

*Invisible Silence – Recent Works by Slavica Zivkovic*

Ceramic artist Megan Patey reflects on Slavica Zivkovic's recent exhibition at Wollongong Art Gallery.



Slavica Zivkovic, *Invisible Silence I*, 2015, serigraph

Searching. Longing. Yearning. Glimpsing. Finding. These are the words that echo inside me when I contemplate the recent work of Slavica Zivkovic.

Zivkovic's prints, drawings and sculptural pieces were recently on show at the Wollongong City Gallery in her exhibition *Invisible Silence*. Everything in this exhibition was selected by Zivkovic to produce a carefully orchestrated celebration of several years' work.

As well as the prints, drawings and sculptures, other items – such as small antique cabinets acting as supports for the sculptures, and two large Turkish dough baskets suspended from the ceiling – formed an integral part of this large exhibition.

Zivkovic's art is made up of her invented imagery: symbols from her travels, and echoes of her Serbian parentage. As Sasha Grishin notes in the finely written catalogue essay, Zivkovic remains based in the Southern Highlands in Australia, while spiritually her art celebrates a very individual internalised vision that

exists neither on earth, nor in heaven, but on another plane of existence characterised by an invisible silence.[1]

Through her subtle use of layering, Zivkovic draws us immediately into her interior world, her inner silence. Subdued sheets of patterns are superimposed one on top of another, over which motifs and figurative elements are placed, giving the artwork its distinctive dreamlike character; the use of small, distinct pictorial elements hint of journeys into other lands.

In the past twenty years, Zivkovic has travelled often. Her travelling is an important source of inspiration both for her personally and for her art. She travels alone and often to third world countries, where she is drawn to the spiritual centres of these countries. As well as revisiting her home country of Serbia, Zivkovic has explored Easter Island, walked the steps to Machu Pichu, walked the Camino (in northern Spain), worked in Cambodia, and travelled to Northern Ethiopia, Armenia, and Russia.

Imagery from her travels seeps into her work: a tiny mountain with a church on its peak, a small cross on top of a building, a round hut with an arched entrance, the rhythmical lines and shapes of exotic vegetation – all absorbed through the eyes of this inveterate traveller.

This is not an intentional thing. It is like the weathering of nature. It happens subconsciously, over time, gently becoming apparent in her art.

Zivkovic's work has a religious feeling, but is not about religion. Religious sentiments are important concerns for Zivkovic, but her sense of religion or spirituality is much broader and she does not directly follow any religion. Religious motifs become little signposts, used as signatures for what she is expressing in her work – the tilted head of the main figure, the angels' wings, the boats, the decorative embellishment of an icon, the large searching eyes reminiscent of medieval art work – these recurring motifs convey compassion, caring, and searching. These sentiments underpin Zivkovic's work.

Her recent work includes patterns of stitching that follow the shape of a leaf, the shape of a boat, and the lines of a journey. Zivkovic told me a story about the stitching: on her last visit to Ethiopia, she watched several women stitching cloths. But these cloths had been stitched many times before, and in that moment, as Zivkovic watched, the stitching embodied the extreme contrasts in the world, between how some people have so little, and some have so much. This is typical of Zivkovic's work: the interweaving of travel, and artistic experience, with her inner world.

All of these aspects point to Zivkovic as a person, her past, her travels. As Sasha Grishin so succinctly expresses in his catalogue essay: Innocent and deceptively simple, there exists a quiet profundity in her art and at times if you listen very carefully and in complete silence, it seems that you can hear the angels singing.[2]

[1] See catalogue essay for *Invisible Silence* by Emeritus Professor Sasha Grishin AM, FAHA, Australian National University, Wollongong City Gallery, 19 September – 22 December 2015.

[2] *ibid.*