

# THE PENINSULA

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# *A* NATURAL *Storyteller*

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IMAGES: DEAN HOME COURTESY OF METRO GALLERY, MELBOURNE

*The still life can be the embodiment of values, tastes and time. It has the ability to appeal to the primary instincts of human nature, of food and substance. Australian artist Dean Home's striking works in this genre are not only symphonies in composition, they are invitations to meditate on beauty, mortality and truth.*





Dean Home has, in his almost 30-year artistic career, brought a deep intensity and drama to the still life works for which he is widely recognised. Over the last decade in particular, he has come to be known for his sensual and sumptuous renderings of ripe to bursting fruits set within fascinating scenes that recall the exotic fables and landscapes of the Orient. His compositions can be translated as meditations on beauty and time, and bear the influence of the depth of wisdom of ancient Chinese poetry.

Inspired by the tradition of the still life and great masters including Caravaggio, Raphael and Velazquez, Home creates theatrical scenes and stories in which his figurative backgrounds interact with the still life composition of the foregrounds.

In his current body of work, mysterious women hold brushes and fruits as they present their own aesthetic compositions to the artist as they entertain themselves in a what seems like some kind of secret Eastern world.

Born in Busselton, Western Australia in 1961 to parents who both had interests in art, Home started doing simple pencil drawings of stick figures at the age of four. With his parents' encouragement, following high school, he left the countryside of his upbringing in 1979 to attend Curtin University in Perth where he obtained a Bachelor of Arts Degree.

Following an extensive period when Home focused on predominantly figurative painting, which culminated in 2004 when he was commissioned by the National Portrait Gallery to paint Sir Gus Nossal AC, distinguished scientist and Australian of the Year 2001, the artist changed paths to pursue still life, one that he has not deviated from since.

Home has since emerged as one of Australia's best selling contemporary artists. His earlier still life paintings had something of a classic European feel and whilst they were both admired and acquired, they somehow were not fully at ease within contemporary Australian art market. The artist's talent was never in question, nor was his enthusiasm to reach a certain level of perfection, and as the years passed, the introduction of a number of collected Asian artifacts into his world provided the catalyst for a dynamic change. "I picked up some Chinese porcelain bowls at auction, including one from the Kangxi period (1662-1722)," Home reveals. "They had a strong sense of landscape and finding them was something that totally unleashed my imagination."

This change, coupled with his imaginative storytelling ability, took Home's work to another level. The fruit took on vibrant new hues and the ceramic pieces different perspectives on life. "I have this sort of telescopic effect in terms of setting up the still life and finding the actual objects that go into them; I have to be fascinated with them," he says. "There are so many elements involved - different pieces of blue and white, fabrics and the way the light falls on the characters. It's not about just choosing any object and painting it, that's simply not enough. The composition has to resonate with me before I start a piece and every time I work, I get deeper and deeper into the process."

Home's sumptuous paintings, some of which measure up to 7 feet by 4 feet are a rich and colourful assault on the senses, each taking around five weeks to complete. The interactions between the characters and the objects on the canvas can be interpreted in any number of ways by the viewer.

A new object that began to appear in Home's 2011 works is a teapot showing lively young boys dancing around it at play. Whilst they play, their presumed mothers adorn the fabric in the background, almost as if they have found moments of solace and peace whilst their children enjoy themselves within the safety of the teapot which seems to function as a playground.

Each work tells a different tale in order to create diversity within a cohesive body of work. "I try to reach into my mind and

think where things came from. The Asian idea of continuity and maintenance and renewal of ideas is very interesting to me," says Home of his more recent work. "I understand the metaphors to an extent that some people actually think I'm Chinese."

Home's process begins with him photographing his beloved objects in different compositions. He then prints out his selected preference and translates it onto canvas, but still continues to adapt the piece as he paints. "I often want to make a piece more poetic, change the light, or just add to it as I go along. I go through stages; I might be out walking with my dog and see a particular flower that I want to slot into the composition. My work always evolving; I'm on a path not in a place and so I constantly seek to increase the intensity of the idea," he says. "I've had one particular bowl for five years and it started out as a simple object, but as time has passed my relationship with the bowl deepens and so different tempos might appear in a work or the sense of time and space may change. I will likely be painting still life 15 years from now, but it won't be the same as anything I have done previously."

Home's "path" has led to him staging 35 solo exhibitions throughout Australia to date and he is also represented in state, regional and private collections, both at home and overseas. His work remains in high demand and as we close our conversation as he laughs and says, "I haven't had a painting in the shed since 2007 - it's a bit of a shock really!"





