

I've always been a water person – far more at ease in water than on dry land. Fresh water preferably - rivers, lakes, pools. Never fearful, no matter the current nor the depth. Introduced early, before I could walk, the buoyancy and rhythm of water felt as natural as breathing in air. I was a strong swimmer and followed a family tradition of plunging into any body of water that presented itself. Despite the brain-splitting cold, despite tangles of waterweeds and despite the surge and dump of powerful waves. A strapping set of lungs meant I could hold my breath under water like a Japanese pearl diver. And so I experienced in water, with delight, total freedom of movement. The pull of gravity suspended with a flick of a limb or a swirl of a somersault. I experienced a different world – a floating world - a glimpse through the eyes of a water creature.

It was a lack of water that drove the theme of this exhibition. Finding myself amidst one of the driest summers in the mid north of South Australia last year. Toward the end, everything was dusty and dry and brittle - the endless acres of stalks of husked crops, desiccated sheep desperately panting for shade. White powdery dust clouds billowed out from passing vehicles, smothering every leaf, every post, every thing – and there was the dust in my hair, on my skin, between my toes.

Yet, the garden, which had to be watered almost daily, seemed to thrive. Produced abundant crops of pomegranates, quinces, apples and pears. Which, like everything living, consist mostly of water. So my attention turned to this and to the vessels that contain, restrain, divide and dispense. This, and the anomaly of the parched landscape surrounding me, the creeks that have silted and rivers run dry.

As an artist I work directly from life – no cameras, no photos, no iphones. Time spent painting from the thing itself, without a filter, reveals what I need to see. My still life painting is an old tradition deeply embedded in a practice of careful observation of things intentionally arranged and composed in the studio. I've lately thought that it's also about painting 'with' life – simply put, of painting life that happens or appears naturally around the artist. Of being in tune with and knowing your environment well enough to be aware of what is at your fingertips or what might be soon. It is not just going out to buy a bunch of flowers and paint them (though I sometimes do) or a bag of fruit to paint (though I have). It is about an awareness of what is happening in the environment around. In my case it is in knowing when the season for blossom will occur, or when the pumpkins will be ripening. It is preparing for that heady rush in autumn when all of the orchard dangles its succulent orbs at once, but it is knowing that the plums ripen first and that the pears will last the longest.

In my studio, I work under an overhead natural skylight. It is perfect except on really dark days. Composition is important, and I may spend many hours until this feels right, but sometimes no time at all. Usually I sketch with soft charcoal or a diluted oil wash and work on the broad shapes and broad tones. I am a self-taught artist and I do not have a prescribed working method. I do what feels right. Gradually, as my eyes attune, I begin to see subtle gradations of light, shifts of perspective, small moments of reality. It is a dance, sometimes awkward, sometimes sublime. I am happiest if I have managed to see and paint some aspect that heightens perception of the subject. Then it is much more than dancing - then, it is diving in water.