

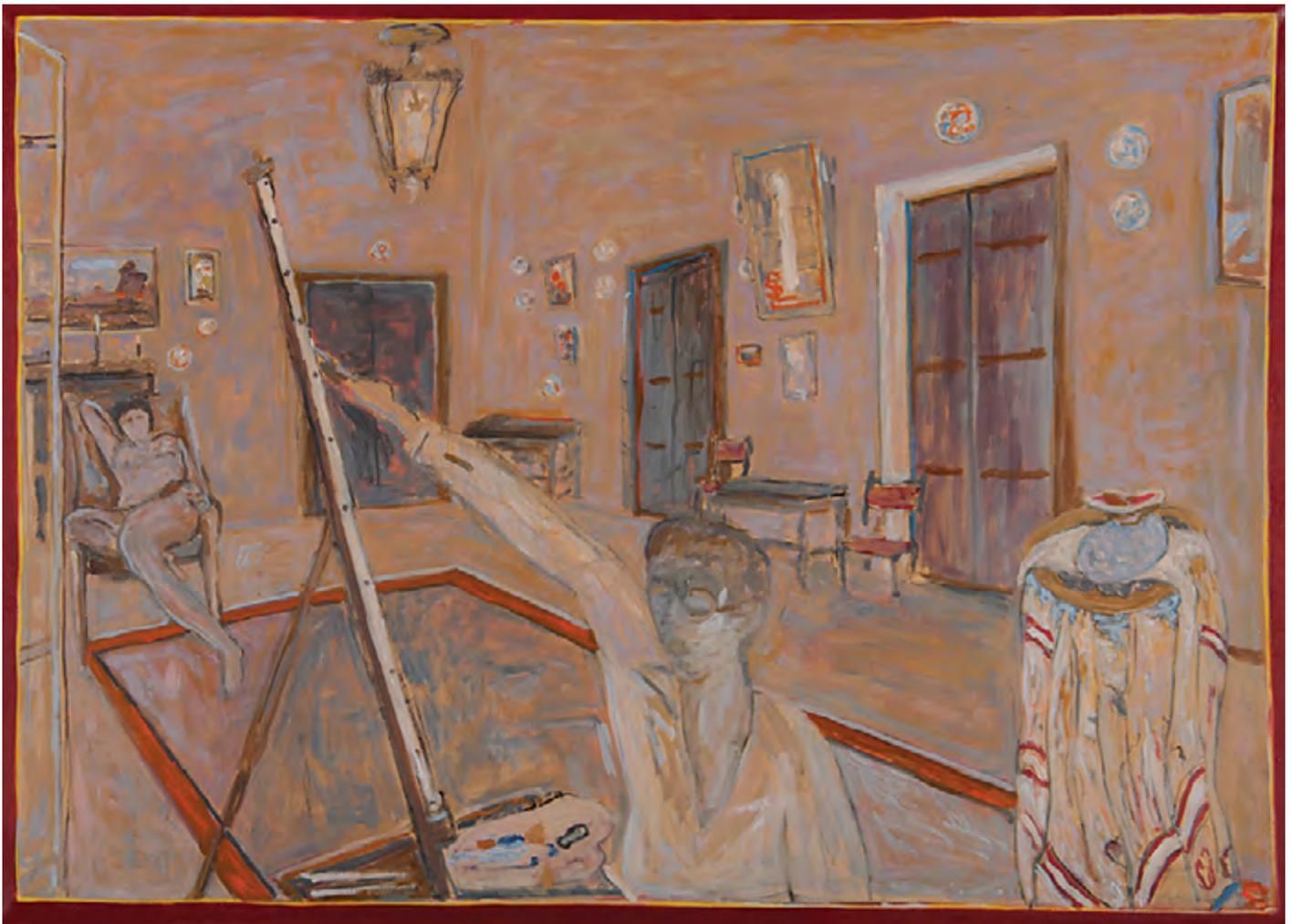


JOHN DENT

BETWEEN TWO COUNTRIES

15 May - 11 June 2021

LAURINE · DIGGINS · FINE · ART



THE STUDIO MALLORCA

oil on canvas
160 x 146 cm



URBAN LANDSCAPE II RICHMOND

oil on canvas
210 x 90 cm

The art of John Dent is surprisingly elusive to define. There is an immediate aesthetic appeal, heightened by the refined colour palette and a sense of an affinity with a certain style – a touch of French Impressionism; an understanding of Fred Williams; a connection with Les Nabis; a touch of master Japanese printmakers; a link with Baldessin; a crisp Cubist placement; a colour palette sometimes reminiscent of Bonnard; a decorative element evoking Matisse and the oriental influence. This is little wonder, when Dent himself identifies his inspiration as, “the whole history of art” and indeed can wax elegant about artists, artistic traditions and their connections. Dent is firmly of the belief that “art builds on itself” and as such an artist is forever developing.¹

Perhaps two of the main factors which shape Dent’s oeuvre reflect the title of this exhibition – *Between Two Countries*. Firstly, the guidance of important masters early in his career in Australia – Baldessin, Williams, Kemp and Olsen; and his experience in France, particularly at the preeminent printing studio, Lacourière- Frélaud and also meeting his life partner, Renée.

