

GEOMANCY

26 OCTOBER – 12 NOVEMBER 2016

NAOMI BISHOP



Geomancy is an exhibition of paintings and works on paper that form a collection of ritual objects, their basis in shamanism and nature worship.

Exploring the interconnectedness of humans, animals and the forest, and cycles of life and death, Bishop imagines a wand for communicating with departed spirits, messages for the deceased on memorial trees, magical objects made of wood, bone and rock for conjuring weather and the elements.

Above | **NAOMI BISHOP** | *Forest Molkky*, 2016 (detail)
Oil on linen, 100 x 90cm

Opposite | **NAOMI BISHOP** | *Witch Sticks*, 2016 (detail)
Pencil, gouache and salt on paper, 38 x 29cm

'These little spiritual boughs of movement hid the lyric.'

– Lisa Robertson

Ribbons of light. Hollowed-out plant life. Rock inscrutable. Rock over rock. Inside weather. Outside lakes, townships. Wild pink striking against vertigo. A year shaded at the edges. Threads of harmonic colour. Clustering branches. Spectacular endings, messages, tree roots.

When I was a kid us cousins went hunting once for dinosaur bones. We fossicked through the grassy paddocks of my grandmother's farm digging up bits of bleached white bone, each one jammed thick in soil. We scraped at the earth with fingers and sticks. Our treasured objects pocketed, held and gathered close. My prize was a sheep skull that I cleaned tenderly with a rectangle of cloth. I painted it rainbow and fastened it to a wooden fence paling. My wand. For days I took it around the house with me placing it by windows, doors and especially in corners.

Naomi Bishop understands that the eye is always looking for a place to rest but that the spirit is restless. In her paintings timescales layer, matter and light splitting her objects – ritual, magical – into dimensions beginning here but arriving someplace just beyond us. These paintings have been shaped by her travels across three continents. They bring together the sheer crystalline force of Finland's winter daylight, the damp edges of Taipei's forests, the drama of our own dry scrub's sandpaper heat. The paintings come alive in this way; a portal opens up between them and us. For Naomi perhaps they exist as a kind of map. For us they are a trail.

Meridian green and silk green and fallow green. In one painting I feel troubled by a dark, unmoored thing. Midnight. Spring. The circle and its shadow. The shadow's wish. Where else could a wreath be placed except outside of time?

My wand was discarded, or was it lost. Before we begin to remember it is innate in us, this forgetting. A precious dark gauze – we struggle.

The radiant intensity of these works recalls the colourful abstractions of the great pioneer artist Hilma af Klint. Where in one painting a path meets a rock, in another a rainbow twists towards its own black hole. A question these works ask is: What is the object in nature, other than impossibly human? This is the tragic heart of these paintings, where wands, pyres and wreaths attempt to channel our secret and brilliant dreams. We can do little more than improvise. We are ourselves the trail, part of a constellation's vaporous edge.

EMILY STEWART

Emily Stewart is a Sydney-based poet and writer.