

NANCY SEVER | GALLERY



Magda Cebokli, *Alhambra # 10* 2023. Acrylic on linen. 101.5 x 101.5cm



Magda Cebokli, *Alhambra # 6*. 2021. Acrylic on linen, 101.5 x 101.5cm

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Wednesday-Sunday 11am-5pm

MAGDA CEBOKLI
THE ESSENCE OF A SPACE

5 March - 9 April 2023

Artist's statement.

This exhibition is a conversation in three parts, each exploring aspects of the language of space. The work in each of the parts was inspired by time I have spent in Spain and my response to some of the places I visited.

None of these paintings is an attempt to depict a specific place. Rather they are abstractions and synthesisations of thoughts on space.

The Alhambra paintings and the harmonics of space.

The Alhambra Series has developed and been added to over a period of time. I visited The Alhambra in Granada in Spain in 2007 and on return to Australia did a number of small studies. These were followed over the years by larger works, based on my response to, and reading about, the site.

The Alhambra is a complex structure made up of inter-related buildings that have been added to and modified over a period ranging from the 9th to the 15th Century. It can broadly be divided into two sections, the earlier Islamic and the later European. It was this Islamic area, developed by the Nasrid architects (1232-1492), that most engaged me with its harmonics of space and light.

The art historian Antonio Fernandez Puertas has written extensively on the Alhambra, identifying the geometric proportional system on which the entire Nasrid architecture is based: a series of ratios rather than fixed units of length, utilising a system of progressive diagonals: $\sqrt{2}$, $\sqrt{3}$, $\sqrt{5}$.

Wondering about this, I decided to follow through on that idea using the same proportional system as a tool for developing new paintings.

I had intended to return to the Alhambra in 2020 to refresh my experience of the place and to see how this would be reflected in new work. Like for many people, Covid put an end to this plan and so I decided to work from the studies I had already made and from further ideas arising from them since then.

The Alhambra Series is the result. All the paintings in this series are based on that system of progressive diagonals.

La Sagrada Familia and the harmonics of light.

Designed by Gaudi, La Sagrada Familia is an exuberant, flamboyant expression of Contemporary Gothic/Catalan Modernism architecture and still, after 140 years, unfinished. Its interior is full of soaring spaces, coloured light and organic references. It's also crowded with people and evidence of ongoing construction. Yet the space, playing so well with the harmonics of light, is serene and meditative. And inspiring.

This group of white-toned paintings was inspired by the experience of walking through the Familia Sagrada in Barcelona and Gaudi's orchestration of light and space together with his use of geometry. Light and colour constantly shift as one progresses through the space and the eye keeps being drawn upwards. The effect is that of moving through a forest composed of stone and light, the visual complexity becoming synthesised into the numinous.

Colour is elusive, arising not from the intrinsic nature of an object but from the way light is reflected or emitted by it. The perception of colour is subjective relying on context, the position of the viewer in space and their capacity to see. The paintings here speak to that shifting relationship.

The Barcelona paintings and movement in space.

The paintings in this group can be seen as a conceptual mapping of space and of movement through it, an abstraction, rather than a literal depiction of the act of negotiating place.

The experience of place is dependent on the choice of your direction of movement and the twists and turns of your chosen route. As a short-term visitor (read tourist) to a place, one's experience is mainly superficial. One walks around, looks, grabs what knowledge one can from what one sees, hears, touches and smells. One only occasionally finds out what is behind the facades, the street is the book we most read – and even then, it's only some streets. As travellers, we build our concept of what a place is from these fragments of the overall space.

It is noteworthy that for the locals themselves the *paseo*, the movement through the street space that is the Spanish ritual evening leisurely stroll, is an important tradition that can be observed not just in Barcelona but throughout Spain.

Movement is both an action and something to be observed. The streets and the skies of Barcelona are filled with both.