A response to *VESTIGES*.

The painted surface in Adrienne Gaha's latest works is restless. In the landscapes here, a single colour has been painted and then wiped back with solvents and rags and brushes. Exaggerating paint's liquid qualities, the images she makes are evanescent. Like mirages, the forms seem unstable and transitional; at once, holding shape and dissolving back into paint. It is the oscillation between these two states that sets up an elemental tension in all of the works here.

Deliberately, Gaha provokes this restless to-ing and fro-ing between figuration and abstraction; between depth and surface; narrative and a refusal of that narrative. An adept draughtsperson, she displays control of the imagery on the one hand and abandoned, spontaneous mark making on the other. There can be visual transparency and depth: Cupid and a swooning Psyche, Bunny's languorous women, clouds and trees and space. But she disrupts these passages with pools of opaque paint. Dribbling and splashing, they draw us back to the painting's flat surface and the materiality of the paint.

Gaha manages to create this play of abstraction and figuration without a deadening irony, or a negation of representation. Rather she conceives of a space where both the figurative and the abstract can co-exist. This is a way of addressing Modernist maxims (painters must), and reconciling these with her slightly 'perverse', as she calls it, enjoyment of narrative and traditional painting practices. She has created her own workspace. Here, as in dreams, disparate images from the tradition of figurative painting – from Titian, Bouguereau, Rupert Bunny – may appear alongside Big Bad Banksia Men, comic book characters and even rugby players. These paintings evoke a dreamlike, liminal place.

The finished paintings emerge rather than being willed into existence. They are not predestined. The 'vestiges' of references to other painters remain alongside traces of each step of the painting process. Wiping back with turpentine, building up with brushstrokes, making glazes - she uses all the ways that paint has been, and can be, handled. Nothing is hidden or disguised. These are open paintings and as such the viewer shares in those moments of surprise that Gaha must have enjoyed in the process of their making. She paints her way out of a self-imposed 'corner', allowing the unpredictable. It is a risky and rewarding way to work. Matisse, Per Kirkeby and Peter Doig come to mind.

Resonances from the tradition of figurative painting slip by under a surface of expressionist mark making: Delicately painted drapery brushes against a rough silhouette; a detailed grisaille is disturbed by a burst of joyful painting (for painting's sake) where the movement of Gaha's brush seems automatic, or independent of purpose. Conceptual concerns are embodied in the actual handling of the paint. She manages to balance opposing elements, in a mutually sustaining tension in this way. But there is no synthesis here. In Gaha's hands the painted surface is unsettled – unsettling – and as such has an endless immediacy. It is in this way that she allows the past to become present.

Brooke Fitzsimons.
London, 2014.

# ADRIENNE GAHA
## *Vestiges*

(Top) *Red Winter Landscape*, 2013, oil on linen, 50 x 100 cm
(Bottom) *Mondenasd*, 2013, oil on linen, 117 x 153 cm

# ADRIENNE GAHA - *Vestiges*

Exhibition Dates 25 February 2014 - 29 May 2014

Sofitel Melbourne on Collins

*Adrienne Gaha was born in Sydney in 1960, She studied at Sydney College of the Arts and National Art School and works between Australia, France and the UK. She has been exhibiting in Australia since 1982. She is represented in public collections including, Natonal Gallery of Victoria, Art Gallery of Western Australia, Monash University Museum, University of Tasmania.*


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(Above) *Umber Study (Rupert Bunny)*, 2013, oil on linen, 117 x 153 cm
(Front Cover) *Purple Study* (detail), 2013, oil on linen, 100 x 100 cm
(Back Cover) *Blue Study After Bouguereau*, 2013, oil on linen, 153 x 117 cm

*Good Farries*, 2013, oil on linen, 101 x 105 cm