



Samantha Dennison
Gum Leaves and Green Vase

CURRENT EXHIBITION

From August 11 - IN & OUT
An exhibition of interior paintings by
Gria Shead & Margaret McIntosh.



COMING UP

From September 1 - Meagan Jacobs

A SPECIAL CONNECTION TO **ARMIDALE**

Regional galleries are no longer just a hub for locals or a platform for unusual collections and local creators. In the past two years I've seen a surge in cultural tourism to my neck of NSW and the adaptive response of NERAM, The New England Regional Art Museum. In the hands of Rachael Parsons (a sparky director with a passion for painting) the program has become inclusive and inviting, changing the idea of what a museum visit can be.

The gallery is excited to collaborate on a solo show for the esteemed Western Australian painter Samantha Dennison. Still life has been something of a cornerstone for us, perhaps because it is such a mutable genre. Australian Modernism began with still lives and in the last two decades the still life in Australian painting has enjoyed a renaissance. Spearheaded by predominantly female painters, the contemporary approach to this subject is both subtle and subversive. Attention to the still life during the pandemic revived with an even deeper resonance as so many artists (and their families) were living an interior life, focused within. Samantha's show has a universal quality with a powerfully Australian mood. I'm so honoured that Armidale are welcoming "Close to Home".

This Friday I will be in conversation with the artist to celebrate the opening of the show.

SAMANTHA DENNISON IN CONVERSATION WITH ALLISON BELLINGER

FRIDAY 19TH AUGUST, 6.15PM

NEW ENGLAND REGIONAL ART MUSEUM

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SAMANTHA DENNISON

“My still life oil paintings explore notions of beauty, space and stillness in the details of my every day. I paint the things that catch my eye – flowers and plants from our garden or from friends and neighbours, together with ceramic vessels I have collected from other artists or have made myself. I set them up and arrange them where I can see them every day in passing, allowing me to watch how the light changes as the days progress.”

As the table supports a vessel the picture plane supports a composition. How this is arranged is the underpinning of all modern still life painting. From the velvet depths of the Dutch Masters to the tilting textiles of Cezanne and Matisse and the excavated void of Giorgio Morandi, the challenge of depth persists. For a realist painter the temptation might be to ‘play it as it lays’ with an informal lay-out. Yet for Samantha Dennison, the surface of a table is less a structural necessity and more of a well-considered equation. Each of her quietly concentrated paintings are cleaved in half. In a deft stroke of austere elegance, she lends the backgrounds above her tables a glowing tactility and addresses the base in a more sculptural way. Like a plinth in a gallery, the base of each work is designed to fall away, allowing the eye to focus on intricate detail and dance of light. Uncluttered and replete, the solidity of each form is lent a dignity that is hushed yet resonant. In Dennison’s hands the still life is not a chorus of voices but a solo aria, focused and clear.

The native stems and flowers, the nubbled monochrome ceramics and the attention to light, lend her work a distinctly contemporary feeling. These are the tones and forms of modern Australian interiors. Like Thea Proctor casting her eye to Art Deco silver or Margaret Preston echoing the bright fauvist palette of Clarice Cliff, these are still lives in step with their time. The collective yearning for minimalism and order is neatly distilled here: “I’m looking for balance and symmetry, using repetition of shape and form but most importantly space to achieve stillness. The moments of quiet contemplation when arranging my subjects and painting my still life pieces help me move through the noise and rush of daily life.”

Dennison’s quest for “space and stillness” is achieved through the volume and opulence of the way she handles light. By concentrating her detail to the core of each painting, the expanse of ambiguous depth lends a ritual quality to her objects. The idea of a vase or bowl serving as a home altar is familiar to anyone entrenched in the minute repetitions and molten flow of domestic time. Somehow the thoughtful placement of a vase, a peach or a bowl lends profundity to the quotidian and the real. Dennison’s treatment of the tiny details is tender yet intense. The technical finesse that captures the slow bleed of pink into green on an artichoke leaf, or the sheen of sunlight on glazed porcelain is a skill accreted over years. Subtle as they are, this collection of work revels in the sensual and the tactile. The heft of solid forms, the delicacy of petal and stem, the minute bubbles in the skin of a vase, all convey a reassuring solidity: an elegy to the concrete rather than the imagined. Exploring the power of singular objects and simple arrangements takes skill and something more. Samantha Dennison’s work crackles with discipline and dormant passion. The lesson of the minimal still life is always held in the unseen, the tension between the smooth surface of a composed interior and the tumult of human life it contains.



Samantha Dennison
Red Poppy Still Life