

L'eau

15-25 October 2014

A new exhibition of paintings, "*Osso Buco*" jewellery and "*Painting with Light*" artist lamps.



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Pine St Gallery, 1/64 Pine St, Chippendale NSW 2008

Mon-Fri: 9.30am-5.30pm

Saturday 25 Oct: 11am-3pm

Water ("l'eau") is the underlying theme of this exhibition.

The series of paintings "*A Window to the River*" is the outcome of an artist residency I undertook at [Moly-Sabata](#) in France in 2013. I spent a month in a studio overlooking the Rhône river, in a small village, south of Lyon. I

painted every day, with my easel by the open window and the river as a companion. The blue quietness of the water reflected the changing colours of the trees on the opposite bank: a tender pink at dawn and an array of blue and green hues as the day rose. The tranquil scenery through my window led me to delve into abstraction in my paintings.

On my return from France, I moved to the seaside. The wild and roaring waves - which carried coloured frosted glass, sea-shells and bleached bones - inspired my "*Osso Buco*" jewellery. The fluidity and transparency of resin is the perfect medium to capture the delightful unpredictability and organic vivacity of the waves.

In my studio in Sydney, I continue to explore the luminosity and transformative nature of water, reflecting on change and bringing colour into the night with my "*Painting with Light*" lamp series.

Water inspires my work from one continent to another, and its seamless form and connective presence clearly runs through all the artwork in this exhibition "*L'eau*".

For more details, contact:

Rita Orsini

Ph: 0431 908 663

orsini@studio205.net.au

<http://ritaorsini.studio205.net.au>

<http://www.linkedin.com/pub/rita-orsini/74/83b/b78>

Opening speech by Dr Bruce Adams, art historian - 16 October 2014

It is an honour to be invited to talk about a show whose genesis was in a place that has been a compelling magnet for both Rita and myself.

I am referring to the space where Rita created the paintings that she calls A Window to the River. To explain the resonance of that series for me, I will indulge in a little prehistory of my own by describing my first encounter with a place that marked a then forgotten chapter in Australia's history of modern art. I also want to reflect on how that location in France has become a catalyst for an energetic leap in Rita's own work. Finally, in considering both her paintings from France and the objects Rita has since made in Sydney, I will be asking you to think about two cities of the mind.

39 years ago this month I got off a local train that was travelling north along the Rhône Valley between Marseilles and Lyon. My stop was a small riverside village in the Ardèche, called Serrières. The day was hot and the town seemed empty. But I came across one elderly gentleman and I asked him in my hesitant Australian French "où est Moly-Sabata s'il vous plaît?" I can still see his apprehension change to a smile as he understood the name in my question. He pointed over the river to an old building on the other side. I recognised its form: an ancient lump of weathered pise, bleached by the light, stretched out in the sun alongside the Rhône. As I crossed the bridge linking Serrières to the village of Sablons on the other side, I

felt I was the first visitor in ages to have asked the directions to this old building. It seemed I was approaching an abandoned hulk. Every door and shutter was closed tight against the world. I learned later that a fire had gutted its interior. But around the back there was still a hand-painted wooden sign on the door to its walled garden: Moly-Sabata: Peinture Tissage Poterie. (Moly-Sabata: Painting Weaving Pottery). It was the vestige that confirmed the point of my pilgrimage.

45 years before me, in 1930, another Australian had made that same journey with very different results. Her Moly-Sabata was animated by an art colony whose goals held her there until her death in 1951. In the early 1970s I had become aware of both the place and the person through some old photos and French journals that the artist Grace Crowley showed me in her flat overlooking the harbour at Manly. Crowley told me about Anne Dangar, the Sydney painter who became a village potter in France.

Among the things that fired my imagination were black and white photos of Moly-Sabata taken by a French Benedictine monk towards the end of Dangar's life. They included a view through an open pair of French doors onto a balcony that overlooked the Rhone. That outlook, across the river to the hills of the Ardèche, is the one that Rita enjoyed as she painted these works.

In the early 1990s I returned to Moly-Sabata to undertake the field work that resulted in my book, *Rustic Cubism*, published in America 10 years ago. During my years of writing, the old building remained a vivid image, like a talisman of the lives I was resurrecting in my mind. It was an emotional connection I had with my subject. So you can imagine the impact when Rita, my French teacher back in the 1990s, contacted me last year to tell me she too was heading there. Now that I see her show I am convinced that her month-long residency at Moly-Sabata in the European summer of 2013 was a pivotal moment for her work.

Unlike the early Moly-Sabatans I had studied in my book, Rita is not a self-proclaimed Cubist. Indirectly, however, Cubist space is an implied heritage in her complex knuckles of interlocking semi-figurative forms. But Rita herself speaks more of Pointillism, as in the fractal properties of her illuminated objects. The paintings themselves remind me of the later years of the School of Paris, particularly the organic naturalism of the painterly abstraction of the immediate postwar years. They are drifting, submersive layers of penetrating colour and bouncing light, metaphors of the changing river scene where they were painted. Change and movement denote life.

Moly-Sabata itself has turned a significant corner over the years I have recorded it. Today it is

a revitalised contemporary art centre whose residencies attract a divergent range of artists. As far as I am aware, Rita is the first Australian who has painted there since Anne Dangar's time. I say Australian, but my French friends who met her during her residency immediately reclaimed her as French. And why wouldn't they?

If Rita wasn't such a Franco-Sydneysider, as one of her Facebook friends called her, I may never have met her. It was in her Continuing Education classes at the university that we first started talking and discovered our shared enthusiasm for artists like Dangar, who straddled France and Australia.

If I were to search for any commonality between Dangar's French pottery of all those years ago and Rita's work now, I would say a vibrant sense of embodied energy.

Energy in Rita's hands is fluidity, the interweaving flow of organic shapes. Energy is in the multiple colours of her vertical tubes of light. To call her illuminated cylinders lamps is to limit their potential scale, for I see them more as maquettes for opalescent towers, prismatic lighthouses by the sea. Her jewellery, on the other hand, remains intentionally small, being items of bodily adornment. Like fetish objects in the proper sense of that term, these bracelets and bowl-like vessels connote a much larger energy, in their case the ocean of life.

Rita calls this jewellery Osso Buco, bones with a hole, succulent treats. But the movement of the sea, and the forms it creates, are their source. Rita describes the "fluidity and transparency of resin as the perfect medium to capture the delightful unpredictability and organic vivacity of the waves." She is speaking of the waves but for me "organic vivacity" is the most succinct description for Rita's work. Of the two cities I mentioned earlier, vivacity is the first.

The Moly-Sabatans of the 1930s spoke of form and history as vital, organic concepts, linking the past and present into one circular continuum. Dangar embraced this idea in the countryside about her, in the rhythms of the seasons and the flow of the Rhône. Move forward 80 years and we find an artist like Rita responding to a similar vitality using her own pictorial means.

If vivacity is the city of life, tenacity is the city of purpose.

Art is a tenacious beast that never lets go. In France I came across a ceramic plaque that Dangar had inscribed with a simple aphorism: "Life so short, the craft so long to learn." It was a testament to the maker's obligation to the integrity of her own practice.

Art and craft, like language and communication are life-long vocations. They demand our own continuing development. Rita Orsini demonstrates this. She is a painter, an object maker, a very stylish linguist and a passionate advocate for her culture. She is the woman at the centre of a very creative family. Tenacity, my second city, is the drive that propels the vivaciousness of her pursuits.

There is no better way to declare this show open than to ask you to join me now in applauding the artist.