

## Fran O'Neill's Next Move

*Cultural Flanerie*

August 18, 2017

First, it's the capture of light that draws your attention, refracted across the canvas like rippled water in a creek. Then it's the way colour and movement wrestle in undulating lines, dragging and splitting pigment into huge writhing forms. Physical and full of life, Fran O'Neill's paintings captivate from the minute you walk in the gallery door.

An Australian who divides her time between Newcastle and New York City, O'Neill began her career in figuration and landscape painting, before discovering an obsession for pattern and repetition. Formally trained in both Melbourne and Manhattan, it was while studying at Brooklyn College that something changed in her appreciation of colour and paint. She has been painting in her unique gestural style ever since. However elements of her foundational training remain.

Though situated firmly within the field of American abstract painting, her practice employs a colour palette and identity that is wholly Australian. Mango orange and watermelon pink, emerald green and crystalline aqua – languid Aussie colours – combine with the energy and grit of the metropolis to create a bold, intimate style that is distinctly hers. Though intuitive, the works are no dreamy accident. O'Neill's understanding of medium and technical prowess is apparent in her control of the paint – colours are introduced purposefully and blend cleanly. Her mark making is fluid, and use of layering to augment both form and space is confident but restrained. The surface is surprisingly smooth, removing texture's tendency to detract from tonal subtleties. That a process so primal should appear so controlled signifies an artist who knows when to get out of her own way and let muscle memory take over.

O'Neill's latest suite of works 'Next Move' is an emotive and sensory exhibition, made even more compelling by the stark whiteness of the gallery space at TW Fine Art. Given titles such as *looking at me looking at you* and *by the moon*, the works are esoteric enough to allow personal interpretations, but assuredly evoke a range of sensations from expansiveness to claustrophobia in the viewer.

In what currently feels like a very 'safe' patch for contemporary Australian art, Fran O'Neill's paintings are audacious and endlessly revealing. Deeply beautiful, they're like spying a ribbon of fiery opal in a darkened mine shaft.