It is fortunate that Dent was open to being an artist, as it was not his initial intention but he found that a natural part of his life became its main focus. He undertook studies at RMIT where his teachers included George Baldessin,

Graham King and Tate Adams and joined the Winfield Studio established by Baldessin, in 1972. Here he met Kemp and Williams and Olsen and greatly benefitted from the guidance and support of these four titans of Australian art. Further education at St Martins, London and the Academia Britannica in Rome strengthened Dent’s resolve to follow his own path. In true atelier tradition, Dent recognised the significance of guidance from the masters, absorbing lessons in a workshop environment in order to find one’s own way as an artist.

Perhaps logically, the subject matter Dent turned to was the everyday world around him. As he notes, roots are integral but then it is one’s own experience that shapes one’s life and you have to paint what you know.² Besides his interest and skill in exploring printmaking, the paintings of this early period in Australia feature a series of intriguing still lifes, what Ronald Millar described as the “secret life of rooms and their contents.”³ A diverse range of objects, often commonly found – a vase, washing on the line, cutlery on a table, eggs in a pan - placed at unexpected relationships to each other, forcing the viewer to reconsider a narrative element out of the ordinary.

The seeming simplicity of the still life paintings belies their technical skill. Each element across the entire canvas has been carefully considered.



JEUNE FEMME
oil on canvas
66 x 51 cm



NOCTURNE
oil on canvas
122 x 152 cm



LA SIESTE
oil on canvas
69 x 110 cm



RUE MOUFFETARD
oil on canvas
66 x 50.7 cm



CLASSIC STILL LIFE
oil on canvas
50 x 46 cm



SETTING THE TABLE
oil on canvas
61 x 51.5 cm



STILL-LIFE - PEPPERMILL
oil on canvas
53.5 x 43.5 cm



PETIT - DÉJEUNER
oil on canvas
53 x 46 cm



THE GLASS VASE
oil on canvas
52.5 x 43 cm



PROTEAS
oil on canvas
48 x 53 cm



CHINESE TABLE
oil on canvas
53.5 x 45.5 cm



A TABLE I
oil on canvas
58.5 x 48.5 cm



LE TEMPS PASSÉ
oil on canvas
55.5 x 50.5 cm



NATURA MORTA - MARTA

oil on canvas
L 152 x 106.5, C 152 x 117, R 152 x 106.5 cm



NUT CRACKER

oil on canvas
48 x 58 cm

Critically, the strategic relationship between object and space is intriguing - the objects crowding the edge of the canvas as if calling the artist's eye; the disorienting tilt of the picture plane; the use of differing relative scale and the boldness of empty space. It is especially in these spaces that Dent's aptitude for colour shines – the contrasts, the harmony, the vibrancy. All of these elements combine with heightened elegance in the masterly triptych, *Natura Morta – Marta*.

Ignoring the usual pull for artists from Australia to travel to London or New York, Dent made his way to Paris in the early 1980s, selecting to follow in the workshop tradition by working at Atelier Lacourière-Frélaut, a renowned printmaking studio established in 1929 and utilised by artists including Picasso and Matisse. Baldessin spent time there in 1976 and encouraged Dent to go. Despite any feeling of destiny in becoming an artist, this does not happen without determination and hard work. Living in Paris, Dent felt he had to start his artistic career again. The isolation of a foreign culture and language and the vast distance

“Roots are integral but then it is one’s own experience that shapes one’s life and you have to paint what you know” – John Dent

from Australia, with its fairly parochial and certainly Anglo-Saxon viewpoint, cannot be underestimated. Of course, within time, Dent was able to tap into the fraternity of fellow artists at Lacourière-Frélaut (including Jorg Ortner, Zoran Music, Roman Suzzoni, Miguel Conde, Pierre Aleschenki, Mario Avati, Antonio Tapiés, Bernard Buffet, the latter four represented in the NGV collection). For some artists, travel can heighten their ‘Australianness’, finding themselves able to gain a perspective of their own country with the benefit of being removed from it – think of Tucker and his 1950s paintings of Australian mythology.

