

Louise Martin-Chew, *Prudence Flint: From Beauty to Complexity—And Back*, art guide Australia, 7 March 2022

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## Prudence Flint: From Beauty to Complexity—And Back

FEATURE 7 March 2022

Prudence Flint paints images of women with exaggerated physical characteristics—tall, statuesque—at intimate moments. They are beautifully painted, layered and luminous, their faces looking away from the viewer, engaging with one another and the intensity of their physical experiences. These paintings draw you close with their oblique narratives, juxtaposed with symbolic elements—but there is also the sumptuous quality of the paint, the pleasure in their muted colours, and the exploration of their abstract and constructed qualities. And in her latest exhibition *Conditions for Sprouting Seeds*, Flint acknowledges a biographical element: “I love that I get somewhere to take my interests.”

And these interests are personal. “The title is a bit of a joke with myself about life,” she says. “At the moment I’m in flux, moving house, setting up for the future. All my relationships are complicated. That is all in the paintings, but I feel very alive too. Repression has lifted.”

Her trajectory of making paintings over 35 years of has included spectacular, life-changing moments. She has won the 2004 Doug Moran Prize, the Portia Geach Memorial Award in 2010, and the Len Fox Painting Award in 2016. Yet she says, “It has taken a long time to get [the paintings] strong, and survive the stress of showing them.”

There’s an old-world interiority about Flint: well-groomed, long hair stylishly positioned on her head, but she also possesses an irrepressible humour and joy. As she expresses it, this is hard won. She was an intense child, the youngest of four with three older brothers. She had a close and lively relationship with her mother, but was left with “a bit of inherited baggage”. What has always consumed her is making things; she sews and knits, writes daily and acknowledges “an intense thing with my female lineage. I do therapy and psychoanalysis. It helps my work, and I am terribly interested in it.”

For Flint it has always been about women as primary subjects. “At the moment, I have a performative thing going on,” she says. *The Hang*, showing at Fine Arts, crystallises her current interest in the dramatic, the suspension of the model dividing the canvas, watched by two other figures. “I love a crucifixion: I went to a Catholic school. You get to a certain

time in your life. I don't feel so much fear anymore. I push the practice as far as I can. I know when I am excited by an image, the drama balanced with restraint. I am bringing in dream elements, like the tree in the bed. The paintings to me are not strange or tragic. I am trying to give voice to the real."

Meanwhile in *The Tree*, a figure lies on a bed in her underwear. A tree grows out of the mattress next to her, while an apple and a cane allude to original sin, the punishment of women, juxtaposed with her beauty. Yet there is nothing didactic about this work: "I am interested in my own psychology and how women survive our culture, but being political does not help me as an artist. Work is political, but I am interested in the freedom of my dream life."

The ability to create such works is also testimony to Flint's long-term relationships with her two models, Athena and Izzy. "They both have a great sense for clothes. Issy is six foot tall. Athena has a PhD in cinema studies. They both bring empathy to the poses."

While Flint taught painting sessionally for decades, in recent years commercial success allows a complete focus on her work. Her process is slow, and she may produce only ten paintings in a year. "I love repeating myself because it is never the same. I paint on raw rabbit skin linen and slowly build up the colours. It all happens at once, putting the figure in and building and changing the colours until it all feels right. It can go out of tune and then I wrestle it back."

*Conditions for Sprouting Seeds* is an artist at the height of her powers and confidence, expressing ideas and empathy distilled from life experience and observation that takes us from beauty to complexity—and back.

*Conditions for Sprouting Seeds: Prudence Flint*  
Fine Arts Sydney  
5 February—15 March