

Yvonne Audette: six decades of painting

Senior Australian artist Yvonne Audette is known for her lyrical abstract paintings. Richly layered and constructed with marks and symbols, Audette's paintings reflect her responses to the local environment in a style characteristic of postwar abstraction. This exhibition presents for the first time major paintings produced over six decades, from 1951 to 2009, and brings together two enduring interests for the artist: the figurative and the abstract.

As an ambitious young student in the early 1950s, Audette took the bold decision to leave Sydney for New York and Europe. She immersed herself in the avant-garde world of abstract expressionists like Willem de Kooning and Franz Kline, and saw the work of artists who would be influential—Pierre Soulages, Bradley Walker Tomlin and Cy Twombly. Establishing a studio in Florence and Milan, Audette worked and travelled in Europe until 1966, when she returned to Sydney before moving permanently to Melbourne at the end of 1969.

In the summer of 1955 Audette travelled to Spain. This was an important time in her development as an artist when she questioned her commitment to abstraction, producing a number of paintings of Spanish peasants in the manner of Goya and Velázquez. In notes made around this time, she wrote:

There are so many different directions to go in—which one is for me? I know my work with abstract content means more to me, but there is still a lot to do with the figure.

Selected works from this period, including a group of ink studies, are displayed on the adjacent wall.

Throughout her career, Audette has maintained an interest in the figure while developing an abstraction which, she felt, promised more possibilities for the introspective art she was seeking. Her aim, above all, is to give equivalence to the inner world. Like many contemporary artists, Yvonne Audette maintains an active life-drawing practice, which offers her the opportunity to hone intuition and invigorate the feeling of immediacy that is so important to her art.

Audette's substantial artistic contribution has only recently been formally acknowledged. In 1998 the Queensland Art Gallery held the first major exhibition of her work in Australia. This was followed by exhibitions which surveyed her expatriate years (the 1950s and 1960s) held at Heide Museum of Modern Art in 2000 and the National Gallery of Victoria in 2008.