

## Painting in a thermocline mirage

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When describing her experience of the Australian Regenerative Medicine Institute (ARMI) residency, artist Candice McGaw often rubs her fingers together. It is like she's handling a very tactile and subtle fabric, available to her through sense and imagination. It is the same imagined touch that she brings to her latest work *Transient Structures*. McGaw's role as the artist is to bridge art and science, connecting a common language of explicit materiality and implicit curiosity.

So imagine the deep space of a body, a mirage not dissimilar to an underwater environment:

Step 1: you begin at the focused diagrams of muscle

Step 2: you then walk through the threads and knots of a muscle structure

Step 3: you walk towards the ambient and galactic pathways of satellite cells and chromal drifts

Step 4: you are transported to the constant movement and interplay between cells as they frolic, chase each other, pass balls, roll and form into muscle matter.

Here the mirage created by McGaw in *Transient Structures* is a thermocline between art and science. A thermocline is described as an abrupt change of temperature in a body of water. When you have warm water beside cold water, there is a difference in density, which produces a thin (thermoc)line. Thermoclines have been described as the appearance of wrinkled glass in water, or the foggy blur you see when hot air rises off the tarmac at airports or desert roads (and have often been linked to mirages). Different schools of fish swim in different temperatures, where the thermocline's thin mirage attracts different schools and species into close proximity. Similarly disciplines are drawn together along guiding lines where materiality and curiosity make a foggy blur between art and science. This has anecdotally been described as a kind of twilight zone.

McGaw has fully immersed herself in the experience of her residency, and in particular her mentorship by scientist Danni Ratnayake. Ratnayake's research explores how the muscles in Zebrafish regenerate without scarification. Through Ratnayake's guidance, McGaw was exposed to the astounding machines of capture at ARMI such as the confocal microscope, which locates life cells in living tissue. McGaw has spoken to the disorienting sensation of falling into the frame with these cells, where depth was altered, leading to the imagined experience of traversing the structures. Looking through the x-rays she wasn't able to step out and construct observed studies from a distance. In this space, she too had been captured, and transported into the twilight zone of scientific intensification of scale and depth.

McGaw's art practice is based around capturing the sensuous qualities of the subject (such as food, architecture, the body) and exploring how this translates through the application of paint into layering, colour, gesture and form. In previous works McGaw has shown the edges and borders of her subjects being ruptured by the active practice of paint, yet where the forms are still contained and managed within the frame. Here the work steps deep into the frame, passing through layers, falling through chromal drifts and dwelling in abstraction.

In *Transient Structures* movement has become the subject. The frames of each work are fragmented, and like cells, they attempt to frolic, play and talk to each other. The cells describe the movement and density of muscle regeneration through the art principles of

line, shape, layers, colour and the imagined touch of proximity. Walking through the exhibition we become McGaw's hand gestures, as we are asked to step through and imagine the tactile sensation of things we struggle to see, yet understand through our bodily sensations. In this stepped relational space, we have the choice to stay with McGaw and Ratnayake in the thermocline between art and science, or pass through to colder and warmer waters and look in from a distance. Such a view allows us to experience the migration and mapping between scientific process and a painterly experience. These *Transient Structures* are a thin line indeed.