

Patrick Hartigan – The Ground

By Eloise Hastings, *The ReviewBoard*, 7 July 2020



installation view: Patrick Hartigan - The Ground, The Commercial, Sydney, 2020 (photo: The Commercial)

Amidst a dense gathering of industrial warehouse estates, utes, forklifts and discarded signage, sits the Commercial Gallery. With its intense concrete interior walls of enviable spatial height and exposed workings not dissimilar to a Berlin bunker. Yet not at all disparaging to fine art as concrete's gritty and grey appearance has evolved to an independent artistic medium thanks to Le Corbusier and Tadao Ando. And, whilst the gallery walls don't pretend to have the signature precision of those architectural masters, they don't need to, for the current show concrete imperfections feed purposefully and beautifully into Patrick Hartigan's abstracted forms.

No better example than with *Great births*, where the dappled grey wall blemishes and cracks harmonise with the slither of a painting on reversed masonite board. The black effortlessly curved figure (nudging perhaps at Matisse) appears out of a white base of clogged and gaping woven pores. A single outline carves the silhouette of a waist and torso and somehow intrigues the viewer to look at what Hartigan chose to see. The implied swelling of a belly, nipples and toes. A piece that is apparently the result of Hartigan's 'five minutes of happiness'.

Yet was this just a momentary bittersweet pleasure, as Hartigan's dark and heavy stencilled piece *Roma* and the large canvas work portraying *The Worshippers from overhead* can't help but communicate a sense of anxiety through the creased edges, strained and raw.

Is this perhaps the start of what we might get used to viewing? A fragile body of work produced during troubled times that embraces collective vulnerabilities and imperfections. Helping us try to make sense of a conflicted and imperfect moment.