



*Rekindle*  
**NATALIE LAVELLE**

21 April - 9 May, 2021



## The Weight of Paint

If there is anything Natalie Lavelle demonstrates in her artworks, it is her love for colour – they are overwhelmingly awash with it. Some glow with a deep luminosity. Others reveal a tender layer of iridescent pigment which glimmers in the light, coyly peeking out at certain angles. Several have been painted a brilliant orange, and they seem almost to catch ablaze.

This sense of luminosity – the spark, the glow, the fiery blaze – finds itself reiterated quite literally in the exhibition’s title: *Rekindle*. The word appeared casually midway through a visit to Lavelle’s studio last month, when she described her work as a ‘rekindling’ of the mid-century art movements of colour field abstraction and minimalism. Her works exemplify many of the traits which defined these movements – a removal of painterly gesture, erasure of figuration, and an interest in the spatial qualities of paint and colour. However, relinquished from the need to reject expressive painting which plagued early minimalists, Lavelle is free to explore the accepted boundaries of ‘painting’ as a medium. From the old, charred logs of these mid-century art movements, she sparks a new fire.

Painting is dissected, simplified. Linen is cut from the frame and restitched back on. Seams crawl up canvases in long and thin protrusions. Other seams are machine-sown, so that the linen folds in on itself, hidden from a distance. These explorations, relatively new in her practice, create small ruptures in the canvas for the viewer to find. With a playful edge, they casually challenge the readily accepted notion of the two-dimensional painting plane.

At the centre of Lavelle’s work, however, lies a simple delight in the very substance of paint. Washes of colour are pulled across her works to create thin layers of pigment, which she gradually layers on top of one another. Each semi-translucent layer forms new formal relationships, blends and associations with the next. Throughout this process, Lavelle openly

acknowledges the space occupied by each layer and the innate bodily weight of paint. This focus on the spatial dimension of colour evokes Mark Titmarsh’s book on expanded painting, in which he states: “Colour is not just seen, it is experienced in depth, through and through.”

While being hyper-fixated on the bodiliness of her works, Lavelle is equally adamant on removing her own body from the process of making, as if her presence might obscure or impede upon that of her artwork. By painting in washes, she removes the painterly gesture a brush would typically betray in the course of its stroke. Instead, the wash allows the paint a certain autonomy of movement and form. This freedom manifests most clearly in the jagged lines of concentrated colour which run down the edges of her washes. Fondly described by Lavelle as ‘bleeds’, these details reveal the autonomous and uninformed movement of colour on canvas at the edges of the wash – stretching, exploring and expanding.

Other works in this exhibition further indicate this desire for bodily removal. The enormous navy-and-white diptych in the centre of the room, for example, showcases strips of linen which have been dipped and stained in navy blue dye. This act of dipping, compared to the act of washing, further removes Lavelle’s hand from the process of creation. The movement with which the dye affixes to canvas is simplified – the hand, quite physically, is removed from this relationship to a new degree.

For an exhibition which at first appears so dominated by large, flat shapes of colour, the true pleasure of Lavelle’s work lies in the details. It is up close where the movement of the paint and canvas becomes clear, and where the depth of colour from her layered washes comes to light. In these details, Lavelle playfully challenges the accepted boundaries of painting, and reveals to the viewer a deeply intelligent collection of works.

— Zali Matthews  
Exhibition Curator



artmoney

54 Vernon Terrace, Teneriffe QLD 4005  
info@janmantonart.com  
janmantonart.com  
0419 657 768

**Gallery Director**  
Jan Manton

**Gallery Manager**  
Taylor Hall