

The instant of love

The starting point for Noël Skrzypczak's new series of paintings, *Dark, shiny*, brings together two unlikely associations: the affects of mythical love, and the memory of swimming underwater. The first of these followed the reading of a passage on Titian's painting *Bacchus and Ariadne* (c. 1523). In his depiction of this epic tale, Titian immortalises the climactic moment when the god Bacchus is about to make love to Ariadne, transforming her into a constellation of stars. It was not the mythology narrated in this painting that Skrzypczak found of interest but rather the ideas and emotions it embodied: how would it feel to move beyond what we know as reality, to enter an unknown dimension, without anticipation? Such imaginings were mirrored by the sensations Skrzypczak experienced while snorkelling in a lagoon. The exhilaration and uncertainty felt when navigating unfamiliar sub-territories brought about a heightened awareness of the easy slippage between ordinary existence and its transcendence.

How to capture feeling and transience is fundamental to Skrzypczak's practice. In *Dark, shiny* each painting elicits a different atmosphere, temperament or mood. The paint carries these emotions, moving around in a sprawling tangle of primordial forms, dark and lurid colours, and painterly marks. The expansive, free-flowing 'pools' of paint that Skrzypczak develops (which she often applies directly to the wall in relation to the architectural setting) are here tempered by the confines of the canvas; the frames act as gateways from which to consider how we might journey through or occupy these spaces. Like dreams or memories, the paintings are shaped by the elusiveness of their subjects. They suggest fugitive visions and passing sensations – elation, fear, meditative calm, desire, release – the feelings we have when we experience life most unconsciously. Skrzypczak invites us to immerse ourselves in the depths of the imagination, before we return our minds to the presence of time and place, restoring reality and quietening the senses.

Linda Short