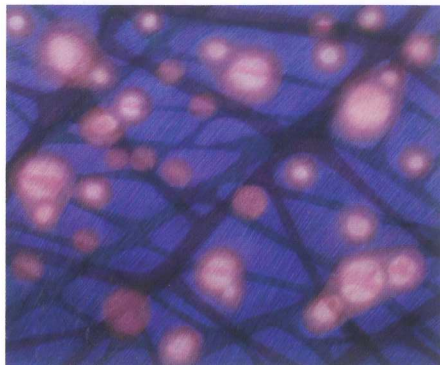


Filomena Coppola: *Moon shadow*

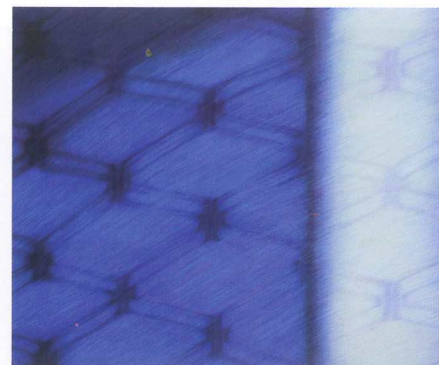
by Louisa Marks, Melbourne-based arts writer and recent Curatorship graduate of The University of Melbourne



Filomena Coppola
Murray River constellation 2007
pastel on paper
90 x 108 cm



Filomena Coppola
Baby Baroque 2009
pastel on paper
90 x 108 cm



Filomena Coppola
Waiting at your door I 2008
pastel on paper
90 x 108 cm

Filomena Coppola's latest exhibition at Dickerson Gallery, Melbourne (1–19 April) represents her fascination with the subdued light of night-time. *Moon shadow* includes Coppola's most recent pastel drawings that continue the theme of her previous exhibition, *Heart song* (2008), in which she collaborated with ten women who photographically documented their responses to shadows. For *Moon shadow*, the artist worked with a different set of ten women. By reinterpreting and layering their photographs through drawing, she sought to locate and explore the personal mythologies of her collaborators; identity being an evolving theme throughout Coppola's works and one of her primary concerns. Although we do not know who these women are, Coppola's drawings evoke differing personalities and therefore contain varying subjects and moods. Through these drawings, Coppola demonstrates her ability to visually capture shadows thrown by various light sources, whether the sun, moon or electric bulbs.¹

Although past works examined her own Australian-Italian cultural identity, *Moon shadow* represents Coppola's journey into other people's lives and stories. Her female collaborators initially photographed shadows that held some personal attraction and Coppola then collated and reinterpreted them to reveal each woman's spirit. In the past, shadows had generic mythological connotations — they were linked to ghosts or souls — but it is the individual's choice of shadow that animates her character in Coppola's works. *Soul fire* simultaneously

refers to the bright flaming colours of Coppola's palette, as well as the soul or spirit of her collaborator, perhaps an individual who is warm and passionate or endowed with a fierce temperament. Coppola's subtle manipulations of colour demonstrate her response to her subject's personality and life. *Murray River constellation* represents the artist herself and draws upon her own affinity with the river at Mildura, her hometown and current base. The pink orbs, perhaps light particles or dappled reflections, float over a stem-like structure, reminiscent of the veins of a leaf or butterfly wings. The subject itself is not always clear without the hint provided by the work's title, but the luminous turquoise hues in drawings such as *Absent friends* and *With the light comes the dark* suggest something more lonely and sombre.

Coppola's works have many similarities, at least conceptually, with 19th century Impressionism, which emphasised light in its changing qualities, ordinary subject matter, unusual visual angles and the importance of movement to human perception and experience. Just as the Impressionists were influenced by photography, Coppola herself explores the medium to suggest the life of objects and the observer in momentary images of shadows. A number of works in the exhibition, such as *Waiting at your door I*, present objects associated with domesticity²; at first glance seemingly esoteric, they form identifiable decorative patterns, such as a silhouette of a screen door or the aluminium coils of outdoor furniture.³ *Waiting at your*

door I, in which the familiar impression of the screen door becomes a purple-blue diamond pattern in the moonlight, contrasts dramatically with the golden shadow of a garden chair sitting in the sun, captured in *Waiting at your door II*.

Then there are drawings derived from everyday observations, such as foliage from a pot plant against a wall, which have been transformed by Coppola into a more classical archetype; leaves become gilded like a Baroque stucco detail or reminiscent of a laurel wreath, Coppola again citing her Italian background and influences. Nature and textural, organic forms are still a seductive and significant part of Coppola's work.

While the works in *Moon shadow* are the result of a collaborative process between the artist and ten women, Coppola revels in the complex interplay of intimate shadows within diffused moonlight or the bright luminosity of daylight. Shadows from man-made forms correspond with forms from nature; the relationship of nature and culture, light and shadow are perceived and expressed by Coppola. Absence is the presence in *Moon shadow*. A mysterious shadow world exists in the midnight hours, antagonistic but synonymous with the shadows of daylight. •

References

- 1 Laurene Vaughan, *Exhibition Newsletter: Transient Light*, 8 November to 3 December, Dickerson Gallery, Melbourne, 2006, p. 2.
- 2 Laurene Vaughan, p. 1.
- 3 *Exhibition Newsletter: Moon Shadow*, 1 April to 19 April, Dickerson Gallery, Melbourne, 2009.

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