

Vanessa Gardiner: Vessels of Light

Vanessa Gardiner is expert at recognising and depicting the geometry in nature. Her paintings are full of coastal light and the way the sea engages the shore in an endless dialogue. In a sense the sea draws the landscape, excavating it and caressing it over centuries, sculpting it into the most intricate and specific shapes. Gardiner identifies this elemental relationship and makes it the focus of her imagery: history and geology play their roles too, and her paintings incorporate a sense of other disciplines, especially archaeology and architecture. These various energies and components are resolved into a still image which yet also contains movement.

There are no storms in Gardiner's work, the underlying drama is more important: the age-old stand and shift of rock, the relentless attack of the tide. The surface calm masks this conflict of forces, implied by her characteristic acute angles rather than described. If you run your fingers lightly over one of Gardiner's paintings (not recommended unless you actually own one, of course), you can feel incised lines and surface texture built into the image. This is like the underlying structure of the landscape she evokes so well.

Gardiner's crisply authoritative abstract shapes and beautifully worked surfaces combine with her resonant colour to make images of serenity and power. If the inlets and bays she paints so evocatively are celebrated through her understanding of the interplay of geometry and nature, her paintings are also vessels of light, containers of clarity, rhythm and balance. They speak to us of recollected action, of experience sifted through memory. Their radiance moves and beguiles us.

Andrew Lambirth 2021