

Teelah George

Teelah George
— Gemma Weston

Teelah George brings *Sky Piece* (2016–17) into the office so I can see it, and we sit on a couch in the foyer with the work spread over both of our laps like a blanket, feeling its softness. We are two bodies bobbing in a pool of blue. The other half still has to be attached, but it is large enough already to envelop us and much of the couch. *Sky Piece* is a patchwork of raw caramel-coloured linen, each piece densely covered with freehand long- and blanket-stitch embroidery in a variety of light blues that verge on teal. Variations in the quality and colour of the embroidery cotton, and in the length and direction of the stitching, form ripples and eddies across the linen for the eye to follow, suggestions of where a hand might caress. *Sky Piece* feels soothing because of this, and also because it holds so much time. It takes the artist about an hour to cover a roughly palm-sized piece with stitching. Looking at the work I remember what relish there can be in slowness.

Sky Piece, composed of so many small elements, is itself a single component in an artistic practice seeking inversions and antidotes to material and other hierarchies of value. George treats the loaded medium of embroidery, deliberately made unfancy, like the loaded medium of painting, working with similar relationships of gesture, form and surface. She uses cast sculptural bronze as embellishment and support. While she works, she listens to oral histories spoken by women, sourced from libraries and archives, which become the foundations for other paintings, actual paintings, that elude identification as either portraiture or landscape. These paintings are raw and provisional, heavy with erasure and revision – like memories, or history.

The lineage of *Sky Piece* can be traced back to a 2015 work, *Effect of Dose on Taste (New Phase)*. George attached this enigmatic title to a vinyl banner, two by four metres, spotted while walking to her studio in Fremantle. Exposure to salt and sun had bleached the banner bone white, the vinyl had desiccated and flaked, leaving only the ghostly apparition of once boldly-printed text: 'Design'. It too held time, a singular expression of its long, slow catastrophe. In the gallery, away from the noise of the street, its fragility was sad and beautiful. George hand-stitched a new supporting canvas border to the banner, documented the work, exhibited it twice and then destroyed it.

Another precursor to *Sky Piece* is *Yellowing* from 2016. *Sky Piece* is intended to capture the effect of a searing blue sky; *Yellowing* is an attempt to house in stitching not the sky but the glorious sun. Both describe a quality of bright airy emptiness that might be considered characteristically Western Australian but this grand gesture – squeezing the heavens into a wall-bound, or pocketable field – speaks of a desire that, like the sky, transcends particularities of location. Describing the vast, elemental and indescribable with accumulated smallness is only the first irony of *Yellowing* and *Sky Piece*. *Yellowing*, the verb, speaks also of decay – the yellowing over time of white paint and paper, or of teeth. Exposure to the very elements they describe will eventually disappear those dense colours into thin air, just like all those stories heard while stitching. And eventually, just like us. History.



Teelah George
Sky Piece (detail)
2016–17
thread, linen,
bronze, oil paint
Photograph:
Bo Wong



Teelah George
*The Persistent
 Yellowing (Time
 Piece)* 2016
 cotton thread
 on linen
 Photograph:
 Casey Ayres



Teelah George
*The Persistent
 Yellowing (Sample)*
 2016
 cotton thread
 on linen
 Photograph:
 Kieren Seymour



Teelah George
*Effect of Dose on
Taste (New Phase)*
2015
found vinyl banner,
canvas, thread,
leaves, photographic
documentation
Photograph:
Bo Wong

Teelah George
*Like Watching
Rage* 2014
Power Tack and
graphite on
watercolour paper
Photograph:
Thomas Rowe

