

Shana James Precipitate Catalogue Essay 2007
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Precipitate: (v/b) 1. to cause to happen too soon; to bring on 2. to throw or fall as from a height. 3. to condense and fall as rain or snow.

“Precipitate”, the latest solo exhibition of Perth-based artist Shana James, is a connected series of oil paintings dealing with the themes of change, adversity and resilience. Drawing on a rich vein of mythological references, both real and imagined, James’s work invites the viewer into a watery world of symbolic imagination.

In her paintings strange objects fall from the sky; flowers, colours and odd symbols rain down on figures adrift in boats on an expansive sea. The nature of these sudden showers is ambiguous; they loom and miss or swamp the tiny crafts with floods of colour. The figures occupy this world in an uncertain manner, rarely in the right place at the right time. The recurrent appearance of a mysterious red symbol, with its ever changing function, reminds us too that the nature of meaning is never fixed but is found within the very individual readings of the viewer.

James’s work is not easily classified. There are touches of Surrealism in her startling juxtapositions that create complex emotional shifts between tranquility and unease. There is also a strong sense of the wide-eyed wonder and uncorrupted vision of the Innocent or Naive art movement. Yet James’s images are not unsophisticated, these are modern symbols of change caught in evocative moments of stillness. The power of these images lies in their ability to express the mutability and fragility of life, with all its misunderstandings, misdirection’s and mistakes, and yet retain within them, an incredible sense of the transient beauty of the world.

Intense colour has been used throughout the exhibition adding a powerful vibrancy to the symbolic narrative. The distinctive liquid textures created in the smaller pieces authentically evoke the watery quality of the ocean. These are mature and detailed works that provoke serious contemplation and a sense of breathless wonder.