Scattering clues, exposing memories, adopting identities, these pictures come to own something of the wilful energy with which a child creates secret worlds, bestowing significance upon the fantasy world of the self. The body of work is structured around a search for the space located between sentiment and sentimentality, where one might recollect and explore experiences such as loneliness, or vulnerability, without sinking into pathos; without embarrassment, squirming or blankness. This show brings together new and older works, illustrating the artists preoccupation with a set of personal images reminiscent of diaristic fragments. That the images are expressly of a personal character, is an indication of the artist’s defiant attitude toward narratives and codes which fail to recognise the complex and shifting nature of personal truth. A space of suggestion is created in these works, the allegorical space of the story-teller. The earlier House pictures, Mont Albert (1975/77), presents the viewer with renderings of a suburban home facade. The seeming banality of the image is subverted by the knowledge that it was indeed one of the artist’s own childhood homes. Thus, the image becomes evocative, the artist recording, in a parody of journalistic style, a memory of adolescence from a distance of time and experience. The home front conceals and contains its history, which remains a closed story to the viewer. However, the image maintains its potency through this very denial of further information. Curiosity aroused, we are forced back into our own memories to complete the story, to satisfy our desire. The image becomes the site for an exchange of experience between viewer and work. The artist employs something of the magician’s cunning in practising a sleight of hand, which protects the integrity and vulnerability of the images, the twin effects of revelation and concealment unify the body of work through shifts in formal treatment. Although the viewer’s interest is fanned toward an image the artist-figure, through the use of autobiographical content, the artist does not manipulate this curiosity to create a platform from which knowing proclamations are shared. Rather, the narratives presuppose nothing less than the dignity of mystery, and elusiveness of identity. Pictures of nakedness, Despair and Innocence, are both taken from the Forbidden Objects series of 1984. Painted straight on to “girl’s bedroom” fabric, the disarming vulnerability of the two figures, unravels any sense of austerity between artist and viewer, creating an intimacy between strangers where cynicism has no place. It is this same place that the horse figure moves in. The horse is posited as a re-creation of the artist’s image of self, an identity which is essentially Romantic, bespeaking a nostalgic desire to “go home” into a world devoid of ambiguity, a Nature-land. It is an image of uncomplicated dignity, its strength is unashamed, an ideal to which the artist is repeatedly attracted. The woman and the horse form a relationship which is created and established through a non-verbal language. The bond is Utopian, based on an acceptance of trust and respect, where no emotions are forbidden, and beauty possesses a non-sexual, simple innocence. This yearning for an uncomplicated emotional exchange is reflected in the artist's increasing fascination with a formal technique which suggests spontaneity. The paint is applied within unsophisticated immediacy, giving an impression of unmediated candour and playfulness. The latter works are simply drawn, single images which are painted on a stretched, hallucinatory scale. The viewer’s attention is focused, undistracted, on the one image which stands isolated in space, freed from the constricts of actual time and place to resonate with a surreal, dream-like significance. Each impression is accompanied by a separate piece, composed of the jumbled letters which construct the titles. As in the earlier Bottle piece, the letters become forms, almost independent of meaning. Text becomes elusive, and in the Bottle picture, a disturbing threat hinting at the self’s ability to create a mood of hysteria, where the transformation of experiences into legible meaning, is withheld. The Self is presented as a kind of container, or house-front, that can only suggest at a multitude of voices to be heard from within. Generous with memory and association, these pictures are never silent. SANDRA WEBSTER
Biography

1951 Born Melbourne
1970-72 Studied at National Gallery of Victoria Art School
1972 Diploma of Painting
1973 Diploma of Education, Melbourne State College
1975 Awarded Travel Grant, Visual Arts Board of the Australia Council
1979 Took up award Alliance Francaise Scholarship
1979-84 Partner in Art Projects Gallery, Melbourne

Selected Solo Exhibitions

1973, 1974, 1975 Powell Street Gallery, Melbourne
1986 Jenny Watson Paintings on Velvet, Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, Melbourne
1987, 1989, 1991 City Gallery, Melbourne
1985 Jenny Watson Paintings and Drawings 1972-1985, University Gallery, The University of Melbourne
1990 Galerie Hilger, Frankfurt
1991 Galerie Hilger, Vienna
1991 Meppener Kunstkreis, Meppen
1991 Annina Nosei Gallery, New York

Selected Group Exhibitions

1977 Illusion and Reality, International Exhibition, Australian State Galleries
1978 Powell Street Artists at Cunningham-Ward, New York
1978 Vox Pop: Into the Eighties, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
1980 Alliance Francaise Fellowship Winners, Melbourne
1981, 1987 Australian Perspecta, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney
1982, 1984 Biennale of Sydney, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney
1982 Popism, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
1983 A Melbourne Mood: Cool Contemporary Art, Australian National Gallery, Canberra
1983 D’un autre continent: L’Australia, Le reve et la real, ARC II Musée d’Art Moderne, Paris

