

Galerie de Bellefeuille

September 2008

“Without contraries there is no progression. Attraction and repulsion, reason and energy, Love and hate, are necessary to human existence.”

– William Blake

“The path into the light seems dark”.

– Tao Te Ching

A clearing gives the viewer a reprieve from the thick bush. The sparkling stream promises to quench his thirst. Alongside him, pine trees cling to the rocks through which, it seems, they have forced their entrance. A flicker of light pierces the darker swirls that surround it as the colours which emanate from that same point harken back to their point of origin. Much of John Barkley's newest work contemplates the path literally and metaphorically. Be they representational, teleological, or spiritual, landscapes like 'The Painter's Path' and abstracts like 'Wahe' hint at the artist's journey.

The journey of the viewer, or even the ray of light, is not unlike the journey of the artist. The goal may seem simple – the

quest to the hilltop, the relief of desire, the expression of oneself – but the process can be complicated. The path is often obstructed, and much energy is expended in order to negotiate the twists and turns which present themselves along the way. For the traveller, the very turn which lengthens the journey also presents the stream. For the ray of light, it is the turn that makes colour possible. The supposed obstruction has created a place where we might breathe or drink, see or dream.

Whether it be the more representative scenes from nature, or the more cosmological abstracts, Barkley's paintings are a conversation about existence in all its complexity and simplicity. Yet, while we often feel that discussions about the

reason for being slip through our grasp, these works are highly tactile, partly because of their scale always because of the generous application of paint and the strokes that are anything but demure. The artist's energy is seen in the marks sometimes made by brush, often by palette knife that have created the work. Viewing them is as much a physical experience as it is visual. On his canvas, the mystifying dialogue approaches a conclusion – that perhaps it is in the balance of opposites where we make the important discoveries about who we are.

– Margaret McDougall