



Traces

NERINE MARTINI

11 July – 29 July 2012

An exhibition of sculpture, installation and works on paper

Traces continues Nerine Martini's exploration of the journey – journeys are at the heart of her work. In earlier work her fragile Vietnamese-style boat, a signature motif for many years, was invested with poignant narratives around migration, loss of culture, attempts to preserve identity in a new place, and the hope of a new life. In *Traces* we witness the artist's thought processes made physical as she shifts her attention from all the concerns which attend the immediate migration experience to others which are ongoing, universal and continually reshaping themselves – identity and loss.

Hands become the new motif through which she explores these ongoing themes. In this body of work, her boat morphs into a pair of hands, cupped boat-shape, but evoking the idea of prayer and care as they travel on to become a community of hands. Like the boat, the hand is a vehicle for a multitude of meanings and the image of layered hands immediately calls to mind the folk wisdom of popular maxims – many hands make light work; lend a helping hand; play the hand you're dealt; put your hands together; made with my own two hands, etc. These small clay sculptures become the vehicles for the next stage of this conceptual journey – they offer transport and shelter.

Then gradually the specifics of the new motif, the hand, come into focus. Identity is explored through the multi-layered idea of the fingerprint. Fingerprint is a loaded concept. It's the legal key to our identity, the print that marks out our individuality. In the West, popular culture has attuned us all to the fingerprint image of the criminal archive – its inference of a brush with the law and the attendant tension this creates. Martini mobilises this familiar linear format to different effect in some of her drawings and books, before drawing us, quite literally, into another experience of the fingerprint.

Through a series of different techniques, including enlarging and layering, she presents a set of mesmeric fingerprint images whose enlarged whorls conjure more intimate experiences of the identity of the



Moments in time 2 2011 graphite on Nepalese paper – 80 x 60cm

individual body, for instance, the particular and specific configuration of hair encircling the crown of a head one has come to love – it's the kind of keen image which comes unexpectedly and vividly to mind soon after the death of a loved one, the reminder that that specific loved body with its particular idiosyncrasies is gone forever.

Martini's distended fingerprints, laminated over one another invite a more contemplative approach to the image. In some, calligraphic marks inscribe inscrutable messages over the surface; in others the line playfully effaces the fingerprint in a game of catch-me-if-you-can. Her titles allude to the mood of the image and also often conjure, in a lateral way, the ephemeral quality of these intimate experiences through the fragility of her materials. In other images, positive and negative blots efface the fingerprint, adding yet another layer of meaning as we contemplate the brevity of our life span on earth in the grand scheme of things.

Her installation *Applause* moves us well and truly into the territory of grief – the fragility of her materials is palpable as these wings of pressed paper hands ascend in silent applause celebrating a life which has ended. This work commemorates a life, and at the same time celebrates Life. Again Martini selects and combines her motifs with Haiku-like precision. The wings invoke angels adorning nineteenth century stone memorials and the hands, in this case, conjure the hands that have cared for the deceased in the final weeks of life. Unlike its stone predecessors, this work is not destined to suffer the same fate – it will not moulder neglected in a graveyard for centuries after its appearance. Its temporary manifestation and ephemeral nature will paradoxically ensure its meaningful survival – it will burn itself into the memory to last long after its disappearance from sight.

In this exhibition we are invited to share in the artist's conceptual journey – a deeper exploration of the themes of identity and loss through Martini's very personal and poetic vision. Simultaneously we are privileged to follow her lateral thought processes as she moves through creating this body of work. The same care and attention she has taken in choosing motifs and media are evident in the crafting of these objects which, as the title tells us, are the residue of the last three years of her life in the studio – the traces. It makes for a rewarding journey.

Elin Howe
MAY 2012



Erasure 2011 graphite on Nepalese paper – 80 x 60cm

Below: *Hold* 2011 fired clay – 22 x 65 x 25cm

Cover: *Shelter (detail)* 2011 fired clay – 20 x 68 x 29cm





Traces series 2009 graphite on Nepalese paper – 80 x 60cm

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ART SPACE

2 Small Street Willoughby NSW 2068
Wed – Fri 11am – 5pm, Sat & Sun 11am – 4pm
*Willoughby City Council is gratefully acknowledged
for the provision of the Incinerator Art Space*

www.nerinemartini.com