

TOMISLAV NIKOLIC *By an endeavour to understand: A & D.*

STOP MAKING SENSE

In the antipodes the water goes down the plug the opposite way – a curious scientific mythology called the *Coriolis Force*, that despite its fiction, does assert that, that which is true ‘above’ the equator is not necessarily true ‘below’. Assumptions made about top and bottom, centre and edge, front and back can no longer be trusted.

Nikolic has long investigated colours theories where mythology and symbolism substitute for science and “truth”. These theories vary from the doctrinal to the impromptu. In each case Nikolic uses them as starting points, initial co-ordinates for an orienteering course so he might navigate his way from the European traditions he admires to his location in Australia.

In all Nikolic’s work though the co-ordinates appear gently confused. The more linear history of European practice, something that is taken for granted there, is set aside. Operating at great distance Nikolic is free to see the front as the back, the top as the bottom, the edge as the centre. This is a central condition of Nikolic’s practice. The notion of the cultural centre and the edge is vital to artists working on the physical periphery but the old cartography that draws the world emanating from a distant centre is increasingly meaningless.

As with the exhibition *By an endeavour to understand: B & C*, held in April of this year, we see every aspect of the painted object treated with unexpected democracy - the back, the front, flank to flank and top to bottom – each sharing in a deliberate chromatic overload. In *B & C* the colour logic of part B was implicated in part C – the colours at the centre move to the edge and back again. This ebb and flow was “framed” by the structure of the paintings themselves. Whilst this is also true of the new works in *A & D* there is a sense in the gritty build-up of pigment that it is the material itself has more to say about this. There ought to be risk in this willful disregard for edge and border, let alone the orthodoxies of the picture plane but his decisions about a border’s permeability are liberating. For Nikolic the frame is not an inert device that signals closure to the work, nor is it a kind of “no-mans” land between the painting and the space it occupies. If frames work to keep the real world outside of the imagined by erecting a boundary fence, Nikolic is steadfastly tearing it down, one colour at a time.



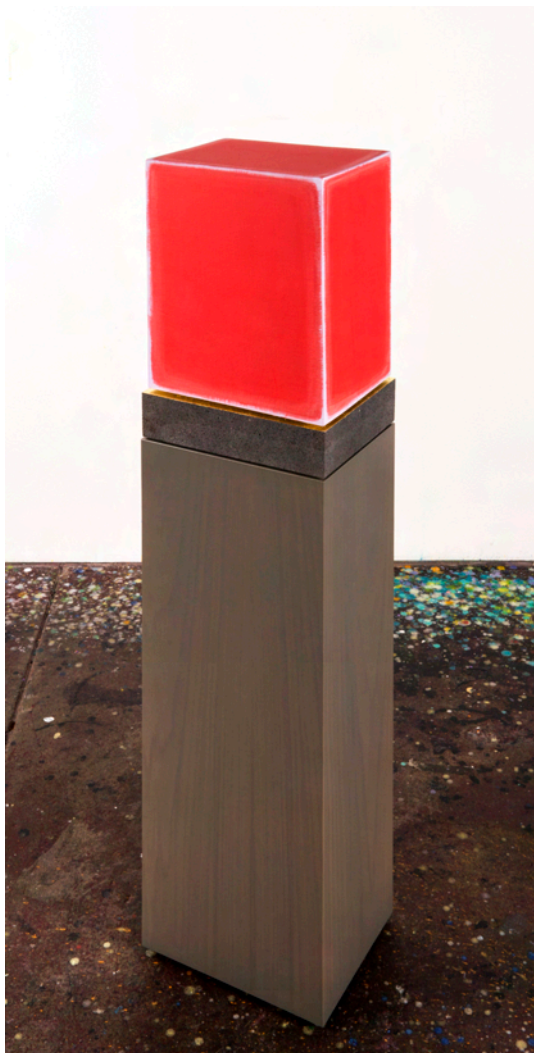
By an endeavour to understand: A. The medium of transmission, 6, 2014
acrylic, marble dust, 23ct gold leaf, glass on paper and wood 134 x 115 x 7 cm

So in these extraordinary paintings on paper we see him building up the surface of the paper on both sides repeatedly, so much so that the pigments migrate over the edge, creating this unpredictable volcanic edge. The paper gains a new torsional rigour due to its accumulation of pigment. Each painting thickens, losing the fragility of the support. In the paintings of Callum Innes, someone Nikolic admires a great deal, we see the most elegant unveiling of the residues, the “forensics” of colour. Nikolic gives us the carcass.

Though the colours might resist each other initially they ultimately make sense – contrast and saturation serving to enhance our experience. The good manners of minimalism are set aside. “Less is more” may have its place but with Nikolic’s new paintings on paper “more is more”...fun.

In an ongoing negotiation between exquisite control and exquisite abandon, Nikolic has produced some of the most compelling abstract paintings made in Australia in recent memory. In *By an endeavour to understand: A & D* Nikolic is also presenting seven sculptures that set themselves aside for their invention, their idiosyncrasy and character.

Standing just a little over one metre high, they are comprised of three elements. The bottom portion is a beautifully lacquered oak veneer plinth on which a rectangular basalt stone sits. The top surface of the stone is gilded in preparation for a “painting” to sit atop that. Of course this is not a painting in the orthodox sense as it really does have six sides. Closer to Anne Truitt or Donald Judd perhaps, certainly in the way that they stand free from the wall, these sculptures don't aspire to the reductionism of Truitt nor the “accuracy” of Judd. The subtle disparity between the size of the basalt and the block lets the gilded edge be seen as uneven shimmery zips. Nikolic’s touch is evident everywhere, particularly at the less formal meeting of colours at the multiple edge. The wood will, in time, dry and crack, revealing pigments forced into the fissures in earlier stages. Such material rebellion would never have been tolerated by Judd. In Nikolic’s sculptures, just like the behavior of colour in his paintings, he wills them to misbehave.



By an endeavour to understand: D. The mode of inter - related activity, 6, 2014
acrylic, marble dust on radiata pine, 23ct gold leaf on basalt, lacquer on oak veneer 107 x 25 x 20cm