

Claudia Chaseling

"I question what reality is. Visual facts are ambiguous, they change with my experiences and with the passing of time"

CLAUDIA CHASELING is a German-born artist who studied in Vienna, Berlin, London and Canberra and now lives and works between Berlin and Rye, Victoria. Her rhythmical paintings feature intricate, layered, intertwining lines and forms that suggest landscapes seen from multiple, shifting perspectives. She is interested in the relationship between the natural and man-made environment, and the inspiration for her vibrant, colourful work can be found in both Australian Aboriginal art and sixteenth-century European drawings. In 2006 Chaseling was the recipient of an Anne and Gordon Samstag International Visual Arts Scholarship. *INTERVIEW: Ruth Waller*

Your surname doesn't sound German...
Chaseling is my husband's name. My maiden name is Poetzsch, but I don't know what it means. My family comes from Munich, Bavaria and north-east Germany. I grew up in Munich until the age of 19, when I left to study at art school in Vienna.

You work between Germany and Australia. How did this come about?
As a child I always dreamt of travelling south. When I was studying in Berlin I applied for a stipend to fund one semester of international study. I thought I'd go to Chicago or New York but on the way to hand in my application I ran into a friend who had just returned from Canberra School of Art. She had high praise for the school and said it was a place for dedicated work. Suddenly my childhood dreams came flooding back. I scribbled down 'Australia' on my application and, when it was accepted, I was offered a place in Canberra. I was so taken by it that I extended my stay for a semester. And after I finished studying in Berlin, I returned to Canberra to study and have been travelling between Germany and Australia ever since.

Moving between the two countries, do you find yourself thinking in two different languages? The notations on your some of your paintings are a mix of English and German.

I think in German, I speak to my husband in English, and my painting language is multilingual. In my work I use the written language that best describes what I want to say. Some phrases are better in English, and others are better in German.

Does a concern with ecological issues like climate change underpin your work?
I'm aware of environmental matters although I try to avoid becoming bogged down by facts and figures. I take a more visceral approach... the patterns of water represent a form of life. You can find similar

patterns in clouds, light, skin, sand and wood – in every living thing. In my painting I build on this image of life structures.

A number of your recent works have the title *Aporie*. What does this mean?
Aporie translates as a contradiction, a problem with no solution. The contradiction I focus on is the intertwining of the natural and the man-made environment. I'm interested in the point when these two don't link together anymore; when the man-made structures become perilous or out of control.

The relationship between technology and nature seems central to your work. What is it about the low-tech tradition of painting that continues to excite you?
Painting is an immediate way of working and yet it has taken me many years to learn the right skills and techniques. It's a very slow process. The time I spend painting is the time I come to terms with everything I see. I use egg tempera with dry colour pigments and oil paint and I've recently introduced ink and graphite into my work. I use different painting supports – canvas, paper, foam and cement – and I make objects, prints, photographs and collages. But I'm a painter, and painting is my language. It is the purest extension of myself that I can find.

Are there aspects of Australian art that have influenced your work?
Indigenous art – particularly from Yirrkala in the Northern Territory – has influenced me, although not through a European attempt to find a spiritual path or by appropriating imagery. I visited there in 1999 with the curator Djon Mundine and met the artist Dhuwarrwarr Marika who explained how crosshatching in Indigenous painting represents light. I was interested in the comparison between this and the use of crosshatching in sixteenth-century European drawing. I was amazed by the extreme abstraction in Indigenous art and how the

movement and reflections of the land are transferred into painting.

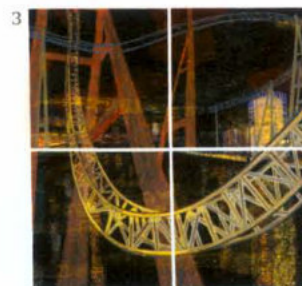
A number of contemporary painters work in a hybrid space between figuration and abstraction. Do you see yourself in this way?
Yes. I use just enough figuration in my work so that there's a connection to what is seen, but by abstracting my painting I aim for form and colour to work in the most direct way. I don't want to illustrate a highway in my work; I want the feeling of the highway to be there. I question what reality is. Visual facts are ambiguous, they change with my experiences and with the passing of time.

