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A Closer Look At ... John Dent still lifes

John Dent: Between Two Countries brings together paintings from early in Dent's career, particularly an intriguing series of still life paintings from the late 1970s. Apart from a couple of works which were included in an exhibition in 1979 and in Dent's Retrospective exhibition at Castlemaine Art Gallery in 1994, many have never been exhibited before. The still life paintings are presented in frames which are gilded and handpainted by the artist.



Glass Vase oil on canvas 56 x 45.5 cm



The Composition oil on canvas 66.5 x 51 cm

Whilst Dent utilises many objects typically and traditionally found in still life paintings, such as vases of flowers and everyday familiar items atop a kitchen table, like cutlery, each item has very carefully been placed in relation to the other, both in terms of composition and colour. The striking and sometimes odd angles of the various components capture our attention and we find ourselves querying the placement and what this may suggest.

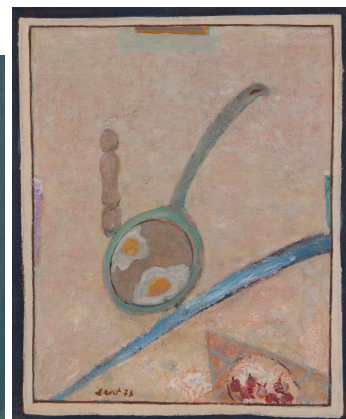
As a result, these still life works have been described as composed of “displaced objects”. The diverse range of common objects – fruit, vegetables, vessels, tablecloths, eggs in a pan - all recognisable but never simply a rendition of reality and more than an artful pose. Each element has been carefully placed with considered thought about the relationship to other objects in each artwork. The use of less common utensils with a more unique shape adds to the complexity, such as a nutcracker or a peppermill.



The Arrangement 61 x 51 cm



Nutcracker 51 x 61 cm

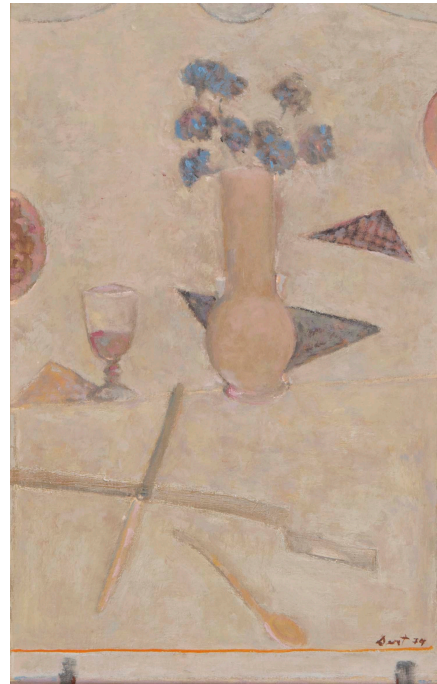


Petit Déjeuner 56 x 48.5 cm

The use of unusual angles are thought-provoking, with cutlery askew, coloured arcs cutting across a canvas, elements almost falling off the picture's edge or perhaps rather pressing themselves in, as if clamouring for the artist's attention and demanding to be included. This is heightened by the use of differing scale and tilting of the picture plane, drawing the viewer into the intrigue.



Chinese Table oil on canvas 55.5 x 48 cm



Cornflowers oil on canvas 71.5 x 45.5 cm

Dent has also experimented with the use of actual objects in the composition, a couple of canvases bear the marks of having once incorporated chopsticks as a three dimensional element, and yet another prompt for the viewer to question between reality and Dent's own vision.

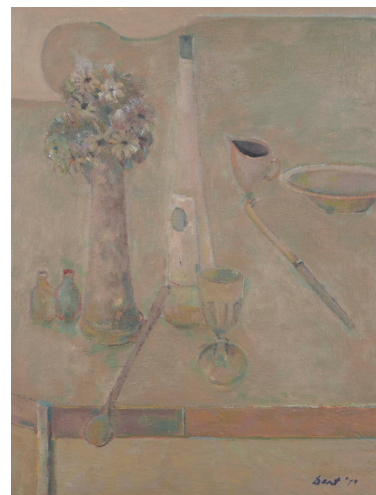
Beyond the choice of objects themselves is the correlation between object and space. It is a confident artist who is bold enough to leave areas of empty space and it is in these spaces that Dent's aptitude for colour shines – the contrasts, the harmony, the vibrancy – like an arc of grey across the pink hues in *Chinese Table*; the blue pop of *Cornflowers*; or the white peppermill against rich blues. The exhibition of these still life works together gives an effect of a softness and subtlety of colour and whilst this is true, it belies the complex overlaying of a multitude of hues to reach the desired shimmering outcome. Stand in front of one of these paintings and really look at the array of colour on the canvas, always presented as a harmonious whole.



Palette 66.5 x 47 cm



Still Life – Peppermill 56 x 45 cm

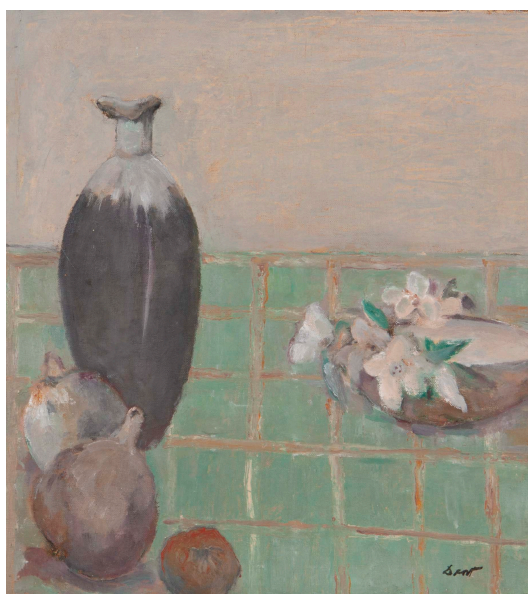


Sur Le Buffet 66 x 50.5 cm

An element of decorative patterning adds yet another layer, sometimes in the work itself (a band of dots in *Le Temps Passe*; or a green grid in *Classic Still Life*) and sometimes in the frame.



Le Temps Passe 56 x 50.5 cm

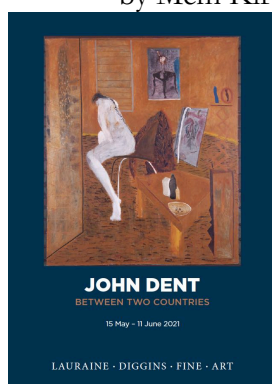


Classic Still Life 50 x 46 cm

The seeming simplicity of Dent's still life paintings conceals their great technical skill; the considered composition; the subtle yet rich layering of colour; the choice of everyday objects and the relationship between each object to each other and the space between. The disorienting angles and skewed placement adds a level of mystery, pointing to a narrative element we can only try to grasp, as critic Ronald Millar described Dent's "secret life of rooms and their contents."

Preview the paintings in the exhibition [John Dent: Between Two Countries](http://www.diggins.com.au) on our website www.diggins.com.au

Download the illustrated catalogue and listen to opening remarks by Mem Kirby OAM and LDFA Director, Michael Blanche



Showing at Lauraine Diggins Fine Art until 25 June 2021 EXTENDED

Gallery Hours: Tues – Fri 10am – 6pm or by appointment
**DUE TO CURRENT COVID RESTRICTIONS THE EXHIBITION CAN BE VIEWED
ONLINE AND THE GALLERY IS SCHEDULED TO REOPEN FRIDAY 11 JUNE**

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