

Monika Morgenstern has asked me to say a few words about her exhibition and it's been a pleasure to delve into the world that she is exploring with her art work. Monika is based in Strathalbyn and has been practising art for many years after completing visual art studies in the early 90s. Recently however she returned to study and in 2014 completed with Honours her Bachelor of Visual Art at Adelaide Central School of Art. The themes of her work remain a continual thread over the years, but Monika has developed a whole new range of ways to express them within her artwork.

The focus of Monika's work is the investigation of the intangible: mood, emotion and spirituality. The title *Who's Afraid of the Colour Blue?* refers to 20th century American artist Barnett Newman who had a series of works called *Who's Afraid of Red, Yellow and Blue* – large works with bold colour (he is placed within the world of what is called *colour field artists*).

Monika is interested in the effects that colour can have on the viewer. What emotions can colour evoke? Can colour impact on a viewer's mood? Can it invite the viewer into a new experience? How can that happen?

And these are areas that are challenging to grapple with – they're ephemeral, they're esoteric and challenging to bring into the more tangible world of physical painting, without becoming didactic or awkward. Yet Monika travels this path with sensitivity and a light hand and has produced works that can be appreciated for the effect they create – how does she make them glow? But I'm finding that even in the few days the exhibition has been open, people are identifying another intangible element within her work.

Amongst Monika's extensive research for this body of work lies an interest in the spiritual experience, what is called the numinous – the experience of the divine, the other, the spiritual. Monika describes herself as not religious but interested in this whole field of spiritual experience ranging through the whole spectrum that includes the behaviour and experience of cults.

Psychotherapist Carl Jung once said proposed that "if all the world's religions were abolished, new numinous imagery would appear and the whole thing would start again. The psyche spontaneously produces this kind of imagery."

He was suggesting that there is something inherent within human beings that seeks out the spiritual, that seeks out the numinous. And that is precisely the area that Monika is investigating.

Monika describes her work as "providing the viewer with the opportunity to contemplate the unknown, as she explores the *mystical* in contemporary art".

Monika has set herself the task of depicting not an object but something intangible, an experience. And her intent is not just to depict it, but to facilitate it. To fully experience her exhibition you will need to come back another time because there is

an audio element to the exhibition that is part of the experience, but is not strongly evident within the context of an exhibition opening. And Monika would like to thank Ben Goldfinch and acknowledge his contribution to the development of this sound piece.

I'd like to finish with the words of a contemporary of Barnett Newmann, Mark Rothko, also a colour field artist who said: – *a painting is not a picture of an experience, it is an experience*. And this is what Monika is offering us with her work.

Melinda Rankin
Director Murray Bridge Regional Gallery
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