



DEAN HOME

STORY ASHLEY CRAWFORD

Dean Home is facing a moment of crisis. This is not a bad thing, he is quick to add. But a crisis it is. His painting, initially a fairly simple act of perfecting still life tableaux centred on Chinoiserie, has become something far more, something that resembles a quest for meaning and understanding.



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DEAN HOME'S TRADEMARK CHINOISERIE, beautifully rendered oriental bowls surrounded by fruits, paintbrushes and other luxurious detritus, began simply enough as a "reinvigoration or reinvestigation of the practice of still life", but as his canvases grew in scale and ambition, something else began to form.

"I probably spent 10 years learning what possibilities there were in painting these forms," Home says. But the shift is clear. He no longer wants to paint the bowls, he wants to paint on them within the frame of the canvas. Pure representation is no longer the goal; the bowls on the canvas have become the canvas itself. "They are no longer just objects to be portrayed. Now it is about what I want to paint on them, I want to write other stories of the mind."

Home has long considered himself a distinctly Western artist, a painter whose aesthetic home resides in the museums of Europe and the hallowed halls of Rome. "I have always responded to the Baroque," he states. "I love the sweep of it, the drama, the theatrics. That's what Rome gave to me."

But a decade of Chinoiserie has left its mark in other ways. For some time Home has been simultaneously considering the stories, myths and legends portrayed on his vessels. At first these seemed to be light stories of mischief and misadventure, but as time passed Home began to appreciate the subtle themes and philosophical musings at play. He recognised the inadvertent similarity between the shape of his bowls and Buddhist stupas. "It was an inadvertent mistake, a spark and you respond. It was the merest atom of the Buddha's presence."

That is not to suggest that Home has become a full-blown Buddhist, but the gates of philosophical musing, and its attendant aesthetic explorations have opened wide.

"For all my love of European painting I could never buy into all of the Christian iconography. It wasn't the world for me. I always sought a more direct engagement with the world, with space. Being Australian I think that engagement with nature comes naturally."

"Superficially they remain still life, but the subject is mine. They are nominally landscapes, but it's a site with two intentions; a mindscape telling a story within a context."

Writing in the catalogue for Home's 2016 exhibition *Travels Under the Red Cliffs*, curator Dr Leigh Summers captured Home's developing oeuvre succinctly: "Beneath Home's sumptuous and refined paintings there also lies a scholarly impetus that at first glance is almost camouflaged by the glistening pomegranates, luminous magnolias and decorative calligraphy brushes that often dominate the foreground of his paintings. Each beautifully composed work is in fact a distillation of history, myths and symbols found in traditional Chinese painting."

01 Dean Home, 2016, photographer artist

02 Free to Fly, 2013, oil on board, 122 x 200cm



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The way I've increased my depth of understanding about what I'm doing has me imagining that I'm on a path, and as I move along the same ideas, broad concerns are addressed and evolve. It's not a question of simply grabbing some objects and painting them – any new object has to, almost instantly, call out to my hidden imagination and open a door for these sorts of ideas to spring out.”



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- 03 Red Table, 2005, oil on board, 75 x 183cm
- 04 So we took our chances, 2016, oil on board, 105 x 170cm
- 05 The overgrown path, 2015, oil on board, 122 x 190cm
- 06 Late summer storms, 2009, oil on board, 94 x 139cm

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Dean Home's studio lies at the rear of his Melbourne Bayside home. A fishing boat dominates the front garden – Home is a passionate angler – and his studio is reached through an almost obsessively equipped kitchen. Home is a gourmand and connoisseur of fine wines which, alongside his passion for ancient Rome and his obsession with painting, dominate his conversation. But it is painting which presides. His work, he says, has developed from painting and “styling objects to a more complex assembly of aesthetic values or issues often opened up by the arrangement of the objects.”

Core amongst his concerns, he says, are “ideas about memory, psychology, imagination and self-identity. The selected objects make an interior scene but can be simultaneously read as landscapes (often literally on the bowls). The swapping of genre sensations allows the objects to become something else. Various ideas go on the bowls to be explored. The “landscapes” I invented from intuiting Southern Asian mountains, which I condensed to resemble the petals of a lotus flower. Various ideas began to coincide with certain Chinese notions of aesthetics and intellectual and moral values. The landscape as a retreat to virtue found in the mountains, notions of water flowing out of the landscape as a metaphor for wisdom.”

Home suggests that the depiction of the calligraphic brushes can act as an invitation to the viewer to create their own narrative. The iconographic bowl, a cherished vessel from the Kangxi Period (1662-1722) and a key object which Home returns to with regularity, carries a similar sense of invitation. The title for ‘Travels Under the Red Cliffs’ was borrowed from a famous poem by Su Shi, of the Song Dynasty. The current works were clearly knitted together via a fascination for such cultural referents, which have become layered over Home's more Baroque imperatives. As Leigh Summers notes, these paintings “form a nexus between the east and the west, the spiritual and corporeal, tradition and contemporaneity”.



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Dean Home's career now spans over three decades. He has barely stopped exhibiting since completing his Bachelor of Arts at Perth's Curtin University in 1981, with just on 40 shows to his credit. Thus he is clearly well and truly an established artist. Yet to speak to Home in 2016 one could imagine him just emerging from art school, full of vibrant enthusiasm as though he has only just discovered the magic of painting. Even after an entire decade of investigating his oriental motifs Home's enthusiasm seems, if anything, more animated. Having conquered Rome he plans to march on the Imperial City to plunder not just its aesthetics, but the wisdom of ages. ■

Dean Home is represented by Art House Gallery, Sydney; Metro Gallery, Melbourne; and Gallery One, Gold Coast

www.arthouse.com.au

www.metrogallery.com.au

www.gallery-one.com.au

07 As you enter the forest, 2015, oil on board, 100 x 160cm

08 Dean Home in the studio, 2016, photographer artist

Courtesy the artist and Arthouse Gallery, Sydney