

/dɛ'skrɪpt/
descript

capturing
a moment
in time

The descript project sets out to celebrate
a human story as a work of art.



Through descript the oil medium is explored.
A journey of challenges and discovery
in paint application and interaction, tone and colour
and the ever-present constraint of time.



Each randomly chosen vintage publication
is partnered with a live subject
and written experiences of a living person.

The book, and its texture, workmanship, message, journey,
is transformed from an object of the past
into a participant in a current social dialogue.



Being a visual representation of the subject,
the painting cements the book into a place in time.

A record of a person's clothing
or the laughter lines on a person's face,
the book becomes a witness to, and testimony of, an event.



descript aims to elicit an emotional response from the viewer
through sensitive and painterly technique.

By engaging with the painting,
and engaging with the biographical text,
the viewer may place a current value
on the book and its journey.

The viewer may then also become part of the book's story.



These stray books, incidental subjects and diverse biographies
are disconnected, somewhat random at first glance.

On closer reflection, the art works lay bare
their thread-like, tenuous links between past and present.

Reflecting perhaps, our own personal pursuit
of connectedness and meaning.



biographical snapshots as artistic creation

When Jennifer Fyfe first introduced me to her work, she explained that she was busy with a project recording life stories and collecting old discarded books which she used as backdrops or props on which she painted portraits. The early version of these composite portraits – consisting of a biographical sketch accompanied by a painting, gave me the impression that the underlying principle of JF's artistic method was randomness and fragmentariness. I was all the more convinced by my own analysis as I looked around at the contemporary world and its discourses, which stood out with their heterogeneity and lack of a unifying moral or cultural value system. The much vaunted 'difference' as a contemporary popular notion of social equality is a concept without content: to be 'different' means not to be 'the same', which is in any case a tautology.

Recently, JF sent me her entire completed project to view and see if I still wanted to accompany it with my original text. I realised that I did not. What has crystallised in the course of JF's project over the past two years – coinciding with our lockdowns – is a completely different aesthetic principle of JF's compositions. The clue to this principle is revealed almost as if 'by the way' in one of JF's questions to an interviewee (Nick's Story, Cezanne's Composition): 'This book explores a method of composing and building a painting.'

I realised as I was scrolling through the PDF of JF's *descript* that this is what her book does: it pursues structures which underlie creativity, understood as a personal choice which leads not only to the production of art – JF's art – but to the production of a life as a work of art. No matter what career or vocation or life's activity is narrated, every life emerges as a creative act, as a work of art. Every word uttered becomes integrated into the aesthetic process, which binds several elements into an aesthetic whole: the interview text, the interspersed interview questions, the title of an old book and the painted portrait of the narrating subject. The composition – which is an old-fashioned word for 'structure' used by the Russian Formalist critics starting in 1914 – of *descript* is studied, it is deliberate, it is anything but random. *descript* is the work of an artist, not just an artistic person. For as another one of JF's interviewees points out,

'... Artistic and being an artist are two different sides of a coin. Being artistic is raw creativity; it's beautiful and honest ... The decades it takes to develop your own visual language giving depth and richness to your work is being an artist.' (Fern's Story, Henry Rousseau)

The gestation of JF's project over a number of years is what makes it into a work of art. It displays a new visual language which uses reverse ekphrasis: instead of painting a visual picture in words, it incorporates words into a painted portrait of the subjects. The words of JF's interviewees, together with JF's discreet but pointed questions, 'paint' a life story, a biography, which is different to all others. These 'painted' stories are there for posterity, to be preserved as a form of cultural history. JF's interviewees also cover a large spectrum of professions and ethnic backgrounds – one could say, JF's biographical pallet is even more varied than her colour pallet, which stays within the bold primary colours of a Cézannesque Modernism. Contrary to my first impression, this variation does not constitute randomness, but 'difference' in the metaphysical (not sociological) sense of the term, although one could also read her community of subjects as a cross-section of multicultural Australia.

Despite connecting the disconnected – an old book title, a new portrait, a narrated biographical sketch – JF does not touch on the Surrealist aesthetics of a Magritte who said that all objects are combinable with other objects. Her artistic creations contain a different – new – message. This is the message about creative freedom, which is alive and to be claimed in all walks of life and in all professional and unprofessional activities, not just in the activity of the artist. Of course, the underlying assumption of this freedom is the guarantee of a free society – and all of JF's interviewees without exception pay tribute to Australia as such a guarantor of their creative freedom.

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Studies

1989 Monash University Arts
1994 RMIT Interior Decoration
1987–1989 Formal life drawing tuition
2000 Formal tonal oil painting tuition



Artistic objectives

To bring traditional oil painting to a contemporary audience.
To make relevant, sensitive and interesting artworks.
To bring depth and meaning to traditional art and reflect current social issues.
To question and explore philosophical concepts through art such as belonging, connection and conscience.
To make art that is inclusive and accessible.

Activities

Signatory Member Victorian Artists Society
Member Twenty Melbourne Painters Society Established 1918
Portrait painting demonstrations for Victorian Artists' Society
Co-convenor of Victorian Artists Society portrait and life painting group

2015 Victorian Artists Society Artist of the year
2019 Victorian Artists Society Artist of the year
2019 Finalist in the Rick Amor Self Portrait Prize and the AME Bale Oils Prize
2019 Winner of the People's Choice Award Rick Amor Self Portrait prize

Exhibitions

2016 Solo Exhibition 'Moments Captured' Cato Gallery East Melbourne
Group Exhibitions:
2018 'Here and Now' Steps Gallery Carlton
2020 'From this Moment' Frater and Hammond Galleries East Melbourne
2020 Poster collaboration shown Frater and Hammond Galleries East Melbourne

Annual Group Exhibition Twenty Melbourne Painters Society Glen Eira Town Hall Gallery Caulfield

Represented

Works held in public and private collections in Australia, United Kingdom and USA

Current Projects ...

New poster designs exploring advertising and traditional oil painting

50-work timepiece project exploring themes of guilt and social conscience within the context of social media