

I want to break free Lily Hibberd

Exhibited at Karen Woodbury Gallery, 26 July – 19 August 2006
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Photography: Graham Baring

Design: Lily Hibberd

Lily Hibberd is a current studio artist at Gertrude Contemporary Art Spaces and is represented by Karen Woodbury Gallery, Richmond. As a visual artist working with painting, photography and installation, she has held ten solo exhibitions since 1998, in Perth, Sydney and Melbourne. Hibberd completed a Master of Fine Art at the Victorian College of the Arts and lectures in painting and art theory at Victoria University of Technology and Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology. As founding editor of un Magazine, she is actively involved in the publication of arts writing and is a frequent contributor to visual art forums, including co-editing (with Natasha Bullock) issue 76 of Photofile in 2005.

SELECTED SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 2006 *I want to break free*, Karen Woodbury Gallery, Richmond
- 2005 *Dangerous Liaisons*, Linden Centre for Contemporary Arts, St Kilda
- 2004 *Paint Tin Fantasias*, The Farm, Brisbane
- SLEEPWALKER: cinema & dreams*, Kings ARI, Melbourne
- Blinded by the Light*, Karen Woodbury Gallery, Melbourne
- 2003 *Blinded by the Light*, Bus Gallery, Melbourne
- Blinded by the Light*, Perth Institute of Contemporary Arts, Perth
- 2002 *Burning Memory*, Imperial Slacks, Surry Hills, Sydney
- 2001 *Burning Memory*, TCB inc. ART, Melbourne
- 2000 *Time Slots*, Spencer Street Gallery, West Melbourne

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 2005 *You're So Vain*, Karen Woodbury Gallery, Richmond
- Murdoch Travelling Fellowship*, VCA Gallery, Melbourne
- 2004 *Imaging the Apple*, (touring exhibition), RMIT Projectspace, Melbourne
- 2003 *Art + Film*, Centre for Contemporary Photography, Fitzroy
- Royal Rumble*, Kings Artist Run Space, Melbourne
- 2002 *Mnemotech*, Perth Institute of Contemporary Arts, Perth
- Towards Colour*, McClelland Gallery, Langwarrin, Victoria
- 2001 *Look See: five contemporary painters*, Monash University Gallery
- One for the Ladies*, Penthouse & Pavement, Melbourne
- ANZ Visual Art Fellowship*, ANZ Building, Melbourne
- 2000 *UBS Art Award*, Whitechapel Gallery, London
- A Brush with Death*, LaTrobe Street Gallery, Melbourne
- 1999 *National Works on Paper*, Mornington Peninsula Regional Gallery
- ANZ Visual Art Fellowship*, ANZ Building, Melbourne
- MINE*, 121 Victoria St, Fitzroy
- Exchanging Places*, Ray Hughes Gallery, Sydney
- 1994 *19*, Charles Nodrum Gallery, Richmond

GRANTS AND AWARDS

- 2006 Studio resident, Gertrude Contemporary Art Spaces, Fitzroy
- 2004 Australia Council for the Arts, New Work grant
- 2003 Arts Victoria, Arts Development, New Work grant
- 2002 Australia Council for the Arts, Arts Development grant
- 2000 National Winner, UBS Art Award, Whitechapel Gallery, London
- 1999 Postgraduate Award, National Gallery of Victoria Women's Association

COLLECTIONS

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Cover image: *Behind closed doors*,
2006, Pegasus print, 67 x 100cm



Australian Government



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I want to break free



Object relations: Lily Hibberd's *I want to break free*

By Kyla McFarlane

In the struggle of our daily existence, the home can be our comfort or our cage. In Lily Hibberd's recent series of paintings *I want to break free*, our domestic surroundings are figured as a precarious, even dangerous realm. Hibberd's subjects tussle with the trappings of their domestic environment as if their life depends on it and, in some cases, the effect is catastrophic.

