



KATE DORROUGH
THEATRE of the GROTTA

10 April - 13 June 2021

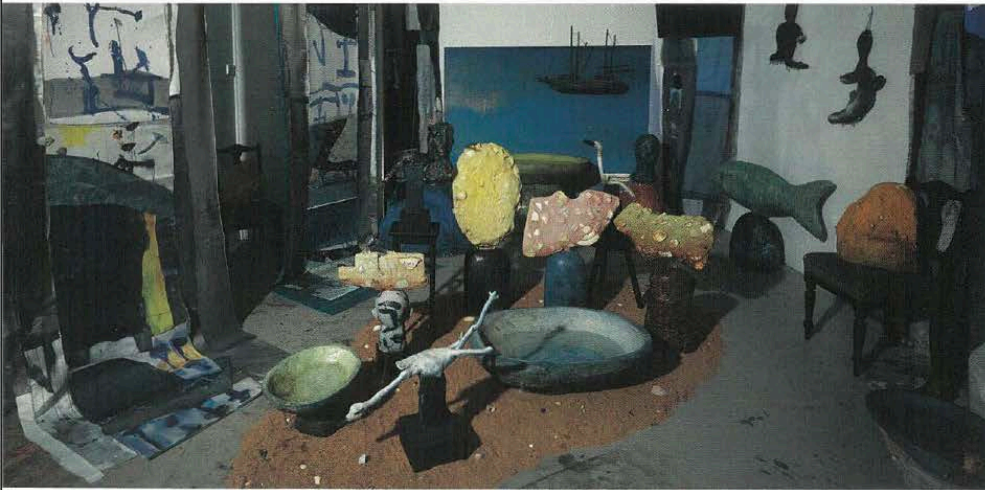
ARTIST STATEMENT KATE DORROUGH

THEATRE OF THE GROTTA IS AN EXPERIMENTAL INSTALLATION. IT IS A PLAYFUL CONTEMPORARY INTERPRETATION OF ANCIENT RIVER CAVE FORMATIONS; CONSISTING OF SHELLS, ROCKS, STATUARY AND WATER.

Grottoes are associated with the underworld, a meeting place between the human and the divine, being the original source of a water representing life. Throughout history the Grotto has been reinterpreted appearing as fantastical gardens and architectural features which echo ancient classical origins. Often artificial in construction, there is an interplay between the artificial, the real and the imaginary.

This installation is a contemporary hybrid incorporating artificial rockery painted in vivid colours in contrast to a series of projected videos, revealing imagery within water accompanied by narrated texts. The work consists of a range of materials; concrete structures and sculptural effigies embedded with ceramic shards and shells, stoneware ceramic vessels, paint, video, sound and fabric hangings. The layering of materials echoes a layering of historical references which reveal signs, totems and unearthed mysterious relics. It is a language as in the painterly calligraphic marks over laid on the fabric hangings which incorporate paper, fabric and hand stitching. Resembling calligraphic scrolls these markings are like a text or a series of musical notes it being an implied language to be understood and deciphered.

The installation becomes a theatre where sculptures are actors within a dramatic stage setting. Fabric hangings act as stage wings inviting the audience to enter and participate within this cool and mysterious space. Walking around the central sculptural groupings, dimensions of this river cave emerge from the darkness. It is a journey undertaken where river naiads and nymphs speak of the need to understand the significance of water in order to preserve this limited resource within our fragile ecosystems. It is a celebration of water as a source of fertility and life.



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Kate Dorrough
***Theatre of the Grotto*, 2021**

(Installation view detail)
Site specific installation ceramics, textiles,
sound and 5 channel video projection
Dimensions variable
Photos by Jenni Carter

CAVERNS OF MYSTERY & WONDER

WITH HER LATEST INSTALLATION OF WORK, ARTIST KATE DORROUGH DELVES INTO THE INTERIOR WORLD OF THE GROTTA, TRANSFORMING 'THE CUBE' FROM A DARKENED ROOM INTO AN ARCAIC THEATRICAL UNDERWORLD.

Grottoes have existed since ancient times, often viewed as places of quietude and mystery. From Roman river caves and early Christian shrines to extravagant Victorian follies, these private caverns can be natural or artificial, sacred or theatrical. They are sometimes seen as a meeting place between humans and the divine, internal spaces intended for refuge and contemplation. Dorrough draws on classical mythology to create a magical multi-dimensional chamber peopled with sculptural nymphs and naiads, whilst also suggesting the more playful 'faux' elements of latter day grottoes.

This Sydney based painter and sculptor has made river life the source of much of her compositions over the past decade. In 2011 and 2012 she created a series of paintings and ceramics based on the environment of the Murray River and in 2019, she embarked on an ambitious theatrical installation that recreated the life and history of the Manning River in the northern tablelands of NSW (following up with the solo show *River Language* in 2020).

Theatre of the Grotto continues on from this series with a mixed media immersive approach to the environment. As one's eyes adjust to the darkness from the glare outside, primal forms start to emerge within this strange fantastical space. Blending sculpture, painted wall hangings, video and soundscapes, Dorrough draws the viewer into a mystical world, where things are not what they seem. Rocks turn out to be created from concrete, pools of water have videos playing on their surfaces and eerie sounds of trickling water and voices reciting classical poetry and text, drift in and out of the space. It's hard for the viewer to determine what materials are real and what has been fabricated and recreated. Sculptures of water sprites are embellished with shells and ceramic shards, carved timber birds sit on man-made plinths and long fabric hangings decorated with lyrical calligraphic motifs float ethereally in the room. The hangings also act like stage curtains, enhancing the theatricality of the space.

Vibrantly painted figures congregate around a miniature 'pond', surrounded by a central hillock of sand. Upon inspecting the still pool and other smaller water dishes nearby, the viewer is attracted by moving images of aquatic and marine life playing upon them; haunting videos of children playing by a creek or beach and of leaves floating slowly upon flowing rivers. All is deliberately artificial; nothing is real, yet the effect is still beguiling and mystical, provoking feelings of quiet wonderment.


In 18th and 19th century Europe, grottoes were places of leisure, recreation and reverie, often housed in the manicured gardens of royal families,

aristocrats and nobles; whimsical spaces where they could escape the real world. In more contemporary times, river caves have been emulated at theme parks, fake rockery composed clumsily out of chicken wire, paint and concrete; a shabby, profane but fun way of interpreting the ancient rock grotto. Rather than mocking this obvious fakery and trickery, Dorrough's own fabricated sculptures are a playful nod to some of these cheap reconstructions, even as she honours its classical derivations.

The artist invariably wants to recreate the sense of enchantment and awe often felt in these quiet interior spaces. The predominant theme underpinning all of Kate Dorrough's work is that of water as a poetic symbol of fertility and the source of all life. Underlying its mischievous artifice and trickery, this staged installation is intended to gently replenish both the eye and the spirit.

VICTORIA HYNES

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MOSMAN
ART
GALLERY



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KATE DORROUGH is an Australian artist based in Sydney with a multi-disciplinary practice spanning painting, ceramics, installation and video. Her work explores the complex relationships between people and the landscape, light and water. She is represented by Arthouse Gallery.


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