

The Subtle Ether

Samantha Clark

Text by Philip Watkins, Hobart, Sep 2007

Until a person has thought out the stars and their interspaces, he has hardly learnt that there are things much more terrible than monsters of shape, namely, monsters of magnitude without known shape. Such monsters are the voids and waste places of the sky. (Thomas Hardy, Two on a Tower)

In the light of Samantha Clark's *The Subtle Ether*, human objectivity doesn't simply encompass truth for its own sake. It is, rather, a creative process, an imposition on physical reality, borne of all too human desire – to make sense of being in a universe seemingly oblivious to human yearning.

The abstract structures we use to navigate this world and to communicate with, establish a division between objectivity and subjectivity; a mismatch between the generic and the contingent that would suggest a void at the heart of experience (to truly account for specific instances would require the impossibly absurd notion of a new language or science for each separate perception). For Clark this space between terms, between definitions, is a dynamic flow of conditional conjecture that's never resolved. Because 'ether' was a term invented to account for a theoretical 'something' that light passed through to get from A to B, it becomes an apt symbol for the artist to articulate the creative act. As Clark states, *the subtle ether... is longing made substance*.

...whatever the stars were made for, they were not made to please our eyes. It is the same in everything; nothing is made for man. (Thomas Hardy, Two on a Tower)

The subtle ether then can also allude to the space between the viewer and the artwork as an osmotic give and take of ideas and perceptions. It is also a vehicle of hope. However vain it might be to attempt reconciliation between the objective and subjective, artist and viewer or rationality and the horror of the universe, it's Clark's faith in the power of the imagination to find a passage between the signposts of current concepts that shines through. She presents us with an exquisite juxtaposition of physical and aesthetic structure that heightens awareness of our common ability to go with the 'ether'. A planetarium in a wall of midges, faces in the clouds, it's all in your mind.

Samantha Clark's association with Tasmania began in 2000 when she received a Scottish Arts Council Australia residency at the University of Tasmania, Tasmanian School of Art, where she has once again been resident artist for the last two months.

The Subtle Ether was initiated during a residency at Wysing Arts Centre, Bourn, Cambridge in 2004-05. A publication with DVD, published by Wysing Arts Centre and designed in collaboration with Mark Beever (in association with CAST and Devonport Regional Gallery) can be purchased from the CAST office.