Dent, however, seemed rather to absorb the sense of place he discovered in Paris, perhaps as a result of his own experiences shaping his art. Paris has a romantic reputation and there is certainly a sense of romance in Dent's work, yet the lyricism, the harmonious colour and the poetry in his compositions were all previously evident. The street scenes of Paris take the viewer on a promenade with the artist as he explores the city, not as a wide-eyed tourist but simply taking in the everyday, from the unexpected to the mundane. If the imagery is sometimes romantic this simply reflects the reality of scenes actually encountered – an arched bridge over the river; a cat in a shuttered street window; lovers entwined in a park. Equally, Paris is a city of unusual contrasts, casual witness to nuns in full habit kicking a soccer ball.

Whilst the figurative element in these scenes can seem incidental, in other paintings the figure is the focus. However, even these works are perhaps more about the act of painting itself; studies in colour harmony and contemplative atmosphere where the figure is integrated into Dent's own unique style, one built on art.

FOOTNOTES:

1. In conversation with the artist 31 March 2021
2. In conversation with the artist 31 March 2021
3. Ronald Millar, John Dent Life on Four Wheels, Lauraine Diggins Fine Art, 2000

REPRESENTED:

- National Gallery of Australia
- National Gallery of Victoria
- Art Gallery of New South Wales
- Parliament House, Canberra
- Ballarat Art Gallery
- Benalla Art Gallery
- Castlemaine Art Gallery
- Mornington Peninsula Regional Gallery
- Newcastle Region Art Gallery
- Swan Hill Gallery
- Warrnambool Art Gallery
- Wollongong City Gallery
- La Trobe University Bundoora
- Melbourne University
- University of Queensland
- South Australian School of Art
- Heidelberg Hospital Collection
- Arts Victoria
- National Gallery of New Zealand
- Bibliothèque Nationale de Paris
- Private collections in Australia and internationally

PRIZES

- 1999 - Finalist, Wynne Prize Rapid Bay at Noon
- 1995 - Finalist, Wynne Prize Kangaroo Grounds Landscape
- 1994 - Finalist, Wynne Prize View onto Kangaroo Ground
- 1993 - Finalist, Wynne Prize Homage to the Great North
- 1995 - Finalist, Archibald Prize Michael Blanche
- 1989 - Finalist, Archibald Prize Doc Hartley
- 1979 - Georges Invitation Art Prize
- 1977 - Georges Invitation Art Prize

DEDICATION:

The exhibition is dedicated to my wife Renée who has guided me through the mysteries of French culture, and revealed another side of Australian life with a freshness I could only have gained by being with her. She has been my constant companion and my fiercest critic.

ARTIST STATEMENT

At 70, I am beginning to understand a little, and am looking forward to my 80th year, where hopefully I will understand more.



LA CONCIERGE
oil on canvas
61 x 56 cm



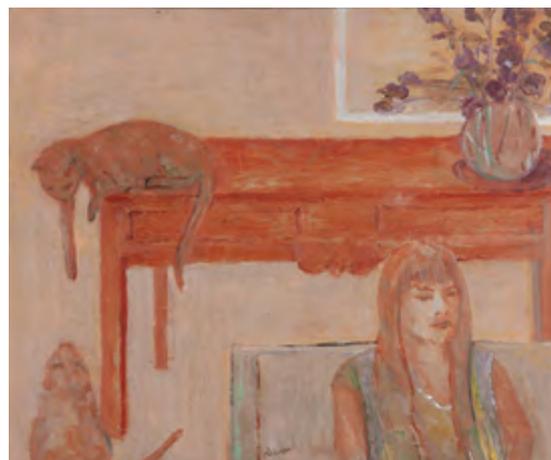
AUTO PORTRAIT
oil on canvas
39 x 32.5 cm



LES DEUX MONDES SE CROISENT
(Two Worlds Passing)
oil on canvas
76 x 61 cm



LES BÉNÉDICTINES DU SACRÉ-COEUR
oil on canvas
71 x 56 cm



INTÉRIEUR RUE CLAUDE BERNARD
oil on canvas
53.5 x 63.5 cm



MONTMARTRE
oil on canvas
61 x 41 cm



ALBI
oil on canvas
53.5 x 66 cm



LE MATCH
oil on canvas
71 x 56 cm



L'INSTITUT
oil on canvas
51 x 71 cm



NATURA MORTA

oil on canvas
164 x 120 cm

COVER

ELLE
oil on canvas
205 x 175 cm

Catalogue design: Anton Banulski
Catalogue photography: Nerida Blanche

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Gallery & Exhibition Hours:
Tues - Fri 10am - 6pm. Other hours by appt.