

greer townshend WITH YOU

thoughts on the soul 18 / 03 - 04 / 04 2015



THE HOLD ARTSPACE Brisbane



With You (Portrait of Mark Colle), 2015 | Charcoal on paper, 180 x 120cm Based on a photograph by Marcel Lennartz

Detail of *With You (Portrait of Mark Colle)*



With You is Greer Townshend's exploration of the metamorphic nature of the soul and the impact that we have on each other's lives. Her series of large expressive charcoal portraits on paper is depicted using literal and abstract references, with an emphasis on absence and floriography. *With You* is a cathartic reflection on the human condition and the artist's concern with fragility.

"I find the concept of the soul intriguing – even in a secular way, I like trying to figure out who someone is at their core. I wonder what that invisible pull is that connects people – and how much it's effected by personal history, memories, dreams. I wonder to what degree we carry those histories with us," she explains.

For Townshend, allowing the notions behind the works to manifest was a considered process. She carefully chose sitters with intriguing stories of connection, exploring differing relationships they had experienced – friendships, families, love and loss.

While some relationships were direct, others were obscure – *La Dispute* (right) embodies the idea of one's own soul as a riddle, while *Things We Both Know* and *Things We Both Know II* (overleaf) looks at the work of New Zealand modernist writer Katherine Mansfield and how a friend of Townshend's, an emerging writer, regards her as a kindred spirit.

"Mansfield was a fascinating woman and so gifted, even Virginia Woolf was envious of her writing. The more I read of Mansfield's work, the more I realised how much I wish my drawings to be the visual equivalent; elegant, mysterious, flittered with nature," says Townshend.



La Dispute, (detail) 2014 | Charcoal on paper, 120 x 180cm



Things We Both Know (Portrait of Katherine Mansfield), 2014 | Charcoal on paper, 120 x 90cm

The mind I love must have wild places, a tangled orchard where dark damsons drop in the heavy grass, an overgrown little wood, the chance of a snake or two, a pool that nobody's fathomed the depth of, and paths threaded with flowers planted by the mind.

– Katherine Mansfield



Things We Both Know II (detail), 2014 | Charcoal on paper, 120 x 180cm



The Woolf Within (Portrait of Virginia Woolf), 2015 | Charcoal on paper, 120 x 360cm

While creating the body of work, Townshend was increasingly allured by the words of writers; verse from Plato and Woolf to Leonard Cohen influenced several of the pieces.

Another reoccurring theme is the metaphorical notion of flowers as the soul. Flowers are a hallmark of Townshend's work and their ephemeral nature is woven through the series with her lyrical and delicate use of line.

"I read a lot, I love the history of things – people, objects, flowers. We think of roses to simply mean 'love,' but their history is far more complex; it involves mythology, religion, medicine, art, even war. There's a long story quietly hidden between those petals."

That Night I Dreamt of a Dragon (Manuel's dream), 2014 | Charcoal on paper, 120 x 180cm



The flowers, as with the figures, are at times conveyed in dark and tangled swirling masses, at others, they are but an erased trace, a memory.

"I use flowers to describe someone's history and to evoke a feeling. They encapsulate the idea that we're gently carrying our stories with us," says Townshend.



The Baffled King Composing Hallelujah (portrait of Adam Brown), 2014 | Charcoal on paper, 120 x 90cm

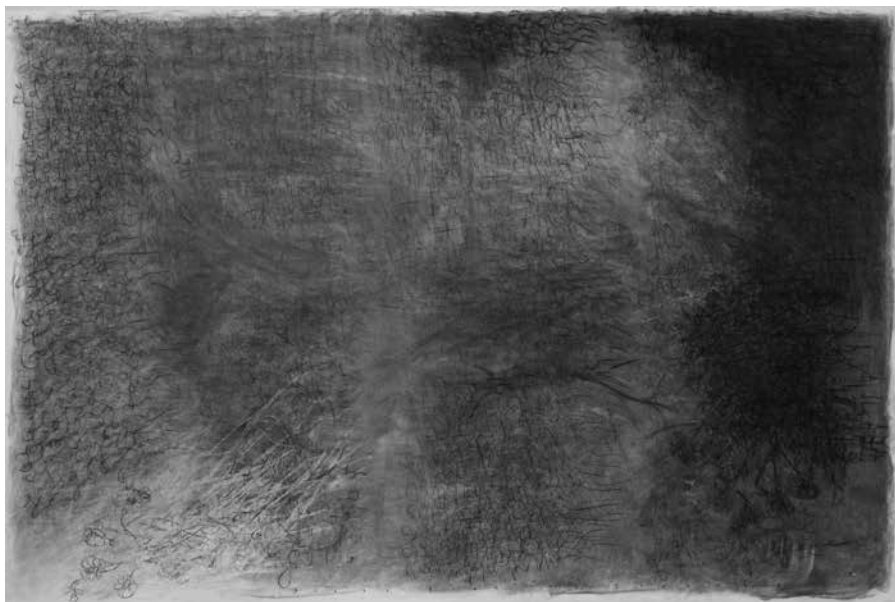


Flowerfall, 2014 | Charcoal on paper, 120 x 90cm

Townshend's sparse compositions allow ambiguous and at times disconcerting narratives to take form.

"I'm trying to determine how much to remove from an image to evoke a more enigmatic story," she adds.

The series is influenced by minimalist ideals. The figures, often reduced to the head and hands, float ethereally on the picture plane. The drawings speak to Townshend's understanding of Japanese philosophies of simplicity, attained while living in Japan.



I Love You Too (Interior), 2015 | Charcoal on paper, 120 x 180cm

A central aspect of the work is the Japanese concept of 'ma', the idea of a void or emptiness of space.

"It differs from the western concept of emptiness, it's more of a pregnant pause or a consideration of absence," says Townshend.

These ideas, combined with Townshend's affinity for literature and language, led her to regarding the works as visual Haiku, a short Japanese poem with reference to a fleeting moment in nature. The result is a collection of evocative portraits, which leave the viewer enveloped in a sinuous and otherworldly portrayal of the soul.

"Part of depicting the soul was accepting how mysterious it all is and then playing with that idea. I'm trying to distil things down to their purest essence so that I can admire each strange and delicate fragment."



That We Would Stay Together Always, 2014 | Charcoal on paper, 180 x 120cm



Greer Townshend is a New Zealand Artist based in Australia, who has lived in Japan and France.

Townshend has a Bachelor of Fine Arts Canterbury University (2000) and is currently completing a Bachelor of Arts (Art History) (2015 –) at Victoria University NZ. Her work has been included in several Australian art awards and she was awarded the Mainzeal Scholarship for Academic Excellence in Art History (Victoria University 2010). In 2014 she was a recipient of the Regional Arts Development Fund Gold Coast City Council.

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The Regional Arts Development Fund is a Queensland Government and Gold Coast City Council partnership to support local arts and culture.

