

A few years ago, I wrote an essay outlining the criteria or qualities that I believe are always inherent in artworks, and always contribute, to varying degrees, to an artwork's value and meaning. My essay was not about what should or should not be liked or valued, but what is helpful to understand when making judgments about quality and value. Part of my intention in my essay was to demystify art without denying its mysteries and the issues of cultural context.

The qualities I chose were craft, meaning, aesthetics, and creativity.

You might be relieved to know that I won't be discussing the details of my essay, but I will utilise some of the formal ideas that I explored regarding the qualities of craft, meaning, aesthetics, and creativity that I believe are relevant and important in the appreciation of Mel's paintings.

I would particularly like to draw attention to one quality – craft, which I feel is a key in the success and appeal of Mel's work.

Craft is often the most easily and frequently noted feature that most ordinary people usually comment on when considering

Mel. Brown, The Space Between, Proxemic, 2025 Painting July 9, 2025

visual artworks, such as paintings and drawings, especially when human figures are involved. However, somewhat paradoxically, it is often the least mentioned quality by contemporary professional critics, who usually seem primarily concerned with meaning in the verbal sense. Meaning in art invariably involves two aspects: the verbal and non-verbal or formal. Verbal content is entirely absent in Mel's work, and I believe that is a strength of the work, which convincingly communicates formally what I feel is Mel's primary concern - the complex relationship between men and women - and probably all animals.

In Melanie's work, it is the formal aspect that stands out. The tonal modelling and basic drawing of the forms in each work is very sensitive and convincing, without being overly laboured.

The compositions are relatively simple, frequently employing a pyramid structure that conveys stillness and focuses our attention on the representations of the man and woman, as well as their physical interaction.

The figures are naked and embracing. Without coyness, the relationships are intimate, but not sexual; rather, they are

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quietly sensuous. Despite being physically connected in the composition, they each seem to be immersed in their separate thoughts and arrested in actions.

The predominant use of almost monochromatic colour of reds, browns and yellows in all the compositions contributes to the effect of giving equal weight to each figure emerging or embedded in a ground of a similar predominant red colour.

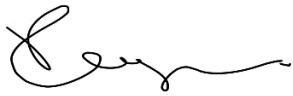
Despite the richness of the colour, the figures of both sexes seem rigorously non-decorative, though given the variation, not devoid of visual interest. Clearly, they were not drawn or rendered to be voyeuristic - the intent seems to be that we should contemplate them almost as archetypes. Each variation invites a reflection on the nature of the relationship between men and women, unencumbered by class or status, and without a suggestion of hierarchy.

To me, the work is refreshingly apolitical without a message other than an acknowledgement of the obvious fact of the physical differences between the sexes, which we are encouraged to contemplate quietly. Unlike many post-modern works, there are no pictorial or verbal puzzles - what you see is what you get!

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Despite the gentle austerity of the work, it is visually
engaging and satisfying - that is to say, aesthetic

Its creative contribution is grounded in its simple conception,
devoid of obvious polemical intent.



9/7/2025

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