

## **Gloria Stern - *Metropolis***

“Cities, like dreams, are made of desires and fears, even if the thread of their discourse is secret...” – Italo Calvino, *Invisible Cities*

Melbourne painter Gloria Stern’s work emerges from an intuitive painterly process which explores the spectrum of abstract possibilities. In *Wheel and Bricks and Mortar*, Stern composes with purely geometric forms, inviting dialogue between planes of flat, emphatic colour. Other works, such as *Suburbia*, *Little Interior* and the figure studies *Seated Woman* and *The Thinker*, reveal they are both derived from, and seeking to transform, the visible world.

Stern is fundamentally concerned with the space of the city. Via distillation into the ‘essential’ forms of the sphere, the square, the cone and the cylinder, abstraction in works such as *Entrance to the City*, *Down Town* and *Up Town* is a tactic to analyse and re-present the city’s rhythms, relations - and secrets. The motors of industry which power the city’s beating heart, machines are a recurring source of fascination for Stern; *Mechanical Rhythm* and *Machine Age*, and of course *Metropolis*, are animated by the dynamic, uncompromising energies of modernity.

Stern’s visual vocabulary seems to quote from the Neo-Plasticism of De Stijl, in the recurring analysis of formal planes, delineated by a rigorous balance of light and dark. Yet though her work chimes with the aspirations of early modernist movements, in others Stern clearly seeks to create a new language of urban space, one more suited to the emotional complexity of post-industrial life. Her decidedly architectonic pictorial composition is balanced with a warm, vivid palette and with textures that speak of elasticity, pliability and delicacy. Stern forgoes the sterility of hard-edged abstraction, choosing instead to introduce a sense of organic vulnerability in her industrial and urban subjects. The snug configuration of geometric relations in the built environment in her paintings, suggests, as Calvino puts it, the daily encounters of the city - the “exchange of glances like lines that connect one figure with another and draw arrows, stars, triangles”. In this sense, the subject of Stern’s work is the force the city exerts on us - and we on it.

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