You worked with Hermann Nitsch and Franz Ackermann. What was that like?
It was extremely important for me. Nitsch, along with Hans Dieter Sontag, was my most important teacher. I learned from Nitsch what a painting can be, and how to work in a non-decorative, immediate way and how to put your own energy and emotion into colour and form. Working for Ackermann was the best job I ever had. He's friendly and energetic...

Are you at all influenced by music, film or literature?
Films by Antonioni and Luis Buñuel, books by John Berger, Italo Calvino, Susan Sontag and Umberto Eco, and music by P.J. Harvey and Regina Spektor all interest me, yet they don't play a major role in my work.

If you could live with any work of art ever made, what would it be?
My husband gave me a watercolour by Michelle Ussher, which I enjoy. I have a few young artist-friends whose work I would like to own. And I'd love a Titian... and maybe even a Delacroix.

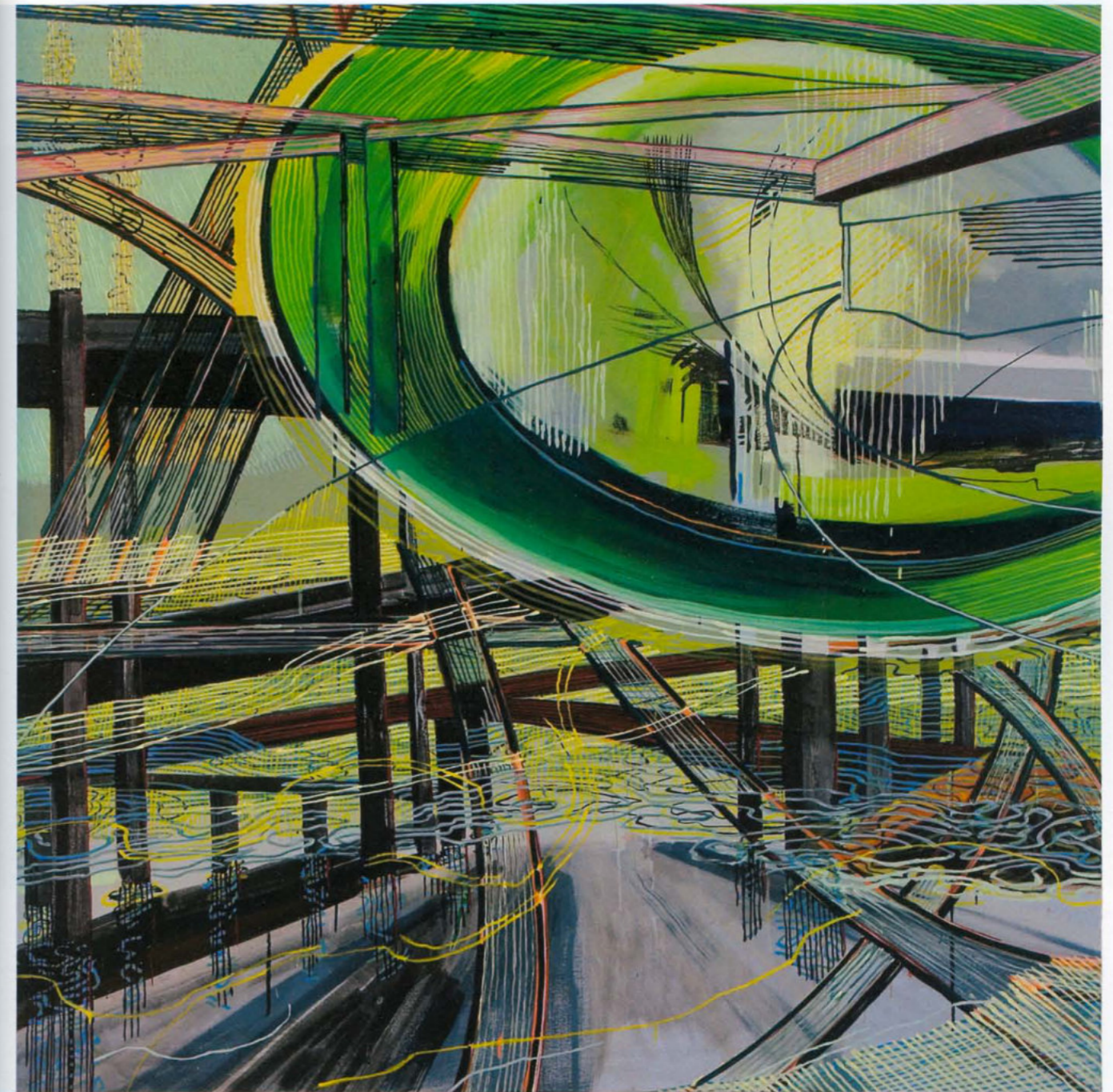
Exhibition: Claudia Chaseling, Boutwell Draper Gallery, Sydney, 27 Feb – 29 Mar



