

Richard Kenton Webb

In 1993 Richard Kenton Webb painted a series of ninety small, imaginary landscapes on pages torn from an old copy of Grays Anatomy; the printed illustrations giving substance and structure to landscapes that were built up from thin washes of colour. In these tiny images, where bone becomes geological structure and rocks resemble fossilised bones, Webb explored the boundary between body and landscape. Using fluid lines and translucent paint he portrayed a world whose boundaries are not fixed and impermeable but dynamic, evolving and interconnected.

After completing this series Webb moved away from the physical landscape into a world of abstract forms and shimmering colour. But Webb had not abandoned his journey through the world's borderlands, instead he had entered the void, the intangible space that surrounds and separates everything. What he discovered there was substance rather than nothingness; photons of light swirling amongst the atoms, each with their own minute mass and character, travelling through space on electromagnetic waves that crisscross the gap and enfold the world in an invisible web of colour.

For more than fifteen years Webb immersed himself in the void; his paintings hovering on the cusp of existence, reaching out to capture the essence of things unseen and unheard. But as he studied these invisible, spectral colours he also explored those of the earth, becoming fascinated by the pigments used by artists throughout history. He began to make paintings of individual colours, a 'Colour Grammar' that used paints he had made himself with pigments ground from rocks he had bought. He also made plaster sculptures that sought to embody the individual colour forms he had begun to discern in his travels through the light filled void. But the complex structures of these reservoirs and wind machines had a physicality that gradually brought him back to the world's more tangible margins, where invisible light intersects with tangible substance to become colour.

Now in linocuts of limpid beauty, Webb takes us back to the physical world, to the landscapes of Chichester harbour, Lindisfarne, Iceland, and the Cotswolds. These are places that fascinate Webb, which hover on the threshold between solid and liquid, thin places where a sense of the sacred is palpable. And this is reflected in the prints as colours spill over, intersect and mingle with each other, untroubled by the lines that seek to define and contain them. For these are worlds hovering on the cusp of creation and dissolution, with permeable borders where nothing is fixed, worlds emerging new born from the void. Here in these simple landscapes colour finds its home.

Dr Richard Davey, January 2014

Dr Richard Davey is a Visiting Fellow in the School of Art and Design, Nottingham Trent University. He writes on contemporary art and artists, most recently James Hugonin, John Newling and Tess Jaray.