

ERIKA GOFTON

Shhhh...

Official opening Friday December 5th, 2008

Exquisitely crafted, Erika Gofton's pictures conjure a yearning for that which has past - a world gone by and now accessible only in reveries, memories and dreams. These are works encompassing strange, indefinite spaces where all sound and movement has stilled... 'shhhh'd' into a contemplative silence.

Our gaze lingers upon young women clad simply in vintage, but pristine lingerie: silky-soft it clings and falls over the contours of their bodies. The visual narratives are at once open and closed, and as enigmatic as the ritual-like gestures of the hands. Perfect pearlescent skin seems bath-warm and fragrant, contradicting the faint memories we may have of musty, antique fabrics in airless rooms. Stasis and movement co-exist in a visual rhythm, alternately lulling and heightening the senses. The profusion of intricate detail in the lace-trimmed gowns and exotic, wallpaper patterns is mesmerising. The compositions themselves however, are utterly uncomplicated. The flat, horizontal banding, minimal use of perspective and for the most part, frontally presented figures, add to an overall quietude.

The mother of a curious four year old, Erika Gofton acknowledges the difficulty in striking a balance between motherhood and being an artist: "... *but you just do what you have to do I guess, and I couldn't imagine life without either. I really feel like this body of work is reflective of my current environment and life. I see it as being very still and calm - quiet, like a breathe, but with an underlying tension.*" Intimations of restraint and containment are revealed in the butterflies and birds of her wallpaper patterns. It is an age-old belief that birds and butterflies have the ability to carry 'the soul aloft'. Over time they came to represent thoughts and ideas, which by nature, need freedom in order to be expressed. Gofton increasingly portrays her 'winged-things' as stirring within their two dimensional entrapments. Silhouette-like they fitfully emerge and eventually take flight as beautiful, full-bodied creatures. It is imagery that extends the ethos of her earlier, paper-doll chains: rudimentary, cut-out figures symbolizing familial continuity and her own formative, childhood days.

The young Melbourne-based artist travelled through France, Italy and England researching the notion of femininity and its representation in art: "*I am intrigued with the subtlety between the sensual and the sexual... the culturally constructed definition of gender...*" Erika Gofton is also interested in exploring crafts traditionally regarded as feminine pastimes: dressmaking, lacemaking and embroidery among others. She pays homage to those activities by assimilating their practice into recent works, where painted and printed motifs are further enhanced by actual hand-stitching.

Essentially, Erika Gofton's paintings are important for their poetic sensibility - that remote, precious quality that transcends time and place. It is as if a spell had been cast and the viewer is given access to a different realm. Meaning will surface in a hush and with slow grace.

JACQUELINE HOUGHTON