

SEBASTIAN DI MAURO
 ROZ MacALLAN GALLERY
 10 April - 28 April 1987

Oldenberg's comment, made in 1967 about "seeing gold frames round Pollocks now is funny, and also hurts" is a necessary reference in the Pocket Guide to Art Watching in Brisbane.

Sebastian Di Mauro is contradicting popular cultural perceptions when presenting large de-mounted canvasses, which had been previously stretched tightly planar to be painted. In doing so he is joining a number of contemporary Australian painters. This de-materialization of the painted object asserts that all that is necessary to present to the viewer is a certain minimum of painterly evidence. This attitude further dictates that the products of painting be not simplistically considered as precious icons to be acquired and venerated.

The artist exploits further the de-mounting by admitting into the range of sensations the slight swell and billow of the slackened canvas. The shallow, slow undulation of surfaces carry extra meanings, indicating that the artist's intentions are more about the significance of the act of painting than about the painting out of narrative or hypothesis. Messages are transmitted that have to do with the synthesis of action/time rather than the finity of object.

In order to identify the source of painting it is often necessary, yet seldom happens, that the viewer admit to things outside his/her experience. The pedestal of solipsism is no place on which to strike a pose of criticism or approval. In this artist's work the question of subject matter/subject can be a perplexing one. The question of his intentions likewise. Until the marks that make up the colour masses are scrutinized the viewer may not guess at the meaning in this artist's work.

To see him at work in the studio is to see a process of mark-making that comes from a physical, rhythmic, gestural sense at work. The sense of rhythm applies, of course, to the innately rhythmic gesture that is characteristically human. The body movements of an energized

and confident artist are the means by which the registration of marks is deposited on the canvas. Though this may imply an acerebral and denying stance, this artist retains a degree of control or contrivance. This is dissimilar to the notion of the artist as Master of the Ritual Dance and to referent works such as the "Lavender Mist", but illustrious precursors leave broad trails and follow them we do. Less pure than Pollock, Di Mauro, through control, achieves a clarity and crispness in mark that tells of a depth of self-knowledge. This awareness of difference in concentration relates well to the practice of Zen drawing and painting. The artist's marks or strokes reveal a quality of cool energy. It is as if the viewer must experience the slow deep intake of breath that precedes the plunge into the void of time/action. The activation of spine and lungs are pre-requisite to seeing. The same is pre-requisite to experience that which is done. The bokki of each mark are clear and defined, rather than dulled and muddy, as when the marks fail. The Kiai is there to be recognized by the viewer, only if he/she is "prepared" or willing to be prepared.

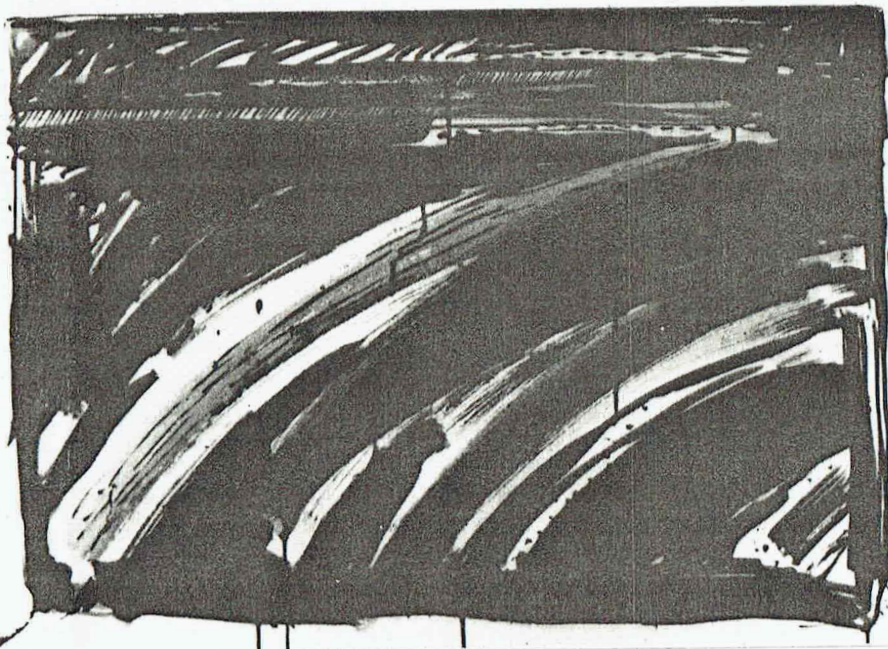
To some extent Di Mauro's work explicates the desire to hold onto a picturing of mythic place. The will to describe the vast spatial and atmospheric quality of place probably goes back several years to 1983 and his Brisbane River, and Bridge paintings. In those, and the subsequent Vanuatu paintings, is sensed the importance to the artist of the conjunction of land and water. From night the painting changed to light, and colour, which was thickly applied, grew thicker, more substantial in intention. In 1987 the best painting, an enormous yellow/blue/brown field of somewhat nebulous space allows easy entry. The painting shares with other smaller works on paper a sense of composite wholeness. In this large work the viewer is prompted to move closer, to allow the sheer dimension of the painting to envelope the limits of vision. This work is impressive in the scale of sound and light sensations it can evoke.

The artist is guilty of contradiction in other works in the show where he extends to the viewer the invitation to enter, then denies entry through a shallowness produced by lapses of painterly energy. Where the surface is deadened through turgid passages, the viewers' entry is restricted to a superficial, lateral movement, and the prevailing sensation is of following the artist's thrust into space. In some passages, certain paintings are weakened by the incidental meandering of drips from the brush. The drips compare unfavourably with the activity of mark-making, being accorded some degree of primacy of function as structuralizing agents, but they appear to lack conviction and purpose. In another canvas, a fringe of drips evokes the coy seductivity of a flapper's dress, with consequent diminution of the artist's more penetrating intentions.

In considering the artist's ambition, his breadth of vision and fortitude in carrying out both, one realizes the value of what he has done. Di Mauro is working with decreasing self-consciousness to push himself to further states of discovery. Within the overall scheme of things happening in Brisbane galleries, he has absolutely no reason to cry "Peccavi".

ROY OORLOFF

Sebastian Di Mauro, untitled, 1987



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