

INGE DOESBURG

THE SPEAKING EARTH



RDS GALLERY

Inge Doesburg—New Work 2019

The Speaking Earth

In Inge Doesburg's prints and paintings of landscapes, sky, water and earth lose their attributes. Clay-orange earth twists or unfolds like an opening hand. Clouds are scratchy and crystalline and have more mass than earth; water pushes its mercury-like meniscus above the land that holds it. Ink's thin flow rejects mimesis, yet still means cloud. Tactile and visual registers are juxtaposed.



Deliberate inconsistencies in pictorial strategies force the viewer to see simultaneously the represented object and its fabrication.

It did not surprise me to learn that Doesburg had drawn on Rainer Maria Rilke's *Duino Elegies* (1923) in previous works. The *Elegies* take place within the gap between the perceived and the represented, that, as modernist artists insisted, is the true province of the aesthetic experience. While for Rilke the act of representation was humanity's primary attribute, he saw it as driven by the impossibility of reciprocity. The artist returns to the insentient earth her capacity to respond, a capacity that depends on the earth's very existence, yet one to which the earth is indifferent. Against this one-sided relationship, Rilke offers the arbitration of angels.

In the *First Elegy*, he writes, 'Beauty is nothing/ but the onset of terror we're still just able to bear,/ and we admire it so because it calmly disdains/ to destroy us.' By the *Ninth Elegy*, the relationship with the world has become more urgent 'because being here is so much, and because everything/ in this fleeting world seems to need us, and/ strangely speaks to us'. He asks, 'Earth: isn't this what you want? to arise/ in us invisible?'. In one of Doesburg's smaller images, a tiny lake

offers a tiny echo to a jagged, angular cloud painted in thick impasto that reminds me of both Blake's and Michelangelo's gigantic but troubled gods. That richness of reference is an



attribute of Doesburg's practice. Just as the works respond to the written form, they converse with artists as different as Anselm Kiefer and Anna Caselberg. Kiefer gives her both grandeur and a sharp, anxious sgraffito that suggests the troubled human relationship with land. Caselberg

offers the bones of a very specific place, Otago Harbour and its peninsula, with all human interruptions pushed aside.

In this collection that ranges from the very large to the almost miniature, scale is used deliberately to offer either the immersive and overwhelming storm clouds of a generalized landscape or the miniaturized and therefore assimilable specificity of a particular place. Scalar dislocations also occur within works, where the attention to the texture of a cloud, or



a sweep of water, is performed by a single brushstroke against tonal modulations that convey volume or distance. Doesburg's approach is restless and questing, as each painting offers contradictory promises of resolution. Such landscapes would once have signified

a restful and reassuring sublime, with every promise of human sovereignty; but now they are images of things seldom seen, landscapes empty of people and autonomous, the kind that were already disappearing when Rilke wrote. Yet, now, it seems, that landscape does need us, and the impossibility of reciprocity has become political rather than ontological.

Bridie Lonie, November 2019

Inge Doesburg holds a Diploma in Fine Arts with Honours and a major in printmaking (1993) from the Otago Polytechnic. At 6 Castle Street, Dunedin, she co-founded in 1995 what would become the Inge Doesburg Gallery and Studio and, later in 2019, RDS Gallery directed by Hilary Radner, Inge Doesburg and Marie Strauss.

In addition to running a gallery, Inge has exhibited throughout New Zealand and is represented in international collections. In recent years, she has moved into mixed media works and painting, finding her inspiration in the great outdoors. David Eggleton, New Zealand's Poet Laureate 2019-2021, describes her art in the following terms: 'Doesburg delivers images of the land that look as if they've been scratched on pitted rock, then given patinas of orange lichen and silvery muttonbird fat. Tree bark, eel skin and fish skin spring to mind as you gaze at her print textures. . . . [T]he wild weather she depicts harks back to 19th century German Romantic landscapes. Sploshes of white or grey-blue are left to drip and animate surfaces, evoking fast-travelling fog, mist and cloud that dapples and darkens the light. In the end all is atmosphere: squalls process across louring bluffs and headlands and hill crowns in a lashing, ecstatic frenzy.'

With Master of Arts (Art History and Theory, 1998) and a PhD (2018) from the University of Otago, **Bridie Lonie** has published widely in such outlets as *Art New Zealand* as well as contributing numerous exhibition essays over a thirty year career, which she began as an artist. Her book with Marilyn Webb, *Marilyn Webb: Prints and Pastels* (2004) was published by University of Otago Press. Her research interests include climate change and art in the public arena. She is currently preparing a manuscript on art and climate change.

References: Galway Kinnell and Hannah Liebmann *The Essential Rilke* (New York: HarperCollins, 1999), 131, 133, and 135; David Eggleton, 'Weathering' (review of four Dunedin artists), *New Zealand Listener*, 19-25 August 2006, 48.

Images: *Blueskin Bay*, Inge Doesburg, 2019, acrylic on unstretched canvas, 1570 x 1800 mm; *Untitled*, Inge Doesburg, 2019, mixed media on paper, 340 x 480 mm; *Untitled [Lake]*, Inge Doesburg, 2019, acrylic on canvas board, 230 x 280 mm; *Headland*, Inge Doesburg, 2019, acrylic on handmade paper, 560 x 750 mm framed.

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