







In the Shadow of Forgetting

Aldo Iacobelli

12 February - 22 March 2013

SASA GALLERY

The Simple Touch

At a certain point the projective capacities of theoretical science exceed the empirical tools for verification. Apart from applying mathematical principles and procedures scientists also examine these claims with a degree of formal wonder. Here the scientific proposal converges with an aesthetic form. Informally scientists confess that they put immeasurable equations to a kind of test of grace. Does it possess a convincing degree of simplicity? Does it offer a sense of symmetry? Somehow I find it reassuring that clarity and poise are questions that scientists put to their wildest truth claims. After looking at a series of images produced in the last year by Aldo Iacobelli and bearing in mind the recurring pulse in his practice I wish to reflect on the aesthetic force of simplicity.

It is extremely difficult to find out the extent to which things are simple. This has nothing to do with the process of simplification that makes things simpler. What is at stake is not the reduction of complexity that already exists, or the ignorance of a potential that may unfold. The simple is something else. When it is seized it appears to proclaim itself in a unique boldness. The person who makes the claim is almost lost in the dazzling mystery of how such a simple declaration could not have been already part of our everyday language. The simplicity of the simple makes its own new manifestation seem already normal, and yet previously it also arrives with the awareness that for so long it went by unnoticed. Suddenly new connections are possible and a capacity to go further is brought within reach. This produces a sense of relief and joy, it can also give voice to a frustration and anger that was latent and silent. Either way it is now more possible to move on. Hence, the freedom that comes from art is not a consequence of having made things more easy.

Standing amidst Aldo Iacobelli's work there is a feeling of repose, but where does this ease come from? I suspect it does not

arise from a process of subtraction. This is the fallacy that often surrounds and confuses our ability to engage with abstract art. The tradition of critical thought that elevated abstract art on the basis that it eliminated and purified the details of everyday life and somehow mystically created meaning out of universal forms has tended to reverse the direction of thought and the sensory appreciation that the artists strove towards. Aldo Iacobelli works with the language of abstraction. However, it appears that the aim is not to put aside the materiality of his lifeworld but rather to hold onto and work with some part of it. This fascination with the part is handled with an extremely wide lens. Simple details gain meaning as he zooms into the context from which they emerged. These details resonate differently as he adds a text that announces an alternative moral position. The individual element takes on more dimensions as he repeats it across a wider plane.

The simple touch in Aldo Iacobelli's practice manifests itself in a variety of obvious manners. There is an unmistakable sense of grim focus and pensive distillation in his drawings. The use of text is direct. These words possess a voice that conveys an exact correspondence between his utterance and your reception. The paintings also utilise recurring decorative motifs. The repetition is handled in a delicate painterly manner but it also recalls a vernacular style, a commonplace obsession with creating order by making patterns, an activity that can be found in every home. These interior decorations are a form of cosmetics. Some snub this kind of activity as superficial and escapist. I think otherwise as I recall that cosmos and cosmetic have the same etymology. When Aldo Iacobelli declares that the artist is an "interior decorator" he is not being whimsical. He is recalling the ancient task of art as a world making activity. Each decoration is a pattern. This cosmetic order is the expression of the need to see a meaning in the cosmos. The cosmos is too big to reveal its meaning, we must make one by finding the patterns that are there and then weaving them into sense. Being an "interior decorator" is both a practical and metaphysical activity.

The focus on the details, the selection of the interplay between the background and subject, and the identification of motifs in Aldo Iacobelli's drawings and paintings is not constructed through a process of subtraction. It is not as if there is a big picture of an external scene that exists out there and the task of the artist is to extract one element. Similarly, while we can find art historical references or even point to domestic decorative patterns that provide the form or even the patterns that Aldo Iacobelli works with in his paintings, the point is not that he has picked out one existing element and then fixates on it with obsessive attention. This process of activity is procreative. It attends to the detail in order to model the infinite. In the introduction to his epic history of film *Mark Cousins* makes a similar observation. "There's a great moment in Carol Reed's *Odd Man Out*: James Mason spills a drink, looks into its bubbles, and sees his troubles in them. Twenty years later, Jean-Luc Godard, who admired Reed, had a similar scene in his movie *Two or Three Things I Know About Her*. Ten years after that, Martin Scorsese had Travis Bickle in *Taxi Driver* stare into the bubbles of a drink. Scorsese is a fan of Reed and Godard."¹ In these sporadic effervescent filmic scenes, which portray the moment of contemplation, a point at which a person's path may suddenly change, or deep understanding may finally come to the surface, *Cousins* also adds a further comment: a man with his troubles stares at bubbles and the cosmos.

