

Sue Arrowsmith

Let the wind blow through your heart

Opening Thursday 6th June 2019, 6-8 p.m.

Exhibition 7th June – 13th July 2019

The glow of soft sunlight filtering through leafy trees. The constant, yet ever changing play of light and shade in a gentle breeze: brief moments like these may induce powerful feelings of being alive, of happiness. It is such moments that Sue Arrowsmith captures in her paintings.

Light is love, as German poet Christian Morgenstern has said. A more sweeping statement might say that light is life. Sue Arrowsmith has noted that light is always present even though we may not always be aware of it – because we look down, or ahead of us. This artist, however, loves looking upwards, into the crowns of trees with their intricate web of branches, and at the moving patterns formed high above ground by the leaves, the wind and the sun.

Born in 1968 in Manchester, UK, Sue Arrowsmith is among the leading artists of her generation. Her works have featured at international exhibitions; they form part of noted collections including the Arts Council Collection in London, the San Diego Museum of Contemporary Art, U.S.A., and the Museum of Prints and Drawings (Kupferstichkabinett) at the National Gallery in Berlin, Germany.

Sue Arrowsmith is also a keen walker, and a careful observer of nature – in particular of plants and their shapes. Above all else, she is fascinated by the light and mood changes that depend on the weather, the time of day, the season. Her camera often accompanies the artist on her rambles, during which she captures the patterns created by trees and leaves outlined against the light, recording the fluid glory of daylight, and the sky that shimmers through branches.

Back at her studio, Arrowsmith embarks on a process of abstraction that transforms her photographs into images whose substance is the light. First, she projects the developed 35mm slides onto the surface of her desk, or onto a wall in her studio: the complex living web of twigs, branches, stalks and leaves that fills the forest space becomes a dense, two-dimensional pattern. The artist then embarks on the act of painting. She applies highly diluted watercolours, inks and acrylics to various supports – paper or canvas; panels of wood or aluminium – allowing her paints to flow naturally, and to follow their own dynamic. The reflected image transforms itself into an image in its own right, one that obeys its own laws and that creates its own great energy. The original nature motif has become an abstract pattern.

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Colour plays a key part in this artistic process. For many years Arrowsmith worked in black and white, which produced a certain visual affinity to the silhouette image. In her more recent works she has employed strong, contrasting colours, which increase their abstract quality and their aesthetic impact as well. In her current works, Arrowsmith has been using gold leaf and metallic paint. This takes her subject, that of light, to an altogether different level. Movement insinuates itself into these two-dimensional paintings that reflect the light in the exhibition space. It is the kind of movement that evokes the shimmering sunlight from which these paintings have sprung.

The use of metallic paints also points to another important aspect of Arrowsmith's approach. She says that ever since her days as a student at the renowned Goldsmiths College of Art in London, her studio has always resembled a lab, and that she has always enjoyed exploring and trying out different paints, colours, materials and processes – alongside her concerns about the nature of beauty.

Beauty is a quality that has been suspected of being superficial in the modern era. Sue Arrowsmith's art however, reclaims a space for beauty: emanating from her art is the beauty of reduced forms and audacious colour combinations, which does not ingratiate itself but contains a hint of challenge – and conveys the bliss that we may feel as we bask in the warm glow of a summer's day.

Alice Henkes

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