

# LILLIAN MORRISSEY

*Highly Commended: Contemporary Art Awards 2017*

## Changing Landscapes

*By Caitlin Eyre*

In her abstract painting *Awakening* (2016), artist Lillian Morrissey (b. 1986) utilises the analogy and imagery of architecture to investigate contemporary Australian society and the changing urban and suburban landscape. The acrylic on board painting features a highly detailed and heavily layered patchwork of crisp lines, gridded maps, architectural forms and intersecting shards of colour that radiate out from black circles. The aerial-style view from which the painting has been executed offers the viewer a sense of distanced detachment from their familiar urban and suburban surroundings; a sensation somewhat akin to the experience of looking out the window of an aeroplane in flight. By focusing on the detailed concentration of fractured shards, lines and shapes of which they are, reveal the complex systems that make up our neighbourhoods, cities and towns. Morrissey abstracts the familiar until it becomes something strange and unfamiliar.

Brightly coloured and heavily detailed, the crisp precision of Morrissey's aesthetic conceals the extensive processes and dedicated labour involved in the creation of *Awakening* (2016). Carefully constructed from printed collages of the artist's own drawings and photographs of architectural forms, the screen prints that form the foundation of Morrissey's painting have been painstakingly layered, repeated and sanded back for aesthetic effect. The drawings that Morrissey utilises in her work have been appropriated from various sources, including photographs of construction sites in Melbourne and Sydney, archival maps of Australian cities from various eras, images of suburban Australian houses, and maps from different cities around the world. In contrast to the stark sterility and machine-like renderings of commercial architectural plans, this work has a distinctly painterly quality that bears the hallmarks of the artist's own hand and her unique artistic expression. The artist's intuitive use of paint introduces elements such as line, colour and shape to the work, as

well as adding interest and definition to the multi-layered illustrations.

The inspiration for *Awakening* (2016) and other works in this series came to Morrissey during an artist's residency in Bundeena, a small 1950s-style suburban neighbourhood on the southernmost edge of Sydney. Positioned in a neighbourhood where the city ends and the bush begins, Morrissey was prompted to consider the spread of housing over the Australian landscape and our ever-evolving

attitudes towards the 'Australian Dream' of the suburban home. The continual process of layering and sanding back the different architectural images recreates the inevitable cycle of destruction and creation that marks this evolution, each new layer being built upon the

partially demolished ruins of those that came before it. The resulting works stand as an evolving memorial to the 'Australian Dream', tracing our past while simultaneously mapping the development of future housing practices. In this way, Morrissey's painting exudes a sense of timelessness and innovation, simultaneously stretching back into the past and reaching ever forwards into the future.



On this page, *Awakening* (2016), acrylic on board, 120 x 240cm

*Image courtesy of the artist*

Lillian Morrissey's artwork can be viewed at:  
<http://www.contemporaryartawards/finalist-exhibition-2017.com>