

Richard Porter

Night Glyph

21 April – 29 May 2021

In his first solo show, *Night Glyph*, multidisciplinary artist Richard Porter presents a body of work comprising oil painting and sculpture. Together they form an interlocked network of energy systems and symbols, collected and gathered in the artist's studio over the course of the last year. Inspired by Buddhist teachings of 'emptiness' and 'non-attachment', Porter's work explores a desire for truth and cosmic equilibrium through various processes that prioritise stillness and care.

Gestures on canvas move between empty space, energy lines and symbolic forms, such as candles and birds' nests. Porter draws from a myriad of pagan, Buddhist and Hindu symbols, and their relationship to the natural world. In one painting, flowers fall from a dark hole in the sky. In another, tremulous lines of vivid colour encompass and contain a field of emptiness. The alignment of these symbols does not point to a particular dogma, but rather posits mystical representations of what cannot be known through his own assembled ecology of symbols.

The sculptures combine a number of intricate processes which Porter says helps "attune" him to their final appearance, which is not something known from the outset. These processes include walking, silent pondering, collecting studio debris and working with clay — the relationship between the thing formed by hand and fire, and that which arrived unexpectedly on the tide or through the coincidence of walking past it, appealing to the artist's interest in the poetic possibility of materials and the juxtapositions that occur in every second of our awareness. In one work, a bird finds itself upturned and asleep in a box of the artist's own antidepressant medication. In another, a bird lies fallen beneath its nest in the ruins of a manmade structure. Some of the birds have had their heads replaced by stars. Each work is supported on a base of sawn wood taken from a found scaffolding plank and lifted into the air by a metal frame, adding a sense of levity and grace to Porter's delicate assemblages.

Viewed together and in proximity to one another, the contrasts and variations in emotional register between the paintings and the sculptures point to a tension that exists in the struggle for light against the pull of darkness — a recurring theme for Porter and the artists, poets and thinkers that have influenced him.

Underpinning everything is the artist's queer identity. The sense of fragility and decay within the work echoes the legacy of HIV / AIDS and the destruction wrought against an entire generation of LGBTQI people. Through the image of the bird, as well as the use of the found object, Porter manifests his allegiance with the things of the world that are most vulnerable and prone to disappearance.

The artist's insistence on carving a role for the fragile and spiritual, as well as his disinterest in the hegemonic theoretical schools of interpretation, point to an identification with the countercultural practices of artists of the 1960s and 70s, many of whom died in the AIDS crisis and of which the effect on contemporary culture is still felt.

Porter's artistic practice, that also includes publishing others' work through his imprint Pilot Press, is one that, in defiance of immense loss and the dominant neoliberal ideology, places the experience of physical encounter and emotional revelation at its centre. It is a practice that follows what Susan Sontag famously proposed as an 'erotics of art' — the jubilant decision to engage with the art object by what is real, tangible and available in front of us.

The exhibition is accompanied by a commissioned text by the poet Timothy Thornton, a long-time friend and collaborator of the artist.