



Cover: *Garden of History - Angel View I* (detail), 2006, acrylic on linen, 81.5 x 112 cm

Above: *Garden View*, 2006, acrylic on linen, 98.5 x 198 cm

Left: *Island*, 2006, acrylic on linen, 72.5 x 108.5 cm

Left bottom: *Token Gestures, Another Token Gesture, More Token Gestures*, Jovi clay, shellac and gold leaf, various dimensions

Flap top: *Salon Hang 1, Disasters of War - not a pretty picture*, 2006-2007, 6 c-types on metallic paper, mounted on dibond with acrylic (all unique states), various dimensions

Flap bottom: *Salon Hang 2, Disasters of War - not a pretty picture*, 2006-2007, 8 c-types on metallic paper, mounted on dibond with acrylic (all unique states), various dimensions

Inside left: *In the shadow of dust*, 2007, charcoal and acrylic on paper, 95 x 70 cm framed

Inside centre: *Garden of History - Angel View I, II and III*, 2006, acrylic on linen, 81.5 x 112 cm each



gallery barry keldoulis

2 Danks Street Waterloo Sydney  
 barry@gbk.com.au www.gbk.com.au  
 +61 2 8399 1240



Sarah **Smuts-Kennedy**



Sarah Smuts-Kennedy's *Painting Rubbish* presents a compelling map of grand narratives and intimate revelations. Renowned as a photographer, it is a marvel to discover that within the space of nine months the artist taught herself to paint and now includes paintings, drawings and sculptures in her portfolio. Her agenda as a photographer however, remains evident by the way in which she employs particular framing methods, an announced flatness and exposure of canvas, as well as her usual contemplative approach and focal precision. *Painting Rubbish*, despite its modest connotation, is an intricate matrix of conceptual frameworks. Smuts-Kennedy takes us on a masterful journey circumnavigating themes as diverse as religion, colonisation, the Western canon, globalisation, ecology and alchemy.

The paintings have a nostalgic sensibility akin to botanical illustrations, old sepia photographs and weathered newspaper clippings that have been misplaced in a dusty archive, long forgotten. They embellish the romantic overtones of Dutch masters, whose palettes created moody landscapes that subtly commented on the philosophical and religious intonations of their era. Smuts-Kennedy though, introduces a contemporary slant to arcadia by coyly injecting such exotic landscapes with points of contention in an attempt to undo our assumptive gaze. Based on photographs of littered forests taken while in residency in India, these are portraits of rubbish or perhaps more precisely, they are gardens of earthly and unearthly delights.

Smuts-Kennedy's paintings refer to the failings of society and the fracturing of modernism's agenda for an amalgamation of experiences and perspectives. *Garden of History-Angel View I - III*, show a number of paths meeting, illuminated by the light of a new dawn or dusk yet cast with deep shadows. Scientific and technological progress may have radically altered our experience of the world but for some, dare we say marginal or indigenous communities, it has also lead to unreconciled conflict and trauma. *Disasters of War - not a pretty picture I - XXIII*, a salon style wall of photographic details of the 'garden' paintings, disrupts all readings of the 'bigger' picture and leaves only abstract fragments of what may have been. Smuts-Kennedy is superbly demonstrating that history is not as definitive as perceived and is only a series of subjective accounts and impressions of time, not always factual. History is indeed fraught with anthropological and nomenclature frictions.

Smuts-Kennedy's divisive narration becomes even more apparent through the uncanny placement of the painting *Island* above a cluster of small amorphous sculptures entitled *Token Gestures, Another Token Gesture, and More Token Gestures*. The implications of

this arrangement perhaps refers to the moral paradox inherent within John Donne's statement "No man is an island" whereby we exist within a community but must also struggle to maintain a sense of individual integrity against all forms of opposition. The effects of globalisation, over-population, coercive politics, militarism, and mass consumption make it even more difficult for individuals to assume responsibility for their actions. It can at times feel as if any ethical impetus is but a token gesture when faced with a future littered with impending ecological disasters brought upon by the longstanding negligence of faceless corporations and first world nations' complacency. Still the insistence for *More Token Gestures* suggests unyielding hope and the urgency for a supreme understanding of interconnectedness.

It is noteworthy that while these token gestures appear as disparate organisms, their placement on brown plinths induces further investigation and reverie. Crudely constructed and unashamedly kitsch, these inexplicable golden objects seem to dance before the viewer, having semblances of lava, pinecones, coral and crystals. They may even be seen as replicas of something of significance, a prehistoric fossil or a displaced meteor. Then again if approached in a slightly different mood, they can be quite affronting and visceral, like a deposit or expulsion the artist herself gave birth to. Perhaps they are matter still evolving or more to the point, matter transforming because they do give the impression of being in the process of something quite profound. Like an alchemist play performed in three parts, *Painting Rubbish* slowly reveals its foundations: analysis, deconstruction and finally, reconstruction.

Smuts-Kennedy's body of work is not so much self-indulgent as generous, providing a series of beguiling landscapes and odd monuments that penetrate our current ambivalent and apathetic state. The final pieces of this puzzle are the *Dust* series, ghostly charcoal drawings of a familiar but barely discernible landscape. Taken from the sketchbook of a botanist, these could be the last record of a natural wonder, a garden that disappeared and along with it the many individual and unique species or forms that made its whole. Smuts-Kennedy paints a pretty grim picture if you choose to see it that way. It may all come down to choice. While history unravels, it is of utmost importance that we pause and reflect on past mistakes before considering the path we might take in the future and the necessary changes required of us. *Painting Rubbish* radiates not only a golden hue but an omnipresent desire for personal, and global, transformation.

*Sarah Rawlings*  
September 2006