

Everything is nothing - or you can't take it with you when you're gone!

Still life is a genre of painting which reached its zenith in renaissance Europe, when arrangements of inanimate objects and foodstuffs were described, in a domestic setting, in order to represent a moral narrative subject or allegory. Still life references life's sensual pleasures and the chaos, messiness and anonymity of daily experience, couched in the material of the domestic space, a place profoundly rooted in the historical oppression of women. Paradoxically, Christian moralism, the dominant belief system of the day, condemned the desires and actions of the greedy consumer, while the paintings which carried these pious teachings themselves were considered luxury goods.

Framed by the expansive desires of the middle classes of the seventeenth century, still life painting reminded their owners of the satisfaction of control, consumption and godliness in the domestic realm. Still life represented the influence of wealth and position, appreciation of the fruits of trade and commerce often represented by abundant tables of exotic bounty and culinary excess. Partly consumed game and joints of meat, ripe stone fruit and shelled lobsters accompanied by crystal goblets of wine were a reassuring testament to privilege largely associated with the male appetite.

Still life as explored in this exhibition is concerned with the transience of life, recognising mortality and the inevitable loss of worldly possessions laced with dire warnings of over indulgence. Historically, this type of still life was known as Vanitas, meaning literally emptiness. Typically these images included rotten worm filled fruit, human skulls and dead flowers to represent the vanity and pointlessness of attachment to material things.

Contemporary artists use permutations of the still life genre as a cipher through which to scrutinize the world around them and explore the form, meanings and conventions of pictorial language.

Well known local and Australian artists are represented in this exhibition of paintings, prints, assemblage and an artist's book drawn from the City of Fremantle Art Collection. This makes various links with the rich heritage and tradition of the popular genre of still life.

Printmakers Terrance Barrett and Graeme Peebles set tables of melancholy and foreboding. Likewise, Kathleen O'Connor uses the wilted heads of sunflowers to reflect upon the fragility of life, while exploring a perceptual engagement with her subject. Ron Nysztor in his monumental work Jagoe Loop finds a disturbing reality in discarded painted masonry and Ray Beattie reveals a distorted domestic scene of earthy familiarity, in his hyper-real award winning etching of 1976.

The City of Fremantle Art Collection has become over the last thirty years a significant cultural resource, a repository for contemporary Australian prints and art made about Fremantle and by artists who live or work in the City.

For more information about the City of Fremantle Art Collection please pick up a copy of Revealing the Collection from the Gallery or visit the webpage www.freofocus.com.au and follow the links to Arts and Culture.

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City of Fremantle Art Collection

April 5 – May 11, 2008

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Check list

Ray Beattie (1949-)

Aubergine still-life (1976)

etching edition /15

74 x 59 cms

City of Fremantle Art Collection acc. no. 241

Terrance Barrett (1937-)

New Objects of the Table V (2000)

mezzotint edition 1/10

10.6 x 14.2 cms

City of Fremantle Art Collection acc. no. 1040

Chris Capper (1951-)

Kitchen Painting (1973)

oil paint on unprimed cotton duck

81 x 77 cms

City of Fremantle Art Collection acc. no. 23

Andrew Hayim De Vries (1955-)

Untitled (2004)

assemblage of found objects

29 x 31 x 21 cms

City of Fremantle Art Collection Acc. No. 1091

Janis Nedela (1955 -)

Interferences # 3 (Bolter#3) (2006)

artist's book

22 x 14.5 cms

City of Fremantle Art Collection acc. no. 1201

Ron Nyisztor (1960 -)

Jagoe Loop (2004)

oil paint on canvas

140 x 120 cms

City of Fremantle Art Collection acc. no. 1073

Graeme Peebles (1955 -)

The annunciation (1986)

mezzotint edition 3/30

22.5 x 30 cms

City of Fremantle Art Collection acc. no. 562

Margaret Preston (1875 – 1965)

Marigolds (c1909)

oil paint on canvas

60.3 x 44.7 cms

City of Fremantle Art Collection acc. no. 222

Kathleen Laetitia O'Connor (1876 – 1968)

Waterlilies

oil paint on canvas

65 x 75.5 cms

City of Fremantle Art Collection No. 134

Kathleen Laetitia O'Connor (1876 – 1968)

Faded sunflowers (c1949)

oil paint on canvas on masonite

99 x 72 cms

City of Fremantle Art Collection No. 140