

VISUAL ARTS

Ric Spencer



Going the mid-distance

I love those occasions when art makes the hair stand on the back of the neck. That was the reaction I got standing in front of *Black and White Entity*, part of Phillip McLeish's *Recent Paintings* at Galerie Dusseldorf in Mosman Park.

This is one of those works you come across every now and then. It feels like such a knowing work, like a metaphysical haiku that you know makes sense but you can't get a tight grip on. I really enjoy this floating sensation of pre-knowing.

Black and White Entity oscillates in front of the viewer like an after-sight of the sun low on the ocean. It's that grey and purple burning blind spot you get after you close your eyes, which seems to hover enigmatically about an arm's length away in front of you.

But this mid-distant haze zone is always there, if you look up from the paper, and just over your coffee you'll see all the dots, all the molecules clashing into one another in the hope of making up some form of *trompe l'oeil* that comes together as a



Sea Rock part of McLeish's *Recent Paintings* at Galerie Dusseldorf.

material space for us to move into. McLeish works in this mid-distant space where light has not yet solidified to make illusion. The truth that we call the pictorial plane, the plane of immanence, is still forming in McLeish's paintings and his works don't attempt to offer another truth,

another illusion; they simply offer the view of scorched and tired eyes trying to assimilate diffracted light into understood forms.

This plane of immanence is wonderfully presented in works such as *Sea Rock* and *Hidden Light*. The subdued, pulsating metallic grey and

purple hues combine in these paintings to present careful observations of how soluble the forms around us really are.

To see the forms emerge but hold no solidity is a wonderful reminder of our place within the scheme of being. How do we grasp our world, are we a creator, observer or participant in the canvas put before us? It would be remiss not mention McLeish's relationship to Howard Taylor. McLeish was Taylor's studio assistant for some time and this influence can be identified in some of the works.

But don't be misled by this relationship, McLeish has his own visual language. And I think in his understanding of the play between optics, light and what we convince ourselves we see he takes his painting into some interesting and shifting ground.

Recent Paintings is a fantastic re-insertion of McLeish's work into the public eye, a vivid translation of some years of thinking, observing and meditation and I'm very much looking forward to the next instalment.