016

acrylic paint on canvas, 90 x 120 cm

3.

Rose's Yard, 2016

ochre, acrylic paint and PVA fixative on canvas, 90 x 120 cm

4.

Rose's down station, 2014

charcoal, acrylic paint and PVA fixative on canvas, 90 x 120 cm

5.

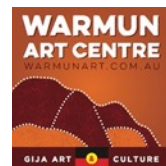
Winniper Springs 3, 2019

ochre, acrylic paint and PVA fixative on canvas, 100 x 140 cm

6.

Winniper Springs, 2015

acrylic paint on canvas, 100 x 140 cm



Between the Fence and Freedom

The work of Evelyn Malgil

On a recent trip to the Warmun Art Centre, I was immediately struck by a suite of bright pink paintings by Evelyn Malgil. I had just come back from LA at the time; they had a similar aesthetic to the cool, block-like minimalist art forms found in the laid-back art and design of contemporary California. They had this incredibly woke, hip aesthetic combined with a kinda 'F' you attitude towards the norm. They definitely had sass, sass in bucket loads; I had to meet the artist and share my admiration. Evelyn Malgil is as cool and sassy as her artwork suggests. She is a senior Traditional Owner for Winniper Springs, a special site about an hour out of Warmun. The work carries a quiet authority in line with her cultural status. It's genius really.

The Kimberley has wrestled with the difficult realities of what can be summarised as the 'station movement'. This movement underpins the economic disparity of the region that used free labour to build the wealth of the State and its devastating effects are well evidenced in art centre archives. The 'station movement', still operating, can also be linked to mining and the ongoing fight for resources from traditional homelands. The specific imagery in Evelyn's work hints at the tension between the settler structures and traditional Country. Gentle reminders of the unresolved narratives of place are evidenced in the dancing brolgas, fences and water tanks amongst the majestic pink landscapes.

A simple black brush-stroked-fence within a cool, contemporary scene reminds me that someone cut that tree, shaped it by hand, dragged it somewhere and put up a fence, for a foreign animal, in the middle of pristine freedom. However, the sanitisation of 'Dreamtime' artwork attempts to remove the politics of place. This can be seen as part of our systemic refusal to tell the truth. It is simply more palatable to sell a romantic story than a massacre story. The lived experience of this Country is what unites us, contemporary art investigates the difficult spaces and reflects on where we want to go. Evelyn is no exception, in her work *Elsie Cliff, Bedford Downs Country* (2016), Evelyn states

[This] is my old man's mother's Country, we call it Elsie Cliff. This big hill they got emu and kangaroo Dreaming there and if you go in that little gap you got spring in there.

But over on that tree they been hanging people there, old people. You can see the shape of chains on that tree there if you go out that way.

Her most joyful and sublime works are of Winniper Springs, where Evelyn is a senior Traditional Owner. Winniper is a sacred site and an inland paradise about an hours 4WD away from Warmun, you must ask permission before you go and be introduced to the water so you can safely enter the Spring. The palm trees are iconic to the site, the spring works have a meditative quality, as she states in her art work descriptions:

When I first went there, it was lovely. It's really beautiful when you go there, you can see rocks on either side, and a waterfall. When the weather is hot, it's nice and cold in the water. People and kids go there to swim. Painting that place brings good 'liyan' and makes me think of the old times, walking around there during holiday time.

Sometimes, when gardiya (whitefellas) feel hot, they go to Winniper to swim, but they do not ask me or traditional owners for permission.

We also got dreaming for sandfrog here, you can see that black rock in the middle of the spring, that's the sandfrog. You can go for jump off rock there too.

In the middle we got that big paperbark tree out there and down the bottom we got those palms that run along that other little river there.

Out the back over the hills is men's country, I can't go out there.

I would argue that most modern art wrestles the untold truths of the world, holding a mirror up to society. Some artists are appreciated within their lifetimes and others are only recognised many years later. If we are lucky and act quick, we will see that we have one of the most modern movements here in our own country. Evelyn's work is an excellent example of how art can make us feel and think differently about the accepted narratives of the shared place we all call home. The quiet interplay between the fence and freedom reflects on the colonial history of the Kimberley, where happiness is found in sacred water.

Emilia Galatis

Emilia Galatis is a Perth based curator, writer, consultant and facilitator with over 13 years experience working across urban and remote areas with National institutions and community owned arts organisations.