

Jennifer Fyfe

PORTRAIT ARTIST



ABOUT

Jennifer Fyfe is a Melbourne oil painter primarily working in portraiture from live subjects. Her work explores contemporary themes of social stories and connection. Fyfe's work is visually easy to interpret and is unique in that it is being created around prioritising exhibition accessibility. Fyfe uses recycled, recyclable and reclaimed objects wherever possible.

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Aligned with



TWENTY MELBOURNE
PAINTERS SOCIETY



IMPRINT EVENT
& VAS signatory member



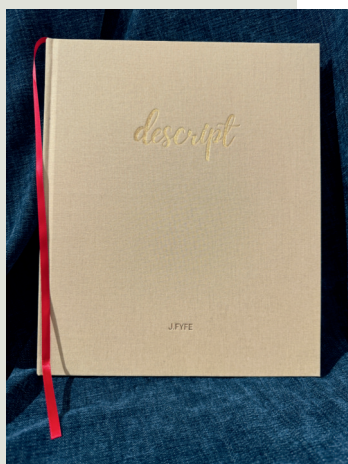
descript exhibition supported by
CITY OF MELBOURNE ARTS GRANTS

PUBLICATION EXHIBITION CATALOGUE

descript

ISBN 978-1-7635573-0-7

essay,
academic commentary,
studio images,
art work images,
biographical stories



ACTIVITIES

Workshops:

model programs

Student workshops

Designed around serious tonal study and colour
exploration for VCE folio expansion

Artist workshops for portraiture. Building on
skills in speed and resemblance

Reimagining the portrait

TRADITIONAL PAINTINGS WITH A CONTEMPORARY AESTHETIC

found,
recycled,
repurposed,
rescued

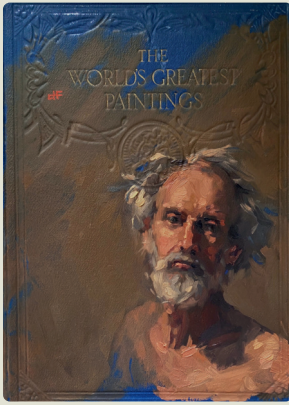
connecting
with
community

“a new way
of seeing
portraiture
and telling
stories”



portraits
completed
in only
3.5 hours

Project DESCRIPT



PAINTED BOOKS

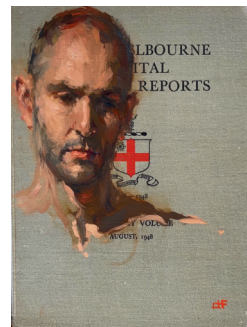
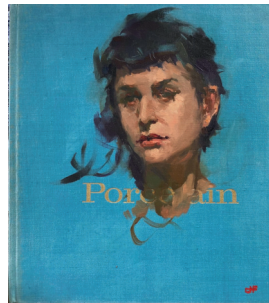
Painted on repurposed materials.
Painted from live models in 2.5 and 3.5 hours.
Accompanying biographies printed in ink
and Braille.
Community stories - first responder, knife
craftsman, artist model, gardener, scientist,
teacher...



EXHIBITION PREMIER
APRIL 16 - MAY 12 2025

Telling social stories
& building connection

DESCRIPT



Describing a living story

Through painterly images, Jennifer Fyfe seeks to elicit a feeling of connection in her audience and convey a message, story, and emotion. Fyfe paints on unconventional substrates as an exploration of texture and colour and, more profoundly, as a response to obsolescence in our aspirational society. The *descript* project was born from books rescued from a rainy day on a nature strip, imagining the souls who had thumbed pages and engaged with these stories on their own human journey. The portraits which ensued, created over 5 years, are underpinned by a collection of vintage objects passed on, or found in hard waste, op shops, and second-hand book shops.

Painting and drawing the figure from life has always been the backbone of Fyfe's art practise. A representational painter, Fyfe works in oils in front of her subject in a time frame of 3.5 hours, in a technique known as *alla prima* (at once). Research of this *alla prima* technique has revealed to Fyfe the importance of this painting procedure in Australian art history and its effectiveness in telling a current story. Vital to her own portrait work, *alla prima* provides an in-the-moment experience which holds in its embrace the atmosphere, the cultural environment, the artist and the sitter, and produces an historical record of an event in time. Fyfe has come to believe that this spontaneous painting process can also be a window into the emotion associated with a moment in time. Fyfe's works in forthcoming painting projects further investigate this contention.

Throughout Fyfe's current works, found objects are chosen for their interesting content and for their appearance. Fyfe is continually challenged by the paint's behaviour on the surface and the often vibrant colour of the substrate but, most of all, by her time limit. Decisions are made 'spur of the moment' and paint tones are subject to muddying when working at speed. It is necessary to use less medium and stiffer brushes to compensate. Fyfe employs loose line work in some areas to give an impression of form without detail.

