

Mitch Cairns



Installation view: Mitch Cairns, *Polaroid Sketch*, 2021/2022, at *Adelaide Biennial of Australian Art: Free/State* Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide, 2022

Cairns presents two separate but related works. *Polaroid Sketch*, 2021, takes the form of a ten-thousand-word poem. Filling an entire wall, it is intentionally difficult to read. Its content could only be realised as a visual, critical mass, to be encountered in sprawling completeness. Columns of text repeat a series of what might be names, their origin unknown. They twist and contort, with slight subversions in their order. 'Goldie' and 'Patch'. 'Whiskey' and 'Pennie'. Alternately in 'a box'. 'A bag'. 'In the kitchen'. Tiny differences in phrasing become apparent, an 'on' is substituted for an 'in'. A 'the' disappears and reappears. The bag is now 'on the verandah', Pennie and Whiskey inside. This shift becomes hypnotic – an incantation of some past event. Eventually, hundreds of formations later, a 'tailpiece' reveals some 'central experience', from which all else has flowed. Time has passed. It concludes: *Recently, a noticeable tobacco stain that marked two of my upper incisor teeth began to fade.*

For all the inscrutability of what lay before, a statement of fact, time stamped.

Accompanying this, more text features on works on stretchers. Paintings, almost. Each holds a single idea. The text is cleaved from vinyl-printed alphabets of various typefaces, sliced and arranged as required for the purpose. Alongside are markings. They are the markings of an artist for whom drawing is a fundamental practice. Whereas Cairns's paintings can often be laborious, detailed renderings, remarkable in their use of the medium, there is a quickness to these works, but no less certainty or singularity. That these can be rendered with such conviction but so sparingly is almost an act of divination. The hand moved deliberately; no error possible. If *Polaroid Sketch* is a vast searching, a means of making sense of some particular event, then these stretchered works distil disorder into delicate aphorisms. They feel like truth.

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