

Rebecca Fulleylove, Artist Prudence Flint paints 'powerful and mysterious' female protagonist, *It's Nice That*, 4 July 2017

It's Nice That

Artist Prudence Flint paints "powerful and mysterious" female protagonists in oil.

Rebecca Fulleylove

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Melbourne artist Prudence Flint paints her works in oil on linen and spends around three months on each one. For 20 years her subject has been "a female in an interior and occasionally outdoors", and most recently she's been painting two figures into her works and she "loves the complications this brings up".

Having studied design in the 80s, Prudence soon found she was more interested in exploring her own specific ideas, rather than those of a client and went on to study fine art. "Since being a teenager I've read a lot of fiction and watched films. I'm interested in the interior life. I love a complicated female protagonist, someone who has to leave the group and do a brave thing," the artist says of her inspiration. Artists that she references include Edward Hopper, Alex Katz, Jocelyn Hobbie and Eric Fischl, who often focus on the single figure.

For many years Prudence used herself as a model for her paintings, working off photographs. "When I can manage it I have a regular practice of drawing and painting from life. These days I have friends who model for my paintings. They always bring something complicated and fresh to my ideas," she says. "All my best ideas for paintings come from actual places and moments in life that trigger some unexpected feeling that is layered in unconscious memories, often about the opposing forces of confinement and freedom. Always the body takes some important stance in expressing that feeling."

Prudence's scenes are eerily quiet and we see her characters do typical things like lying on a bed, relaxing on a picnic blanket and showering. While they're seemingly mundane activities, simply by painting them Prudence gives meaning to her characters' actions. A slew of pastel colours inhabit Prudence's works and the soft hues juxtapose with the tense atmosphere she creates.

"I want a simple idea that is visually powerful and mysterious. I want the paintwork to be as clear and pared back as I can make it and the colour to work to bring out the idea," Prudence explains. "Ideas start out as small pencil drawings. I will draw the idea up on a canvas in charcoal and sit with it for a month or so. If it survives that process, I start painting rough and loose at first, each layer becoming more refined and distilled. Some ideas take ten years to find form."

For the artist, it's the "independence and brutality" of painting that drives her. "It's just the quiet and you sitting with yourself and what comes up," she says. "All the ghosts and internal voices and working out to how to manage them. If you can bare that and take care of yourself, you can paint."