Fyfe is inspired by the colour and texture of 19th and 20th century Australian painters such as Carrick, Roberts and Phillips Fox along with the mastery of Singer Sargent portraiture and the line work and emotionally-charged images of Toulouse Lautrec. Occasionally she will allow her work to be directly influenced by the book on which it is painted. For example, in 'Cézanne's Composition' Fyfe mimics Cézanne's technique of using cool colours to make shapes recede, and in 'The Italian Drawings' Fyfe uses a burnt sienna colour to affect the pen and ink of Renaissance sketches. In some instances, Fyfe references the artist via both the painting and the story. For example, in 'Toulouse Lautrec', Fyfe uses cool turquoise on the human form as an homage to the bar lighting from Lautrec's interiors. In doing so, she draws comparisons between the sitter Megan's story and Lautrec's own relationships.

descript is also a reimagining of the 15th and 16th Century Renaissance art experience. A renaissance painting might, at first glance, be a lifelike rendering of a subject yet, on further inspection, yield a message using motifs and symbols such as a skull suggesting finality, lilies for purity, dogs for fidelity and so on. Paying tribute to these traditional oil paintings, *descript* presents a resemblance to organic biology, enabling an innate connection with the viewer, however the art can also be 'read' by the viewer. The *descript* paintings communicate our environmental burden through their recycled origins and, through printed and encoded stories, their social message of connection.

Recently, Fyfe has been reaching back into her family history and her connection to the Limestone Plains around Canberra, home of her maternal Ngunnawal ancestor. Fyfe feels that she is a combination of cultures. A mixture which, indeed reflective of contemporary Australia, is also present in her artwork. Fyfe allows her lineal ties to inspire a curiosity and sensitivity to country and, on occasion, influence her selection of books and portraits.

descript is an invitation to a contemporary audience to engage not only visually but also emotionally with the art of portraiture and the stories it conveys.

biographical snapshots as artistic creation

Dr Slobodanka Millicent Vladiv-Glover
Adjunct Associate Professor (Research)
School of Languages, Literatures, Cultures and Linguistics Monash University (Clayton Campus)

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 'dierence' as a contemporary popular notion of social equality is a concept without content: to be 'dierent' 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 dierent 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 dierent 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 dierent 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 'dierence' 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 dierent – 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.

The Accessibility Project

A NEW WAY OF SEEING THINGS

This project seeks to provide greater accessibility for art gallery visitors.

The 'descript' book project involves Braille and large print for the vision impaired and the ability to take books from their frames so that height-restricted visitors are given greater opportunity to see the paintings up close.

Fyfe exhibitions will be designed to potentially include a new, innovative device, the result of collaboration between the artist, RMIT University and accessibility advocates to allow height-restricted visitors to view the artworks in a more inclusive manner.

RMIT UNIVERSITY

- Fyfe will be collaborating closely with RMIT to explore the prototype build opportunity
- Having met with the RMIT Partnerships Team to initiate this collaboration, areas of discussion were:
- around working with the student body in a collaborative and mentoring capacity,
- the end-use of the design,
- intellectual property considerations,
- other possible applications for the design beyond the gallery space.
- RMIT Partnerships Team is now taking the project to their Society 5.0 Social Change Initiative to decide the best fit for the study area



<https://www.rmit.edu.au/research/our-research/enabling-impact-platforms/case-studies/society-5-0>

ACCESS ARTS VICTORIA

- Discussion around the advisory process and the design options, 'analog' versus high- tech mechanics, height considerations and the consultation process with AAV.

*Exploring the human condition
through paint*

IN THE STUDIO



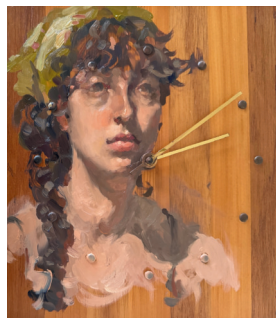
160 NEW WORKS IN PRODUCTION

Portraits on repurposed objects.
Painted in 3.5 hours

Project 1 - 60 works
social conscience and time

Project 2 - 55 works
human as vessel

Project 3 - 1 installation, 51 works
water life



*Exploring the human condition
through paint*
IN THE STUDIO



Jennifer Tyfe

PORTRAIT ARTIST

Objectives

- To bring traditional oil painting to a contemporary audience.
 - 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.
-

REPRESENTED

Works held in public
and private collections
in Australia, UK, USA

ARTISTIC CAREER

- 2019 Winner of the People's Choice Award Rick Amor Self Portrait prize
- 2019 Victorian Artists Society Artist of the year
- 2019 Finalist in the Rick Amor Self Portrait Prize
- 2019 Finalist in the AME Bale Oils Prize
- 2018 Invited to join the Twenty Melbourne Painters Society Inc. est 1918
- 2017 Finalist in the Rick Amor Self Portrait Prize
- 2016 Finalist in the AME Bale Oils Prize
- 2015 Victorian Artists Society Artist of the year
- 2014 Commenced Membership to the Victorian Artists Society

EXHIBITIONS

Oil paintings on reclaimed objects

Solo Exhibition

- 2025 'descript' Frater, McCubbin & Hammond Galleries, East Melbourne

Oil paintings on linen

Group Exhibitions:

- 2019 - 2024 Annual Group Exhibition Twenty Melbourne Painters Society
- 2020 Poster collection shown Frater and Hammond Galleries East Melbourne
- 2020 'From this Moment' Frater and Hammond Galleries East Melbourne
- 2018 'Here and Now' Steps Gallery Carlton

Solo Exhibition

- 2016 'Moments Captured' Cato Gallery, East Melbourne