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NATURA

Christopher Beaumont
Adriane Strampp
Alana Kennedy
Grant Nimmo

Exhibition opens Tuesday 22nd May, 5pm – 7pm
Exhibition runs 22nd May to 2nd June 2007

Consider the manifestations of nature in art: the still life, the landscape, the animal portrait. Though stylistically diverse, artists Christopher Beaumont, Adriane Strampp, Alana Kennedy, and Grant Nimmo share a preoccupation with the natural world.

Christopher Beaumont's still lifes owe a debt to Spanish painters of the 17th century. He admires their use of humble subjects, like vegetables and flowers, set in shallow spaces and voids. They become the simple stars of his compositions.

His vegetables and flora are fertile, sexually charged. His protea and waratah breathe fecundity. The depiction of zucchini presents produce thrusting toward the viewer with a siren-red, horny gourd dominating the rear of the arrangement.

He considers the abstract or virtual space important to his renderings. "I had great interest in astronomy as a child. The heavens are an abstract emptiness with objects moving on principles of geometry."

During his time at the VCA Beaumont was known as 'The Cabbage Painter' for his commitment to the still life genre. Like his European predecessors he builds the image slowly using opposing glazes. "I work in a traditional method with oils on prepared linen."

Yet he has moved on from the era when the *camera obscura* was needed to accurately model space. Beaumont employs the tools of the digital age – photoshop and digital imaging – to create his hyper-real still lifes.

Adriane Strampp finds inspiration in an earlier art historical period. She fell under the spell of the Italian Renaissance during an extended stay in Umbria. Strampp extracts then abstracts details of landscapes and textiles from Renaissance paintings. "I work from a reproduction of a painting or directly from the landscape outside my studio. I also use text allowing it to float to the surface."

Her work is self-referential, employing as it does words and images that have appeared in her oeuvre over the past 20 years. She favours Vita Sackville-West's extended poem 'The Garden' –

an ode to the passing seasons. Strampp ensures that she quotes stanzas in their entirety before eliding words. "I feel the work needs the integrity of the whole writing even if I paint over it."

Like Beaumont, Strampp intends her work be appreciated for more than its formal, seductive qualities. She makes us aware of the fragility of life: of its fragmented, illusory nature, and of our need for escapism. Her luscious renderings of botanical details present an opportunity to escape the mundane.

Emerging artists Grant Nimmo and Alana Kennedy round out the "Natura" quartet. Both present visions of utopia – romanticised spaces wherein the spirit roams unimpeded (both literally and figuratively).

Nimmo's images owe a debt to both the Heidleberg School and to contemporary film makers. He uses landscape elements from film stills, with sources including the "Deer Hunter" and "Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon".

The resultant canvases reflect the cinematic influence, with a heightened sense of drama. "I wanted to find images that had impact without being restricted by my physical locale", says Nimmo.

In his painting 'Spirit' the title dominates an expanse of sky. It acts as an irresistible force, drawing in the landscape like a vacuum. Foliage floats upward toward the esoteric magnet.

By contrast Kennedy's inspiration is found in the commonplace: her kitchen. She began with the idea of illustrating the qualities of honey and its signifiers. Her works are set in an imagined space she refers to as "the painted gardens of the Honey Empress".

The execution of her paintings reflects the intensity of her creative experience. She uses oil and beeswax, creating up to 20 layers in her quest for the most expressive surface.

Kennedy's series is loosely based on the frescoed garden room at the Palazzo Massimo in Rome. That collection was dug out of the ruins of a country villa belonging to Livia, wife of the Emperor Augustus.

Like their Roman counterparts, Kennedy's songbirds also perch amid fruit and foliage in a painted garden. "I like to get involved in fantasy worlds through art." She invites us into her rendition of paradise – a land of milk and honey.

The still life and landscape genres endure, remaining as popular today as they were at the height of the Dutch Golden Age four hundred years ago. The fruit, bird, and tree are merely descriptive symbols these four artists employ; invitations to engage with the allegory beyond the picture plane.

The artists are available for interviews on request. For further information or high resolution images please contact Mary Lou Jelbart on 03 9662 9966.

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