

Synchronicities

Sue Leeming and Britt Mikkelsen

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Stala Contemporary

If there is a distinction to be made between artists who are friends and friends who are artists, then perhaps it is to do with origin stories; but if I was to make an empirical division between those of my acquaintance who fit in to one or the other loosely lassoeed group, I think it would come down to whether or not I have ever seen them without art, theirs, mine or other's in the background.

I have had long conversations with both the artists showcased in this exhibition, about family, about the environment, about relocations, dislocation, loss, love, process, damage, despair and healing but almost all of our words have been back-dropped, both metaphorically and literally, by art and so I will designate them, for the moment, as artists who are friends. The reason I make this point is firstly to disclose any conflict of interest in writing about their art. Secondly it is to illustrate how difficult it is for me to walk into this exhibition and look at each work as a single shining jewel without trying to put them into a setting of my own making and adding what I know to the context. However it seems that by choosing the title that they have, Britt Mikkelsen and Sue Leeming are actually inviting me to form my own relationships with the pieces.

The artists have named this exhibition *Synchronicities* and reference the Jungian origin of the word as 'Meaningful coincidences' things that occur simultaneously and seem related but with no apparent causal connection. The etymological relation to words that mean to set your watches at the exact same time or to dive head first and nose pegged into deep water and emerge still twinning your movements with your partner, illustrate the difficulty of achieving deliberate coincidence and makes us believe in gods and religions or some purposeful direction to our lives and thoughts. But it is the accidental nature of these coincidences that is the part we love the most, the 'Oh! I was just thinking of you and here you are!' It is the chance, the serendipity of it, which delights and amazes us.

When I think of both of these artists it is always with art behind them. It is how I so often meet them, standing with a glass of wine in front of their work, where it takes just a blink and a tiny change of focus to see their art even while they talk of other things. I could close first one eye and then the other and have now art and now artist in focus but if I was to enumerate all the points of synchronicity between their lives or their work I might be missing the point.

Britt Mikkelsen has become widely known for her acrylic resin works. Belying their organic and natural appearance these works require long hours of drilling and paring back and she became distressed by the amount of waste plastic product they were contributing to the environment. In the last couple of years she has broken open her practice to encompass mediums such as large-scale aluminium sculpture, transitory cotton thread installations and now, a deep dive into the anthropocene has her investigating the impact of human living on

the earth at a geological scale. Cracking open rocks and repairing them with a filling of gilded plastic objects emphasises both the persistence of plastic and our shortsightedness in not valuing it as we should.

Sue Leeming's very recognisable style evokes sweeping abstracted landscapes, the movement of water across land, ephemeral surfaces and the bedding of sediments on the essential, unchanging substrate beneath. Describing herself as a printmaker who left her instruments behind and adapted to painting, she nevertheless applies the printmaker's principles of layering and overlaying to create her complex pieces. My layperson's understanding of printmaking, beyond its essential reproducibility, is that it introduces a meaningful separation between the hand and the work and while Sue's pieces seem to strive to be uncontrolled, natural and accidental they are just as much about our place on the earth as Britt's recuperating stones.

Despite what may have been the catalyst for this pairing of two artists, the gracefulness of their movements, the perfect timing of their ideas and their corresponding palettes, the synchronicity inherent in this exhibition is not just between them. Despite the carefully considered arrangements of the works such that each produces a harmonising note in another, the correspondence between striations and colours and sight lines across a room, the synchronicity is also not just between the works. The meaningful coincidence, the one that describes the profound relationship of synchronicity is actually to be found between each work and the viewer.

While we can understand and identify with the story of synchronicity that the artists tell, we cannot feel it ourselves and while the curation of the pieces explicitly identifies the points where the pieces meet, such overt harmony can itself be unsettling. Luckily the delight and amazement at discovering unexpected confluences does not live only in the artists or indeed in the gallery but is ours to have; we can bring our half of the coincidence with us. If we bring sadness and loss then the complex and half concealed layering of Sue's landscapes of the heart will console us. If we bring our anxious thoughts for the future of the planet, then Britt's cracking apart of the very stones on which we balance can forge strength and purpose out of formless worry. If we bring a lightness of heart then the detailed minutiae of the clockwork rock mendings will make us smile and if we bring a fractured busyness then the flow and backflow of lines and curves will compose and ground us. If we bring our history, our childhoods, our own landscapes, our own foundation stones and hold them up to find the places where they overlap and mesh and match with the works in this exhibition we will experience that enviable sense of shared connection that these two artists have so clearly demonstrated.

Ideally the curation of a room full of art should be a balletic performance, rising and falling, in unison or mirroring, with pointe and counterpoint as you move about the space. This exhibition is a beautifully choreographed example of artists working separately and in different disciplines but whose work complements the other's with a beautiful, coincidental harmony. But in addition, if you should connect with a work and take it from this setting, you will discover that each piece pirouettes a perfect duet – a synchronicity with just you.

Mikaela Castledine