1 **Stranded** (2005)
egg tempera and oil on canvas,
180 x 160cm

2 **Horizon** (2006)
egg tempera and oil on canvas,
80 x 80cm

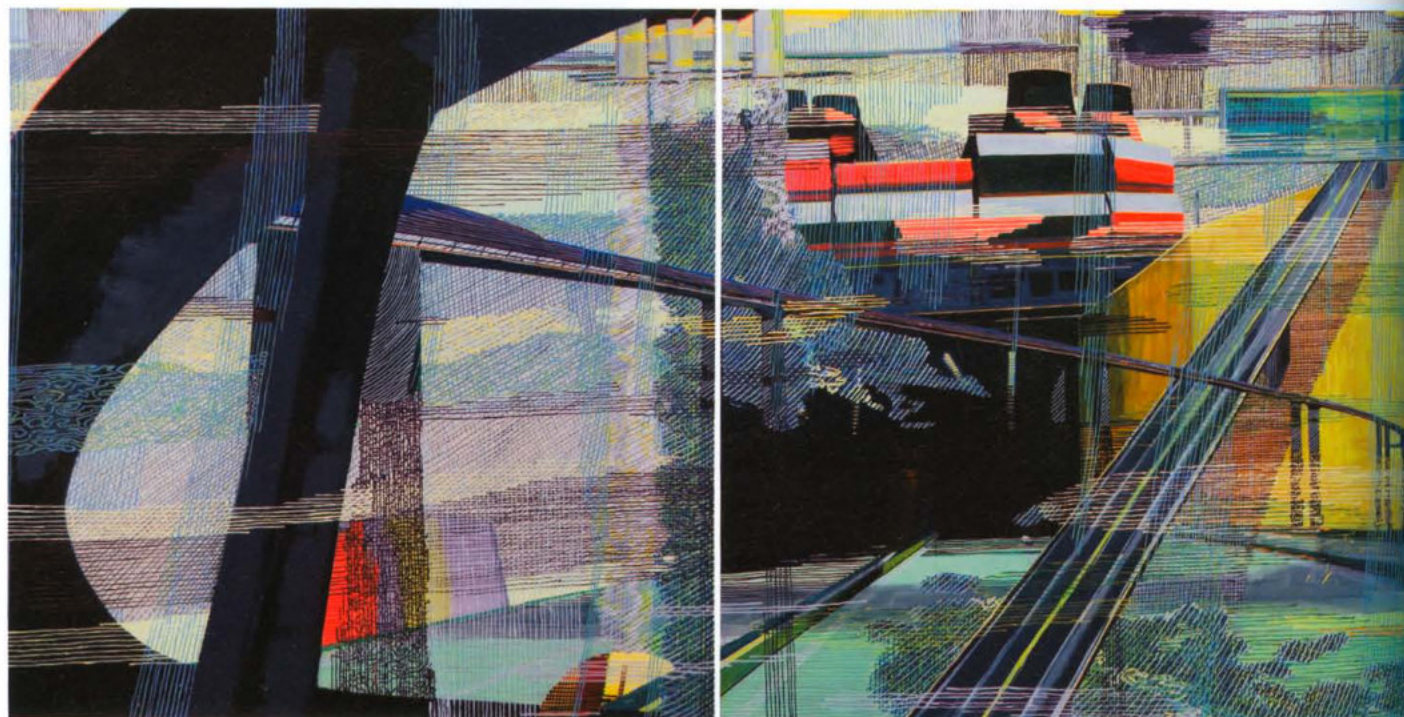
3 **Leaving** (2006)
egg tempera and oil on canvas,
220 x 220cm (four parts)



