

KATYA PETETSKAYA

AirSpace Projects: *The Spill* 2016

Ecological Vulnerabilities

By Dr Julie Rees

Katya Petetskaya's (b.1981) recent solo exhibition of painting *The Spills* (2015-2016) are as distinct as they are compelling. She creates paintings that fuse landscape and abstraction, evoking a moody and dramatic atmosphere. Attracted at first by Katya's colour palette, the viewer finds, on closer inspection, that these works actually respond to ecological disasters.

Katya's inspiration for this series was formed while working as a Russian translator on an oil spill documentary in 2014. This experience sparked a new conceptual underpinning in her art practice. The Sydney artist's work sensitively deals with the politics of contamination and the obligation to manage such events. Katya explores oil spill sites in Russia and Australia as Anthropocene landscapes (these locations were chosen to echo her cultural roots and her connection to Australia).

She examines these sites for the unique interactions they produce between nature and culture and between human and landscape. As a result, her paintings provide an ambiguous experience that diverts the viewer from conventional interpretations of the subject matter.



Spill No. 8 (2015) and *Spill No.11* (2016) are two wonderful examples of Katya's work. Her colour palette represents the burst of colours seen when light reflects an oil film atop water. The artist's bold brush strokes add a further contrast, vividly animating the composition. *The Spills* (2015-2016) serves as a promising introduction to Katya's work. Her approach delicately tackles environmental issues, and is more expressive than didactic, reminding us about the misgivings of mining and implications of human error. However, these paintings not only document affected oil spill areas but encourage the viewer to reflect on our relationship with the environment and ultimately with ourselves.

Exhibiting since 2010, Katya is a prolific artist currently completing a Master of Arts in painting at UNSW Art & Design. With a number of artist residencies, scholarships, and awards under her belt, she is an exciting artist with her work already being featured in private collections. As a result, Katya has begun creating her next body of work titled *The Forces of Formation*. This series will build upon *The Spill* (2015-16) by further exploring the effects of fugitive emissions, oil spills, and other excesses resulting from human interference.

On top of this page, *Spill No.8* (2015), synthetic polymer paint on MDF board, 61 x 91cm.

On the bottom of this page, *Spill No.11* (2016), synthetic polymer paint on Masonite board, 94 x 63cm.



Images courtesy of the artist

Katya Petetskaya's works can be viewed by visiting her website ekatsky.tumblr.com.

This article can be retrieved from www.contemporaryartawards.com.