



a question of counterpoint DONNA BENNINGFIELD





A Question of Counterpoint is my latest body of work, and it has pushed me to explore portraiture on a whole new level. No longer is the sitter visually recognisable, as their emotional marks and their collective consciousness are captured in a new vision.

This body of work is a relatively new exploration of the genre of portraiture which is referred to as *Expanded Portraiture*. It is more commonly practised amongst photographers. Photographer Eileen Powers states¹, "At its most universal, a portrait is the essence of the subject, but that subject is not limited to people; a portrait can be any reflection of an essence or idea." She goes on to say that the portrait may not be the actual person; nor is it the artist. For her, it is the representation of an idea.

In previous exhibitions, my sitters have been painted in a more conventional manner where they are recognisable. Many appeared as recently as 2019 in *Migrating Souls*. In a desire to push the boundaries of portraiture, I encouraged the sitters to make marks in response to a set of various verbally-described emotional scenarios common to all sitters. In addition, their mark-making was further expanded through the process of exploring the potential possibility of a previously unknown life of the sitter. Their unique collection of marks was later transposed on to canvas with charcoal or paint, as a foundation of the work. What may appear as reeds in Peter Hanley's expanded portrait, Japanese calligraphy in Tanya Geysler's, or a hand in Mike Butler's, are in fact the artist's working of the non-representational marks created by the sitter. Later in the process, more recognizable images like dogs, cockatoos, faces, piano keys and butterflies, reference a more direct visual link to the sitter's past, present or future existence.

A Question of Counterpoint is a respectful borrowing of the statement of Peter Porter² in regard to Arthur Boyd, who illustrated four of Porter's poetry books. Porter stated "Arthur likes to use words to inspire him to paint, not that he takes too much notice of them, it's a question of counterpoint." By definition, a counterpoint is "a thing that forms a pleasing or notable contrast to something else". The "something else" is who we are in this life, and that is juxtaposed against who we are in our past, present or future.

An additional series of 8 works on slate tiles represents my own mark-making response to various emotions.

Donna Beningfield

¹ <https://eileenpowersphotography.com/defining-and-expanding-the-idea-of-portraiture>

² <https://www.studiointernational.com/index.php/peter-porter-1929-2010-an-appreciation-through-an-examination-of-his-collaborative-projects-with-arthur-boyd-1920-1999>



image list

Front cover: Donna Beningfield, Mike Butler: *The Guardian of My Utopia* (detail), 2020, Acrylic and charcoal on canvas, 100 x 76cm.

Pages 1-2: Donna Beningfield, Grace Vigar: *The Dog Whisperer* (detail), 2019, Acrylic and charcoal on canvas, 91 x 122cm.

Page 3: Donna Beningfield, Tanya Geysler: *The Masuku of a Geisha*, 2020, Acrylic and charcoal on canvas, 90 x 60cm.

Left: Donna Beningfield, Peter Hanley: *The Joy of Being Human* (detail), 2020, Acrylic and charcoal on canvas, 90 x 90cm.

Above: Donna Beningfield, Mark Three, 2020, Acrylic and copper leaf on slate tile, 30 x 30cm.

Back cover: Donna Beningfield, Meredith Starck: *Linage Through Time* (detail), 2019, Acrylic and charcoal on canvas, 91x 122cm.



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