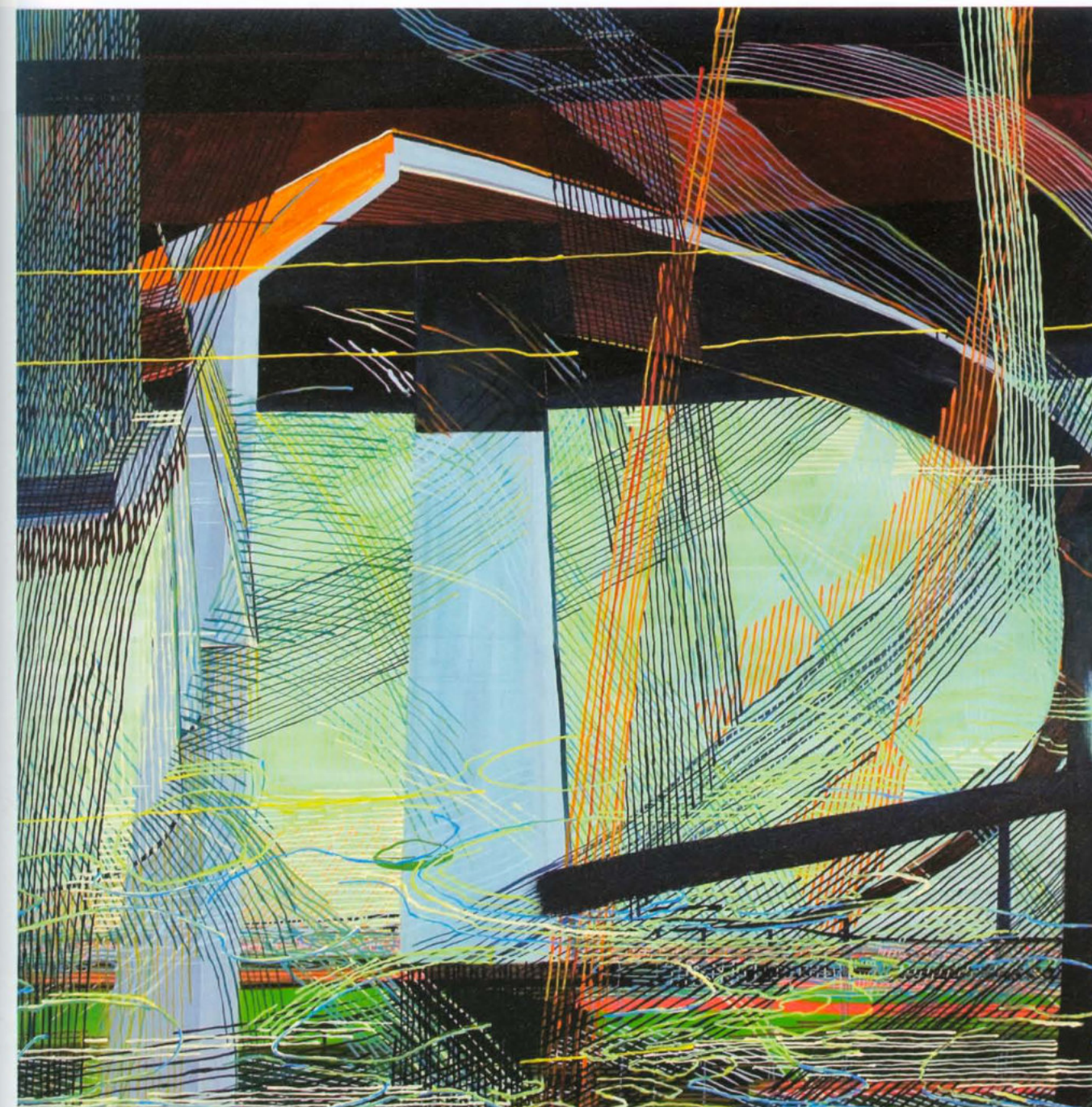
Down to Earth (1) (2007), ink, graphite, egg tempera and oil on canvas, 150 x 150cm



Aporie (2) (2007), egg tempera and oil on canvas, 150 x 520cm (four parts)



Aporie (1) (2007), egg tempera and oil on canvas, 200 x 400cm (two parts)



Land escape (2007), egg tempera and oil on canvas, 150 x 150cm