

Karen Torp-Pedersen
M: kktp@ruc.dk

'Cool Spaces' by Sue Ninham

'Cool Spaces' by Sue Ninham
Soho Galleries
April 20 to May 16, 2005

Shaken, not stirred the words of James Bond ordering his preferable martini/vodka drink in a classy atmosphere with architectural and high society emblems. The Australian artist Sue Ninham has captured the class and the aesthetic of the 1950's in her new exhibition 'Cool Spaces' which is currently being shown at the Soho Gallery in Sydney.

Experiencing Ninham's paintings is like experiencing a nostalgic trip back in time, where people were having cocktail parties, and drinks were enjoyed around the pool tables or in the cocktail cabinets. It was also a time when European and American artists awoke from the devastation of WWII with optimism and new expressions for arts. The period was dominated by the breakthrough of the abstract art, and especially the abstract expressionism gained a footing. The artists' emotional state and freedom from all conventional rules were outlived. This modern society was marked by economic growth and consumerism, which gave rise to mass culture and technology. From this came new forms and ideas for design and art. Designers such as Arne Jacobsen and artists like Jackson Pollock had great influence on the trend and art of the era. It was a period with increasing affluence and ease, strength and function.

James Bond's sentence 'shaken not stirred' reflects a time of class and decadence but is also the title of one of her pictures in her new exhibition, showing an object that looks like a cocktail glass in strong colours. The architecture and aesthetics of the 1950's is visualised in new forms by Sue Ninham. The objects in her paintings consist of abstract and geometric forms with strong primary colours. Both figurative and non-figurative elements appear side by side, and therefore carry references to differing objects. For example a recognisable object, such as a lamp or a martini glass, embraces an atmosphere from the time or. Her paintings become nostalgic and overwhelming as you are drawn into the storm of impressions and fragments. Most of the paintings appear powerful and controlled, which is different in a post modern time when most artists experiment with the balance between kitsch and art in pop-art, installations, video art and conceptual art. Where some artists

Karen Torp-Pedersen
M: kktp@ruc.dk

detest the tasteful when a picture manifests itself as a beautification and a drawing-room picture, Ninham on the other hand seems to seek an aesthetic order, and her pictures become pure. That results in an art which is meek and straightforward.

It looks like Ninham is searching for something eternal and lasting for her art. As a result she aims for quality and craftsmanship. Her bachelor education of design at the South College of Advanced Education formed the basis for this initiative. Since 1984 Ninham has worked as an illustrator which has armed her with the talent of visual expression. Knowing to set up composition and set up a balance with elements and colours has contributed to her career as a painter

Her inspiration emerges basically from her childhood when she spent her summer holidays with her grandparents in Adelaide. They lived in a house designed during the 1950's which sparked a fascination for all things springing from that time. "Everything in that house opened and closed and fitted snugly. There were nooks and crannies everywhere. Even the record player had its own fold out cupboard which lit up when you opened it!" Like an El Dorado for an adventurous child. Besides her impressions from her grandparents' house, she is also inspired by Joan Miró. Many of her paintings in 'Cool Spaces' have the same stringent composition as the paintings of Miró. Balance is a key word for Miró's art which he creates with the shape of his figures and colours. His paintings appear to float, as does Ninham's. Besides their similarity composition methods, the two painters share the same joyfulness in their expression. And both capture picture elements from their childhood and uses them in paintings.

Another great artist like Pablo Picasso can also be spotted in her geometrical figures, especially the paintings from his cubist period. Mixing the composition from Miró with the abstract, geometrical figures from Picasso result in an art that is both original and recognisable.

"Cool Spaces" takes you back in the aesthetic era of the 1950's and is in many ways a reunion with stylistically consistent and modern classics. Ninham has created something continued that exists on its own premises due to her unique style.