

Katherine Hattam's work sees the terrain of language as a wilder and more intimate place. This is not a home or a homeland, it is a landscape that belongs to itself. Perhaps it belongs to no one, but lives as all beings live, against the possibility of being owned by another.

Language makes itself real in the world. Language shapes our bodies before we inhabit them. We are born into language. There is an old and very beautiful essay by George Steiner entitled *Our Homeland, the Text*. The essay Steiner wrote was about Jews living in the word and the world, living as a people of the text. The essay I read, in the shade of Derrida and Gadamer, Heidegger and Lacan, was about how we live in language. Language shapes the landscape of our birth. We enter a world already made, each part made legible and significant. The tree, the sky, the breast, the mouth have meaning before our touch, yet our first encounter with the world is worldless.

Katherine Hattam's work bears witness to a long reflection on language, and that in embrace and rejection of high philosophy. Her work cuts across the barricaded border of modern and postmodern and goes deeper into the terrain of language and thought. It is a terrain in which guidance is as much to be found in Freud or Wittgenstein as Lacan or Wittig.

Hattam has kept a place for the daring transgressive feminism of the 1980s: the feminism of language and bodies, of remaking language and bodies; of making the world over. Did this fugitive radical feminism go underground? Perhaps it is just looking out from behind the curtains. So many of Katherine Hattam's paintings have windows, or the effect of windows. The viewer -and the artist- are a little apart from the scene. There is always the recognition of the other at a distance, always the sense of something hidden in the watching self.

One of the constants of Katherine Hattam's work is the unleashing and undoing of the book, the revelation of the inadequacy and explosive excess of the word. *Language, names, lists, and a dream* bears witness to this method. The book is at once the basis of construction and something to be unmade, remade into discrete pages that become tiles in a new construction, a painting that is at once read and rendered unreadable, read and built, the foundation of the work and the book's own overcoming. The space between the pages transforms them into tiles, units of construction, but it also draws our attention to the space between the pages: the space where all readers write themselves into the text, the space of difference and dissent, the space of longing and reaching. They mark the space of that which is outside and beyond the book: the place and time and making of the book, contending histories, the intentions of the author, the time and place and mind of the reader. Books catch words, use them to build, combine them in the crafting of thought and message. Words escape this space and find themselves. They are written on the doubly deconstructed book, but they take a wilder, less orderly, less disciplined form. The words in Katherine Hattam's paintings are not the printed word as it comes from a machine, but the word, inscribed or scrawled, as it comes from a human hand.

Lists

Guston's *Pantheon* recorded the names of the fathers, each name laden with memory and image. Hattam's *My pantheon* sets a dialectic in motion. Guston's painting depended on the evocation of "people we know"; it was stable, magisterial. He had a

Pantheon. Hattam's *Pantheon* is collaborative where Guston's was individual, and though hers refuses his implicit universalism, hers is larger, encompassing more kinds of work, more spaces, peoples and cultures. Guston's was an avowal, it sought to settle. Hattam's is unsettling. Guston's list is an answer, Hattam's list questions. Her *Pantheon* is a question to herself, to friends, to us. This is a question that generates more questions. There are those names that are laden with memory and image. There are names that call forth only a void. Hattam reminds us of the people we do not know, the work we missed, of rents and wounds, elisions and concealments. Perhaps there is something more. We will not remember, we will not miss, the same artists. We will have the same sense of unsettled ground, of terrain shifting under our feet, of a landscape with holes and chasms, a dangerous beautiful country, a call to exploration. Perhaps it is for this reason that Katherine Hattam gives us not just one pantheon, but several: *My Pantheon*, *Our list*, *The nearby list*, *My list* and *If only one person likes your work*.

Hattam is tagging. Tagging is a much deprecated practice, a form of graffiti barely worthy of the name. Yet it is, I think, worthy of more respect. In tagging, artists write their name on their world, on a place, usually an abandoned, neglected place, on an object. Politicians, activists, critics and aggrieved neighbors protest. Who can write their names on the world? Who cannot? St. Thomas Aquinas argued in the *Summa Theologica* that it is no sin to steal food if one is hungry, and indeed, no sin to steal to feed the hungry. Ownership does not overcome need. So it is with tagging. There is no sin, no fault, no wrong, when the nameless, the unnamed, the unrecognized, landless, moneyless, powerless, voiceless write their names on the world. When Hattam tags the women artists who lack the voice and power and recognition their work should command, the dominant order is unsettled. There is more space for all. Her tagging is not narcissism but looking outward, bringing others forward, not claiming space but making space, not one man's name but a commons, made by many for many. Here, in the artistic landscape, Katherine Hattam is showing us how to make a commons. This is a practice we need to remember.

Landscapes

What happens when one enters a landscape without language, without names? Terror, perhaps, and an unmediated joy. What happens when the landscape is made legible by another language, by another speaking? Surely one is born anew, entering another world. Jacques Lacan wrote of language "it speaks in the other." Katherine Hattam opens a gate to the landscape of language.

The British Empire had a remarkable recognition of the power of language to rule. For British imperialists like John Stuart Mill, the word could comprehend a landscape, a people, a world. "The whole government of India is carried out in writing", John Stuart Mill boasted to the House of Lords in 1852. No other government, no rival Empire had "a system of recordation so complete". That system of governance extended across the British Empire: as botany, as anthropology, as cartography, as orders, law and rule. William Dawes was a part of that endeavor. Dawes sought to record the landscape, capturing the landscape and its animals and people, in words, learning the language of the people.

