

Kate Genever – The Discoveries

During Kate's residency at Studio459 in Tomar, Portugal I had the privilege of watching her creative process in action and how she made sense of her new surroundings and context through her making. Through deep observation, listening, talking to local residents (farmers, neighbours, café owners), daily walking, collecting found objects, drawing and taking photographs she started to build a visual language and understanding of the place.

Initially, she scoured the barns on site, looking for traces of the previous owners, from found family photographs to man-made tools hewn from scrap materials where function necessitated an ingenious response with what was at hand. These 'ghosts' ranged from buckets and paddles to breadboards and a weathervane. This seeking out of objects that reveal a trace of human presence and ingenuity was then extended to the wider landscape – a dug well, a shelter created for sheep made of corrugated iron painted in brightly coloured stripes, fencing made from cut branches, open pipework disappearing underground to redirect a rainwater course. These became motifs for a series of drawings made with soil pigments, referencing the rich colours of the earth from yellow ochres and pinks through to deep sienna.

Our day trips to places of interest (the Templar church at Dornes, the Convento in Tomar, the ceramics museum at Caldas da Rainha) alongside our weekly shopping trips to the market or visits to the local farmers café all added to the lexicon of imagery, colours and source material. The challenge became how to distil and reconcile the opulent exuberance and maximalist decoration of church interiors/Bordello ceramics/Azulejo tiles; the monumental forms of the aqueduct, the bullring, or the belltower; with the patterns and rhythms of the rural landscape (from the formal rows of olive trees, grape vines, and eucalyptus forests to the structures of stone walls and fencing; the cut bark of cork oaks or the piles of logs waiting to be transported for paper production).

Two moments seemed significant to me in understanding how Kate made sense of this conundrum in her making. At the market, she was struck by the beauty of the seemingly random 'compositions' made by the local farmers selling their fruit and vegetables. These tabletop displays were not agonised aesthetic decisions and may have been made unconsciously at speed but held a perfection and honest simplicity that created a beauty deeply rooted in place (a floral tablecloth, a vase of flowers, a pile of oranges next to a cabbage). The other moment of recognition came when watching Kate repair a drystone wall in the garden. The repair was a puzzle of forms, her searching for the perfect rock to fill a space, to interlock with the others to provide strength and structure; again, the creation of beauty rooted in place through functional decisions and labour.

Her drawings became a distillation of colour and form exploring the relationship between the land, the sky, and the ghosts of human intervention. These simplified and abstracted forms employ a minimalism in the search to find the essence of place. On the surface there is a simplicity of colour and form in the drawings, with a juxtaposition of two shapes and two colours but these have been borne through deep observation relating directly to the seen, perhaps referencing a roof profile, the geometric diamond point motif of a convent tile, a barn or a well. These drawings were then photographed on painted outdoor architecture (doors, walls) often with the blue sky showing above - these additional coloured elements from the 'real world' adding another form to the composition, with visible stripes and frames of colour physically rooting the artist made object into the place it was made.

To me all these works reveal the inherent beauty in the symbiotic relationship between the (wo)man made and the natural world.