

## REVIEWS

## LONDON EXHIBITIONS

Luke Elwes' *Olgas* - Dreamtime from his exhibition of paintings of the Australian outback at Rebecca Hossack Gallery. See review



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**Luke Elwes:**  
**The Australia Paintings**  
Rebecca Hossack Gallery

The Olgas and the Bungle Bungle heave out of the earth, their giant backs to the sun.

Freaks of nature on an impossible scale, these great red rocks mark a territory untamed and untampered with by Western hands. When looking for a landscape in which to find "the means to explore a deeper personal terrain" it was here, to the Australian desert that Luke Elwes removed himself.

"For my painting this was an exhilarating journey into new colours, the intensity of which could only be grasped with new pigments: Pilbara red and Flinders blue and violet, and the dry desert ochres, streaked with tints of lemon, rose and rusty orange." Each image vibrates with the vital force he saw, because for Elwes the desert was no barren wasteland, but rather, throbbing with life.

Its extraordinary fertility is depicted in *Mulga* and *Spinifex* where the strange scrub-like vegetation bursts forth instantaneously and momentarily after a rainfall. Lush greens, oranges, reds and purples abound in a pulsating celebration of the living. It is a jubilation expressed in the most parched of scenes where thick cactus leaves and spiky blooms hover as a reminder of this fecundity, and Aboriginal dots, arrows and roundels flicker like tricks of light above the earth.

His use of Aboriginal symbols, while adding to this decorative touch, indicates something more. The Aboriginal presence in this uninhabited zone is in the form of ancient drawings and carvings on rock faces, often as much as 40,000 years old. The symbols are part of a complex language concerning the landscape, lending it not only life, but a past and a culture. For Elwes these messages reinforced the mystery of the place and enhanced its sense of timelessness, a notion he captures by incorporating them in his works. The rocks themselves, naturally sculpted by the elements to reveal layers, veins and scars, possess their own vitality. For Elwes, however, they are monuments to an existence that extends beyond our understanding of time. "They are all part of a living story, one that stretches back in an unbroken line to the creation." The works reflect this sense of vision and are a record of a spiritual and inspirational journey. (See colour illustration. Luke Elwes' *Australia Paintings* can be seen at the gallery on request. A colour catalogue is available, £10)

EMMA BURN

**Yuko Shiraiishi**  
Edward Tootah Gallery

There are three things in particular which distinguish the work of Yuko Shiraiishi. The first is self-evident: that it is entirely non-representational; the second is that she has an exquisite colour sense; and the third is that she deploys the utmost sensitivity in the placing of her bands of colour. There are obvious affinities to the numinous floating colour areas of Mark Rothko, and she often uses the 'zip' format particularly associated with Barnett Newman to divide one colour area from another. She feels personally and artistically closer to these two colour-field painters than