

Stella Downer Fine Art

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Member of the Australian Commercial Galleries Association
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Artist's Statement on the Enso

The Enso is a particular calligraphic practice from the Japanese Zen Buddhist tradition. It also used in other cultures too.

Originally the Enso mark was made using a large calligraphy brush dipped in black ink and painted on rice paper or silk. The ink brush is loaded up with ink and the maker uses a formal gesture that had been rehearsed and rehearsed, before just letting go with a clear mind and just doing it, with that grace and simplicity that Japanese Zen is so good at

The Enso can be an open or closed circle. The closed circle suggests completeness and even the enlightened state of mind. The open circle is more about the void, the unknown and the state of the unenlightened mind seeking the void; emptiness- ultimately of 'the way' in Zen Buddhism. The mark needs to be as spontaneous as can be. It is uncontrolled, but done within its controlled parameters. It is then left as a mark to be felt and contemplated.

These I see as having a sort of stumbling energy and vitality, from that of a stumbling Buddhist.

The Enso is married with mortality in these works. We know that, materially they come from graves; from ashes to ashes and dust to dust. But, they are also about the wonderful circularity of existence. It is not a closed loop but an open one full of possibilities.

These Ensos are made with clay soil from both Trangie and Strathfield cemetery graves, which I was given permission to use. The colours come from collecting soils from specific locations which I sort out then kept separate so that there were different shades and textures of soil. The range of reds are mostly from Trangie. The greys and yellows are from Rookwood Cemetery. The clay soil has been washed down to a slurry, then sieved and let settle to remove the rough grog. Later it is dried then pulverised and finally fine sifted to a light powder. Once the clay soil has been clarified and dried, it is mixed with acrylic medium and a little water to make a paint-like emulsion. The background is first built up with thin layers of soil paint to give an even field for the mark, with very little cracking. The enso mark is then done with a thicker paint so that it will crack and dry like a clay pan.

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