Dawes enters the landscape as coloniser, but how does he leave? His teacher, Patyegarang, said he spoke well, well enough to make friends. Dawes's recordation adds another element to Katherine Hattam's unsettling of the colonial imaginary. We see his notebook, out of place, precariously balanced on a table that seems almost at sea, overlooked by a kangaroo and a black swan.

Hattam's paintings of the world of William Dawes echo her earlier transfiguration of the story of William Buckley. Her paintings are not as the stories were, stories of the man. They are paintings of the land he entered. They are paintings of an alien and intimate landscape, a home that is always alien, at once one's own and wholly foreign. For Buckley, the landscape was an escape, a hiding place, a refuge, perhaps a land that opened to freedom. But nothing in the paintings belongs to Buckley. William Buckley is a small pink dude in these landscapes, when he appears at all. He does not draw the eye like the black swans or the bunyips. He is hidden, and this hiddenness is his emancipation and ours. He is free from his jailers. We are free from the concealments of colonialism, that buried the richness of indigenous land and life, and sought to bury the indigenous with it. This is a landscape of freedom.

The paintings of the world of William Dawes continue this unsettling of the colonial myth. We do not see him, we see, we read, of his place. We have his notebook.

What is it to learn the language of the other? It is, of course, to enter another world, to learn, to have other minds and other worlds open to you. But it is also to have the other enter you. The mind that once thought of fruit as apples and pears now thinks of Bo-murra Cammeral, Mo-mur-re and Boorooowan. Once the mind held only cod or salmon in the name "fish", now that name is ruptured, opened, filled with new meaning. The colonisers knew that they would rule through language. They did not realise or recognise that landscape could colonise the eyes, the minds, the words of those who settled. The rulers who declared Australia "Terra Nullius", claimed land for the Crown and set campaigns of land seizure and annihilation in motion. They did incalculable damage, and yet the land and its people entered their eyes and ears. They tasted the new world, they smelled the scent of the gum trees and the native frangipani. They had entered the world, but the world had also entered them.

We have learned, like Dawes, parts of another language. Perhaps, like Dawes, we can learn it well enough to speak "with a good mouth". Perhaps we can learn to meet the first people of our lands in the words they give us. William Dawes did. Perhaps we can come again to a new world meeting on common ground.

Hattam sets the land free from the dominion of the word, but the words remain. The word is captured in a place, in a landscape, in the evocation of a world. These are paintings of an intimate immensity. In Katherine Hattam's vision, the word is enfolded in the landscape. It is the shadowy koala that inflects the inscription (a name? a noun? a verb? a command?) "dream".

Dream

British colonial enterprise was driven by the enclosure of the commons in England. The Enclosures removed vast populations from their land and customs, and made them masterless men, the prey of rapacious landlords and an anxious state. Vagrancy became criminal. Children were taken from their parents and shipped in packed vessels to the Antipodes and North America. The vulnerability of uprooted laborers at home became the means of uprooting commoners among the Indigenous in colonized territories. This was the double displacement whereby the displaced commoners of the metropole became weapons in the displacement of commoners in the colonies.

We of the settler colonies have been taught to remember the mother country, taught to remember discovery and conquest. We have learned, belatedly, to remember the indigenous: to see defeat and devastation in the place of conquest, to see loss in the place of discovery. The commons are still lost to us all. Katherine Hattam's landscape paintings bear witness to the power of the land, and opens the possibility of overcoming.

Hattam's recollection of *Joachim's Dream* in these landscapes is a reminder that change works both backwards and forwards: on the past as well as on the present and the future. Joachim is a saint of popular religion and the Apocrypha, a saint of painters and visionaries. He is the father of the Mother of God, imagined, remembered and recorded as Christians reached back for a genealogy of Mary. A past had to be imagined, made, found. Settler and indigenous, eyes filled with eucalyptus and quokkas, scenting blood and frangipani, tongues hesitant in a language still to be learned, look out at the land. What can one dream in this place? What dreams become possible in a New World?

On the left side of *My mother and Captain Cook* Hattam has painted traces of her mother's image and written "Kate Cook came to Australia in 1948 and had 4 children". The right panel reads "James Cook came to Australia in 1770 and declared it Terra Nullius". The words in both sides are shadowed and disordered, but there is a clear division between them, sharpened by the stark double divide of the central panel. On the left, a woman, who will bear children in a new world. On the right, a Captain, charged with the expansion of knowledge and the Empire. On the left, new life, on the right the denial of life, and in center, seen as if through the panes of a window, a landscape. This landscape is another view of the world disclosed in *Landscapes, names, lists and a dream*.

Language, names, lists and a dream is framed by a decorative pattern quoting Sidney Nolan. The quotation is caught between Nolan as artist and Nolan as maker of myth. Nolan painted a world as white as bleached bones in a drought, as masculine as men in hand-hammered armor. Like Hattam, Nolan was preoccupied – or, in Freud's sense, occupied (besetzt) – by the Australian landscape. For one British reviewer at Nolan's centenary, he was an "artist of terrain and torment". Hattam is an artist of landscape, language, and joy, for it is, as Lacan recognized, in joy, in jouissance, that we enter language. Hattam gives us a landscape bracketed by Nolan's patterns, but holding another world at its center. There is a mountain like that of Joachim's dream, a river and sea filled with animals of every kind. The bird is in flight, the fish swim, the animals climb and burrow and crawl. They look out with a calm indifferent presence. They are at home together.

We look out at this commons which is and is not ours. Perhaps it is a dream. Perhaps "dream" is a command. Perhaps Katherine Hattam has given us a history of the future.

Perhaps this is where we turn in a burning world.

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26. *My mother and Captain Cook*
oil on linen
125 x 125 cm (framed)