Even in these tiny bubbles there is already more information than art can handle. No amount of time and space can capture and convey all the thoughts and memories that are projected onto these tiny spheres. In the films that *Mark Cousins* identifies the bubbles soon pop and the scene changes. However, what remains is the event of realisation. This may take the form of a decision to change direction, or the reconfiguration of murky thoughts into a formal language. These realisations can be big events in the story of a person's life. However, the significance of these turning points is not only the dramatic announcement of a

punctuation, the shift in emphasis, or the clarification of interior sensation, but also a connection to a wider and infinite sphere. The key element in the details of Aldo Iacobelli's drawings and paintings is his gesture to the cosmos. These images create an alternate world. This world is not a bubble in the private and escapist sense, but a model of everything else. It is making the world as simple as it could be, not simpler than it is.

Sometimes we admire people who state the obvious. We appreciate the courage to put into words a truth that is otherwise embarrassing to articulate. Speaking truth to power is always risky. It is possible to see this trait in Aldo Iacobelli's art. However, to think of this work in terms of defiance and honesty alone is to miss another quality. Roland Barthes also pondered over the mystery of artistic communication. He noted that literature could convey a level of meaning that exceeds the information that is provided in the text. He distinguished between what he called the obvious meaning that can be determined in a systematic manner, and the obtuse meaning that is "blunted, rounded in form" and eludes any of the manifest structures that are utilized in the text.² To grasp the sense of the obtuse meaning that emanates from the text he suggested that the critics must participate in the game of creation. In short, the critic must share the approach taken by the artist. This encounter makes them companions to the unforeseeable. In the case of Aldo Iacobelli's work the obvious and the obtuse and entwined together. The obvious stands out immediately but it also beckons us closer to delve into and produce our own obtuse meanings.

Nikos Papastergiadis

1. *Mark Cousins*, (2011) www.guardian.co.uk/film/2011/ep/01/eas-movies-film-history.

2. Roland Barthes (1987) *Image, Music, Text*, trans. S. Heath, Glasgow: Fontana Press, p.54.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The SASA Gallery supports a program of exhibitions focusing on innovation, experimentation and performance. With the support of the Division of Education, Art and Social Sciences and funding from the Divisional Research Performance Fund, the SASA Gallery is being developed as a leading contemporary art space and as an active site of teaching and learning. The SASA Gallery showcases South Australian artists, designers, architects, writers and curators associated with the School of Art, Architecture and Design, University of South Australia, in a national and international context. The Director, SASA Gallery, would like to acknowledge the contribution to the development of the 2013 exhibition program by the SASA Gallery Programming Committee; Professor Mads Gaardboe, Head, AAD; and Professor Pal Ahluwalia, Pro-Vice Chancellor, DIVEASS, UniSA.

The SASA Gallery has received significant support for *In the Shadow of Forgetting*. Special thanks to Aldo Iacobelli, Nikos Papastergiadis and Linda Marie Walker for their participation in this exhibition, catalogue and associated events. I would like to thank Amanda Pepe, CEO, Helpmann Academy, and the patrons and sponsors of the Helpmann Academy for their generosity. I also acknowledge the support and participation of staff from the Adelaide Central School of Art and Adelaide College of the Arts, TAFE SA.

Aldo Iacobelli would like to acknowledge, with gratitude, the support and contributions of the following people: my friend Linda Marie Walker for her curatorial engagement, and our many conversations about the beautiful practice of making art; Professor Nikos Papastergiadis for generously making time to share his thoughts about the project; Toby Richardson for photographing the works in his own distinguishable creative way; Mary Knights and Keith Giles for their professionalism and

ongoing commitment to the artists and to the significance of the South Australian School of Art Gallery; and, especially Debbie, Raffaele and Olivia for their continued unconditional love and faith in my work.

Curators: Dr Linda Marie Walker
Artist: Aldo Iacobelli
External Scholar: Professor Nikos Papastergiadis,
Cultural Studies and Media & Communications,
University of Melbourne
Editor: Dr Mary Knights
Catalogue design: Keith Giles
Photographer: Toby Richardson

SASA Gallery staff:
Dr Mary Knights, Director, SASA Gallery, AAD, UniSA
Keith Giles, Curatorial Manager, SASA Gallery, AAD, UniSA
Julian Tremayne, Installation Consultant
Gallery Assistants (Research/Education team): Chris Boha,
Ursula Halpin, Dr Sue Kneebone, Madeline Reece, Adele Siluzas
Technical Officer support team, AAD, UniSA

Published by the SASA Gallery, University of South Australia
GPO Box 2471, Adelaide SA 5001
February 2013
ISBN: 978-0-9873951-2-2
Printed by Finsbury Green
© artists & SASA Gallery

Images:
Front: *Shadow*, 2012
Middle: *Food*, 2013
Back: *Birdbath de luxe*, 2013