

You and Me
Gina Kalabishis
Flinders Lane Gallery
March 2016

" Holding back a branch as one meanders along a scuffed path through the bush, most wouldn't give it a second thought. The Australian wilderness is rough and unruly - as eucalypts grow their bark shreds and falls, tea tree branches arch over boardwalks and native poa grasses spread, lashing at shins exposed in shorts or skirts or bathing suits. But within this touch, of fingertip caressing leaf and twig and seed pod, Gina Kalabishis feels alight at the beauty and celebration of life that surrounds her. Tamed yet also untameable, her work reflects the fact that our relationship with nature is joyous and testing.

Kalabishis often makes a pilgrimage to a closely-kept-secret camping ground, within a National Park on the south east coast of New South Wales. For her it is a restorative process – sometimes peaceful, other times more challenging, for when exposed to the space and silence one can finally process complicated thoughts. Although usually painting at her home nestled in Melbourne's suburbs, where weatherboard terrace houses are often seen with silver princess gums standing like soldiers at their mailboxes, Kalabishis aches for this journey to where she can solely be immersed with nature, away from the ticking of pedestrian crossings.

After years of trying to harness these feelings within her practice, when contemplating this latest body of work the artist discovered the term 'biophilia.' Belonging, intimacy, touch, euphoria. These siblings to love all arise when an individual recognises a physical and emotional response to nature. German psychologist and sociologist Erich Fromm (1900 – 1980) penned the term in reference to being attracted to all that is alive and vital. Bjork, the ethereal Icelandic songstress released an album in 2011 titled Biophilia, exploring the link between nature, music and technology.

To explore this relationship in all of its intricacies Kalabishis juxtaposed elements of her city home and self with the wild and isolated landscape. Foraging for flowers, leaves and branches she tied, hung, and draped ikebana like arrangements, photographing them suspended in her surrounds – whether that be at home or in the wilds. Taking these photos back in to the studio she found herself inspired by Kandinsky and Rothko. Although this may seem an odd marriage – a realist painter finding a likeness within the work and concepts of pioneering abstract artists – it was their deep relationship with colour that inspired Kalabishis. Kandinsky (1866 – 1944) felt that deep blues – pthalo, ultramarine and lapis – were associated with the supernatural, and were calming and contemplative. Mark Rothko (1903 – 1970) also infused his abstract works with careful emotional colour contemplation. Kalabishis, in appreciation of these insights, has limited her palette in her major works to explore this also. Her luscious and smooth application of paint renders eucalypt leaves, lily pilly berries and bound twigs settled within their landscape in shades of only carefully considered hues. Blues as a nod to Kandinsky, pinks and browns as she explores love and intimacy and attempts to infuse her emotions by expressing them with tender colours that match.

With this new body of work Kalabishis also brings the element of flesh into her

paintings. As though clothing the bones that once were made so prominent in her earlier works, the flash of flesh through beautiful foliage provides a lovely harmony to the human emotions and desires she is willing into her paintings. Teamed with titles referencing songs of love penned by Australian musicians by the likes of Paul Kelly, Neko Case, Max Richter and Nick Cave, *You & Me*, is exactly that. A love song to the Australian landscape, to the most petite leaves and the grandest of arbours, and the relationship that can be had with nature and within the self."

By Melanie Caple, BArts,(FA) MArts 2015