

# light projects

176 High St, Northcote  
www.light-projects.com

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**Light Projects**  
presents:

**Kristina Tsoulis-Reay**  
Submarine

14 May - 6 June 2010

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Surface Tension  
**Kyla McFarlane**

Water is a body. Immersing ourselves in it, we feel the weight and flow of it pressing against our own body, heavy and enveloping. Emerging from it, we inhale the invisible, life-giving lightness of the air around us. Kristina Tsoulis-Reay's paintings remind me of this transitional moment, that of moving between one element and another - the transfer between that which can suffocate and that which sustains us. I think of the pressure of holding my breath under water and of the flapping gills of a fish as it is plucked from the sea.

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Kristina Tsoulis-Reay paints pictures of animals, which she has gleaned from photographic sources. The complexity of this apparently simple preoccupation is revealed across multiple paintings, which she might present in sequence. Seen together, these images have the typological air of cards found in cereal boxes, or snapshots of animals we might take at a visit to the zoo. Their colours shift across the paintings like a fluid rainbow, moving from multiple tones of blue, to green, to ochre, then red. Often, the creatures she chooses to paint inhabit the watery confines of an aquarium, a river, a sea ... These small, loosely rendered beings - a dugong, perhaps, a lungfish, or a snail - are held in place by Tsoulis-Reay's swathes of translucent colour. Some, like the lungfish and the otter, are creatures that move between water and air, living their lives between these two elemental realms.

In her works, Tsoulis-Reay observes the duality of these worlds in various ways. Submarine 2008-9 alludes to the divide between the two - from beneath and above the water. In this painting of an otter swimming, the animal is a shadowy body suspended near the bottom of the tank, its brown belly echoed by the hair of a child looking in on this scene behind glass. Milky water fills the frame, mottled by bubbles rising to the surface. At the very top edge of the painting, the water is replaced by dark earth, as the artist infers the line between surface and depth, and between worlds...

In Lungfish, however, these worlds have equivalence. The murky brown water is echoed by the skin of the fish settled within it, by the plant life hanging under and above the surface of the water and, finally, by the space beyond. An environmental

camouflage is enacted in paint, melding life forms, their surroundings and their skins. And paint is itself a skin, a liquid play across the surface of the picture.

There is another slippery border here, between the flat, so-called 'truth' of the printed photograph and the liquid 'fictions' of paint. In the transfer from her photographic sources to her snapshot-sized paintings, Tsoulis-Reay breaks down the certainty of the edges of images, and of the subjects they depict. Feeling her way into the weight and flow...

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