



Constellation, oil on linen, 145 x 198 cm, 2010. Private Collection.

Irene Wellm:

'the gold in the shadow'

by Martina Copley

Wellm extends her earlier work on the child as a symbol of the potential for transformation within individuals. Ostensibly portraits, the contained images of women in *Her Fragrant Frown* do not look back. Figures emerge from darkness, faces are masked or cropped away, eyes are closed. These deliberate refusals suggest a pictorial logic in which the figures are bearers of meaning in a psychological drama. More like ideas or models, they enact a general concept of feminine aspects in the psyche and the forces that shape the individual.

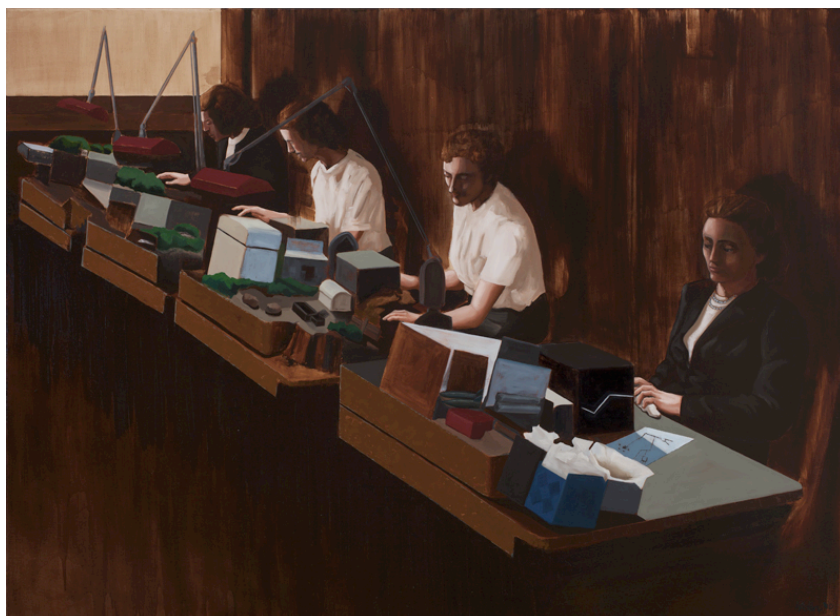
A space of communal dreaming in which the symbolic imagery links to folklore and mythology, the deep black shadows and burnt out highlights of film noir easily dissemble into transitional zones. As groundwork imagery, these filmic landscapes allow Wellm to loosely project a story of inner process - something like working from a stain or blot. In this way, unconscious dreams and memories find their way into the image. Her paintings appear shifting and unstable because she is dealing with material that is essentially unconscious and archetypal.

For Wellm, painting is a tool that mirrors process, and a kind of storytelling. Unclassified, disruptive zones and ambiguous, spectral shadows allow for a disintegration of physical space and reflect inner factors of

intuition and bodily feeling. Interested in the German figurative painting of the New Leipzig School and in artists like Neo Rauch, Max Beckmann and Daniel Richter, Wellm also delves into the mythopoeic psychology of Carl. G. Jung. Through attention and openness to the world of symbolic language, her work invokes encounters with things 'known but unknown'.