Selected Catalogues and Books

1977 Illusion and Reality, Australian State Galleries
1979 Still Life Still Lives, Australian Regional Galleries
1980 On Paper: Survey 14, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
1981 New Realism, National Gallery of Victoria Travelling Exhibition
1981 Australian Perspecta, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney
1982 4th Biennale of Sydney, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney
1982 New Painting, Roslyn Oxley9, Sydney
1982 10 Years of Australian Art/Philip Morris Collection, Australian National Gallery, Canberra
1982 Popism, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
1983 Australian Perspecta, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney
1983 Jenny Watson, Roslyn Oxley9, Sydney
1983 Minimalism, Institute of Modern Art, Brisbane
1983 A Melbourne Mood: Cool Contemporary Art, Australian National Gallery, Canberra
1983 From Another Continent: Australia, The Dream + The Real ARCHII, Musée d'Art Moderne, Paris
1983 Vox Pop: Into the Eighties, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
1984 5th Biennale of Sydney, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney
1984 Dreams and Nightmares, Roslyn Oxley9, Sydney
1984 Art '84, Jean-Louis Pradel (Editor), London, New York
1985 Image Codes, Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, Melbourne
1985 Isolaaustralia, Fondazione Bevilacqua La Masa, Venice
1985 3rd Internationale Triennale der Zeichnung, Stadt Kunsthalle, Nurnberg
1985 Jenny Watson, Paintings and Drawings, 1972-1985, University Gallery, The University of Melbourne
1987 The Australian Bicentennial Perspecta, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney
1990 Jenny Watson: Pleasures and Memories, Galerie Hilger, Vienna and Frankfurt

Selected Articles
Ashley Crawford: “Interview", The Virgin Press, November 1982
Maggie Gilchrist: “Biennale of Sydney”, Art Network, No.6, 1982
“Young Blood”, Notes on Art Practice, Art Projects, 1983
Frances Lindsay: “A Melbourne Mood”, Art & Text, No.11, 1983
Bernice Murphy: “Recent Painting in Australia”, Flash Art, Milan, January 1983
Sue Cramer: “Vox Pop (Review)”, Art & Text, No.12/13, 1984
Juan Davila: “Jenny Watson", Express Australia, New York, 1984
Phillip Brophy: “A Face Without A Place”, Art & Text, No.16, 1984
Ashley Crawford: “The Artist and the Aristocrat", Follow Me, August-September 1985
Catalogue
(All measurements in centimetres, length before width)

1. Horse Painting 1974
oil and acrylic on duck, 183.0 x 247.0 c.m.
inscribed verso on stretcher and canvas
collection of the artist

2a. House Painting (small version) 1975-1977
oil on duck, 91.5 x 60.8 c.m.
inscribed verso on stretcher
collection of the artist and Mrs O. Watson

2b. House Painting (large version) 1975-1977
oil on duck, 183.3 x 290.7 c.m.
inscribed verso on stretcher
collection of the artist and Mrs O. Watson

3. Despair 1984
acrylic on damask, 146.6 x 76.8 c.m.
inscribed verso on stretcher
collection of the artist

4. Innocence 1984
acrylic on damask, 146.3 x 80.0 c.m.
inscribed verso on stretcher
collection of the artist

5. Bottled Memory: Exhibit A: Female Artist 1987
Aus Australien folio, René Block Editions
colour etching, 70.5 x 99.7 c.m.
signed and dated, pencil l.r., Jenny Watson 1987/88; inscribed pencil l.c., “for Chris & Lee”; inscribed pencil l.l., “Artist Proof”
(Printer: John Loane, Viridian Press)
collection of Christine Hubay and Lee Harper

6. The Woman (diptych) 1991
scenic paint on paper, 367.0 x 97.5 c.m.
not signed, not dated
courtesy of City Gallery, Melbourne

7. The House (diptych) 1991
acrylic on paper, 367.0 x 97.0 c.m.
not signed, not dated
courtesy of City Gallery, Melbourne

8. The Horse (diptych) 1991
oil on paper, 367.0 x 97.0 c.m.
not signed, not dated
courtesy of City Gallery, Melbourne

9. The Bottle (diptych) 1991
oil on paper, 367.0 x 97.0 c.m.
not signed, not dated
courtesy of City Gallery, Melbourne

oil paint on found bottles, various sizes
collection of Anna Weis

Acknowledgements

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Jennifer Duncan, Director.