

Melissa Pesa, *Prudence Flint: The Wish*, Art Almanac, 20 May 2020

**Art  
Almanac**

## Prudence Flint: The Wish

20 May 2020 | *Melissa Pesa*

In *The Wish* (2020), a woman lies prone on the bed; head to one side, with her arms tucked beneath her chest. She is still; resting. An unplayed guitar beside her sustains the quiet in the room. We watch, patiently, in silence for her next move.

Prudence Flint's 'psychologically charged environments' draw the viewer into acts of inadvertent voyeurism, seduced by semi-undressed figures and a glimpse into intimate everyday domestic activities – from nourishing a child, bathing and sleeping, to coition. Their averted stares rupture the tranquillity of the scene and encourage the viewer to explore the true complexity of their narratives. I spoke with Flint ahead of her first show with Fine Arts, Sydney.

*In paused moments of contemplation, what lies beyond the frame, or within the emotional framework of the characters?*

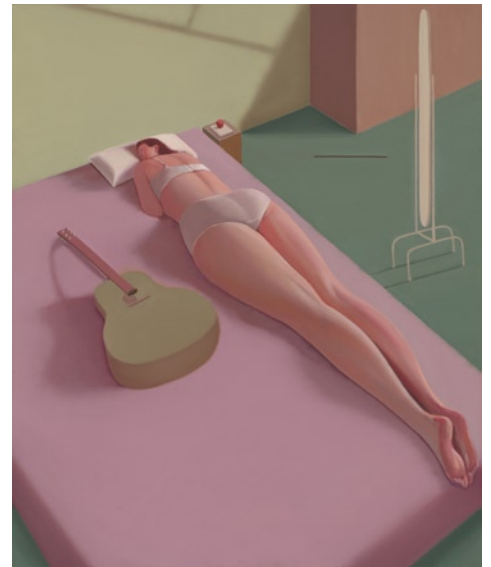
I'm trying to create a scene of familiar tension where the surface of the paint, the shapes, the colours, the figures, form a whole. I want a feeling of intimacy and intensity. I think about early renaissance paintings where the viewer enters into a world, and a clear story is being told, but not without ambiguity and complexity. I like it when my unconscious distorts and gives unexpected qualities to the images. As in a dream, I don't always know exactly what is going on in the narratives, but I am attracted to certain arrangements of shadows, furniture, angles, poses and objects and the atmosphere this creates.

*You often focus on the single figure, yet occasionally you insert a second. Does this complicate the narrative or relationship of the composition?*

It has taken me a long time to tackle the complexity of arranging multiple figures. There are certain curious blind spots in the social world regarding figurations of women-with-women unless it is clearly spelt out, but I am most attracted to mysterious gatherings. Couplings of men and women are tricky to paint because the symbolic law creates such primal fixed power relations. I find myself needing to play with angles and size relations for months before I can start painting because of all-the-trouble it brings. I have to subjugate the male figure in relation to the female figure; otherwise, the male figure colonises the narrative. Women need space for anything desirous or impossible to happen.

*So, what role does the male figure, or male audience, play in works such as *The Cup* (2020); laying on the bed, asleep and exposed while his female counterpart stands semi-clothed and drinking?*

He's definitely the sacrifice in this work.



Prudence Flint, *The Wish*, 2020, oil on linen, 122 x 102 cm

*There are recurring objects in this series – for example, the seashell and the apple – what relevance do they hold?*

I want the objects in my paintings to sit well within the narrative. I will often change them, paint them in, remove them several times until they feel right. Both the apple and the shell are meaning-laden in relation to the female subject. Shells are womb-like and have receptive oceanic listening associations with the Roman Goddess Venus (born of seafoam). The biting of the apple as symbolic of womanpower in biblical stories and fairy tales. These objects sit well in this series of paintings because of the themes of desire and loss.

*Do your distortions of the female form and restricted palette of flat pastel pinks and muted pared-back greens tones attribute to the emotive psyche of the works?*

I want the distortions to give emotional weight to the figures. I like it when the distortions become almost uncomfortable – but not quite. Colour has to have a temperature and work spatially within the picture plane, and its associations need to work within the narrative. I want the colour and surface of the paint to be pleasurable and palpable.

*In this time of crisis and isolation, do you think your paintings can be redefined or given new relevance in regards to enforced solitude and self-reflection?*

Context will always temper how an artwork is received. Being home for me is real sanctuary, where all my epiphanies, realisations and emotional shifts happen, and it is also where I paint. Solitude is highly desirable (necessary). It gives everything else meaning. My paintings are concerned with a self-relation that has developed over a long period of time.

[Fine Arts, Sydney](#)

**13 May to 20 June 2020**

Sydney