

AUSTRALIAN

ART

collector

AUSTRALIA'S ART MARKET MAGAZINE

ISSUE 39 • JANUARY - MARCH 2007

ISSN 1328-9586 PRINT POST APPROVED PP235387/00100 US\$14.95 • UK£7.95 • NZ\$20.95 • €11.95 • HKD 112.95 • ¥1600 RRP AUD \$18.95 (incl. GST)

Del Kathryn Barton is one of Australia's

50 Most Collectable Artists 2007



Christine Wake

Kensington Gallery, Adelaide

23 February – 25 March 2006

Christine Wake, 46, has been painting professionally for just a decade – having spent an earlier lifetime as a garden designer.

Her first incarnation in commercial art, following a TAFE course in acrylics and studies at the Adelaide Central School of Art, was a conjoining of those worlds – still lifes of the fruit and flowers of the garden.

In this mode, calling herself a “tonal impressionist”, she achieved steady sales and carved a respectable reputation. She has been represented by Marie Mizon gallery in Sydney, Pollock in Melbourne, Gadfly in Perth and Kensington in Adelaide.

Wake's meditations of late have been upon the masks of life – who we are and what we hide beneath the masks of conformity that she believes we wear for work and play. But she likes to leave open to the viewer the many interpretations of the mask – it could be a symbol of defence, performance or, in another historical context, the garb of social merriment.

Thus does her new exhibition depict a lightly surreal exuberance of carnival themes, entitled *Behind the Mask*.

“Who are we behind the facade of acceptable behaviour?” she asks. “Has society conditioned us into a boring, obedient mass, or can we express individuality? How much of ourselves do we reveal?”

“I didn't want to paint just decorative work, paintings that simply look great but I wanted to create works which opened up some interactivity.

“And, by painting uplifting works, it does not mean I don't have something to say. Behind the mask, metaphorically speaking, there can be broken minds and bodies, things perhaps we don't want to deal with...”

Wake is perhaps speaking of herself. She confesses that a very dysfunctional childhood propelled her to create an alternative world “psychologically far away from that reality”. Painting was always a treasured escape.

While she avoids morbid or confronting imagery, she reiterates her need for a serious undercurrent – other masked messages on euthanasia or the state of the planet.

These she delivers with an almost Chagall-like swirl of confidence and a range of characters who remind of **Blackman** and sometimes early **Nolan**, with the element of skewed frivolity that Wake has made hallmark to the series. The works are bright, strong and interesting in their quirky detail.

She lives in a rural setting in the Adelaide Hills where her small, canvas-crowded studio overlooks a Japanese garden and a world of “big sky, bird life and open views”. She is a steady, productive painter who estimates her output at about 100 paintings a year.

The Adelaide Plains and its Festival City is just a few miles down the freeway and it is there, says Wake, that the models for her characters – acrobats, jugglers, opera divas, mime artists and party people – are to be found.

Samela Harris



Christine Wake, *Acrobat with Hula Hoop*. Oil and acrylic on linen, 65 x 91cm. COURTESY: THE ARTIST.

“I didn't want to paint just decorative work, paintings that simply look great but I wanted to create works which opened up some interactivity.”