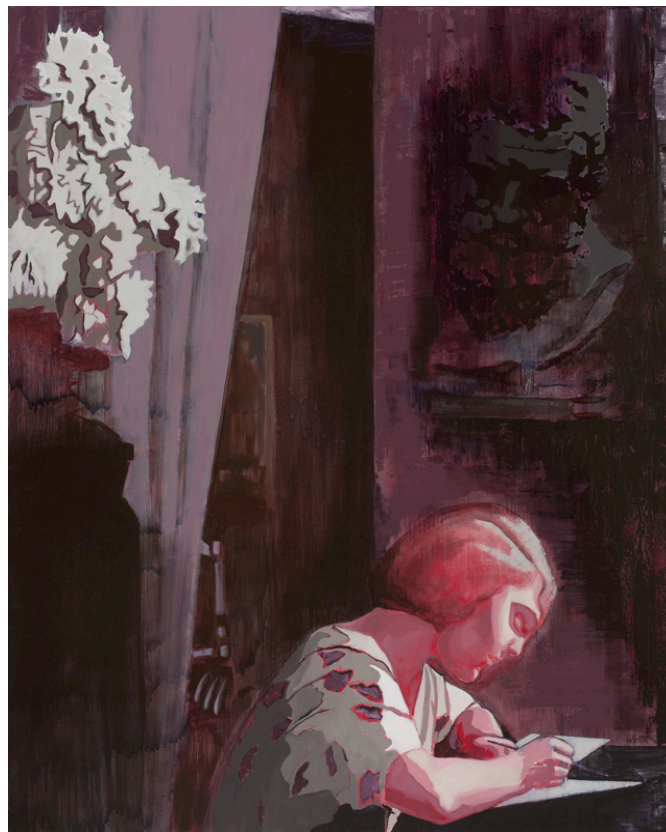
In *Constellation* the artist presents two figures in a dance. Neither landscape nor figures seem certain. She is open-eyed; he is distant, with eyes downcast or closed in reverie. He leads the dance, she responds. Her dress is a broken floating world unto itself; the space between, a closed door dripping shadow and green. Visage, ghost and shadow... We are aware of a dark silhouette that hovers over their joined hands. For Jung, this shadow world represents those things we don't accept about ourselves and may project onto others. However, in its more constructive aspects, a person's shadow can also represent hidden positive qualities.

The painting's events permit entry into the world of the painting. In this rather hermetic experience of reality, there is flow and some stagnation. Wellm keeps the language diverse with paint to allow for different kinds of looking. Letting the work happen, allowing accidents and other things to occur, she creates a fluid space that bears 'not-knowing'. Purposeful oscillations, correspondences and deliberate forestalling highlight process. The medium of painting appears in drips and flatness and unfinished edges. In the sensual and emotional experience of painting we shift between the visceral materiality of paint and representation, between form and its dissolution. There is no fear of darkness. In this autonomous space, the image opens up to allow us to bring our own feelings and ideas. The specific is transposed into the general and back again into the specific, and we become alive to how much we preface the frameworks for understanding.



Construct, oil on linen, 145 x 198 cm, 2010.

In a place where imagination constructs history, duration is the secret of action. Painting recycles time. A strange geography instances through space. Indicators like palette, architecture and clothing bring a sense of nostalgia, even of failed utopias. In *Construct*, the floating hands are all about making; a kind of industrial, seismic moulding that speaks of the intuitive relation of mind and heart as the source of creativity. In *The Divide*, essential relationships between figure and prop, between the darkened interior and triangular window light, suggest the symbolic connection between masculine and feminine and the cusp of day and night. Areas of ambiguity, such as the patterned shirt - a gentling of sunlight on shoulders or flayed skin, remain unresolved, creating an undertow that permeates these works with unease and anticipation. Wellm's images contain opposites – and hold them open.



The Divide, oil on linen, 152.5 x 122 cm, 2010.

Aware of the collective realm of image and story, and of the limits of that shared language, Wellm's intuitively drawn suite of paintings suggests the disconnection between the individual's consciousness and the greater archetypal world, resulting in a life cut off from deeper meaning. She also re-imagines a certain balance. *Lysis*, brown like earth, the creature from the woods, the stag with human eyes, relates to the proliferation of nature and to the masculine creative force that works in conjunction with the feminine. This painting underlines that it is the action and flow of life that unites.

Just as Jung considers the unconscious as hypothesis, so Wellm approaches painting as a question. Drawing on the history of her own painting and on the histories of Painting, her creative process is an ongoing narrative. These paintings ask us to think about what we bring to the work, and how we produce and discover meaning for ourselves.



Lysis, oil on linen, 145 x 198 cm, 2010. Private Collection.

Text © Martina Copley
Freelance arts writer and curator
Melbourne, Australia 2010.

From the exhibition ***Her Frangrant Frown*** at Catherine Asquith Gallery, 2 – 20 November, 2010.

All images © Irene Wellm.