Choreography of War Reportage; Pathfinder Closing; Dream Weapon; Protean World - works of art exhibited in the exhibition Ten Years of Contemporary Art: The James C Sourris Collection

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M. T. Kelly 2011 Choreography of War Reportage; Pathfinder Closing; Dream Weapon; Protean World - works of art exhibited in the exhibition Ten Years of Contemporary Art: The James C Sourris Collection Queensland Art Gallery/Gallery of Modern Art Brisbane, QLD Gallery of Modern Art 12 November 2011 — 19 February
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Abstract
Madeleine Kelly’s paintings present an inscrutable iconography, drawing on complex associations — from contemporary politics to classical mythology and the artist’s own concern with environmental degradation. While Kelly often engages topical issues, her work is never didactic.

These two paintings were created out of the artist’s concern with humanity’s dependence on fossil fuels and the devastating consequences this will have. Kelly says she ‘investigated the archaeological metaphor and its potential to create new meaning . . . to represent our relationship with the environment, both natural and artificial’. The end result is a persistent sense of foreboding.

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TEN YEARS OF
CONTEMPORARY ART
THE James C Sourris am Collection
Emerging artists: The current crop

BREE RICHARDS

The James C Sourris, AM, Collection has the overall effect of a contemporary Wunderkammer or cabinet of curiosities. The collection includes works by a number of younger artists in the first ten years of their practice which, on the surface, appear largely unrelated beyond the unifying intelligence of their approach.
The interrogation of the painting project continues with the work of Nana J Hughes, who, since 2000, has been making elegant works that reference both Eastern and Western art history, reflecting an ongoing interest in the aesthetics of decadence and the feminine. Her practice is largely concerned with depicting the body in new ways, drawing imagery from ukiyo-e woodblock prints of Edo-period Japan (1600–1868) and from the fragmented Art Nouveau designs of mid-nineteenth-century British artist Aubrey Beardsley (1872–1898), who was himself inspired by the style of Japanese woodcuts, especially by those practitioners who emphasized the grotesque, the decadent and the erotic.

Hughes’s interest in the visual pleasure of eye-catching detail is apparent in Flaccid Lake 2008, part of an ongoing series which draws inspiration from the monochromatic drawings of Aubrey Beardsley. His lyrical illustrations of European fin de siècle decadence are the source material for her large black-and-white oil paintings, which depict fragments from skirts, ruffles and underclothes. In Flaccid Lake, as everwhere in the artist’s oeuvre, clothing is depicted without wearers, and here these elaborately flowy fabrics, which still hold the shapes of absent bodies, morph into a mirrored pair of abstract penile forms. These curious shapes are at once object and attractive. A conversation is taking place that an century lady might turn into a fin de siècle debate-bows politely at the other, engaged in a form of conversation. In the process of removing sign from context, Hughes shapes to float within blank fields, and to forestall any further reference.

While the origins of Flaccid Lake lie in Beardsley’s unsettling universe, Hughes creates new means of deconstruction and reconfiguration. The human presence in her work, yet the primary focus here is delicately rendered shape, texture and drapery, exactly the carefully stylized folds and ruffles of the references, and the process extracts a duality and concealment. As elsewhere, we find hints of knowledge expressed, and suggestions of that which lies beneath the strictures of Victorian etiquette as we look. Flaccid Lake intonates the act of looking and by utilizing a compositional style that has abstraction and figuration, Hughes reconceives the feminine, the erotic, the grotesque and the...