Hibberd is an artist who has always held a fascination for film. And, in many ways, these small dramatic scenes allude to filmic genres. The shower scene in *Psycho*, the domestic obsessions in *American Beauty*, a half-remembered scene from *Ghostbusters* and a myriad of teen slasher films sit somewhere in the latent, collective memory of these works. And Hibberd prompts us to think cinematically, providing us with an establishing shot of a house photographed at night. Here, the orange glow emitting from its windows in a dark, empty street scattered with dead leaves suggests the home as a sinister, rather than comforting realm. However, these paintings are not simply scenes from an unmade film of suburban lives. Solid skeins of paint leak across the picture plane from the edge of each large canvas, acting as a kind of theatrical curtain that simultaneously reveals and entraps each scene. This rupturing of painted space reminds us that these scenes exist in the field of representation and are therefore subject to its limitations and tropes. Hibberd's subjects are trapped, not only in the four walls of the home, but also by the bounds of their representational framework. The paintings are also the final link in a complex representational chain developed by the artist in the course of making the work. Beginning with written fragments, Hibberd then stages each scene photographically before moving to the final painted work. This merging of mediums has an uncanny effect, as each painting retains residues of this process, holding fragments of narrative together with the simulacral effect of the photograph. The result is a tangle of references from representation's vast domain, as traces of each medium are merged with urban mythologies and the singularity of any one of our personal histories blends with the collective unconscious of our cultural realm.

Although the paintings in *I want to break free* convey a sense of drama and intrigue, their single-shot partiality refuses us the pleasure of the dramatic *denouement*. The 'knot' of narrative suspense is not unravelled, and the luxury of cause and effect is not revealed by the paintings themselves. The subjects, while depicted in a climactic moment, are caught in cyclical narratives of repetition and compulsion, from which they seem unable to break free. Take, for example, the habitual wrestle with the doona cover in *Clean sheets*, or the woman standing at the screen door to watch the sunset in *Security screen*. Both these moments emerge from the smallest of recurring interior narratives, borne from frustration and anxiety, or boredom, or shame. Entangled in the bedclothes, or unable to move beyond the back door, Hibberd's painted subjects provoke in us an existential insight: perhaps this is as good as life gets. These are small stories of discomfort and claustrophobia, but their re-presentation as painted scenes throws the poignancy and pathos of each scenario into sharp relief.

Light pervades these paintings, but they are infused with a dark humour. In *Garden variety*, Hibberd depicts a suburban Laocoon struggling not with a serpent, but his garden hose. The backyard scenario is at once courageous and absurd, as Hibberd replaces mythological heroics with a situation that is 'garden variety' in its ordinariness – the struggle against an overgrown garden and a wayward, writhing hose. If Laocoon and his sons exemplified a dignified suffering, Hibberd's backyard Laocoon struggles against the indignity of the banal. It's a battle played out in each of these paintings, and one that is often lost to the domestic object. In *Super cycle*, a woman is alarmingly impaled on a poorly-positioned knife in the dishwasher, whilst *Slip up* features a man facing the ignominy of self-injury in the bathroom, his head cracked on the toilet seat after



Above: *I want to break free* (*Garden variety*), 102.5 x 152cm

Across: *I want to break free* (*Super cycle*), 122 x 183cm
Below: *I want to break free* (*Slip up*), 102.5 x 152cm



All images oil & pencil on linen, 2006
Right: *I want to break free* (*Domestic bliss*)
91 x 137cm.
Across: *I want to break free* (*Security screen*)
102.5 x 152cm



slipping in the shower stall. For Hibberd, the dangers of the ordinary clearly lurk in every corner of the house.

A suite of smaller paintings in the series continues to unravel the psychological intensity of these object relations. In these works the most insignificant of household objects become containers of meaning – receptacles for anxieties, desires and imaginings. For instance, an isolated yellow rubber glove, set in a pink colour field, is attended by the words 'every time I think of you I cry'... Against the larger dramatic paintings, the objects appear uncanny and their partial, often despondent, texts allude to universal human sentiments and the torpor of the daily domestic grind in the absence of more meaningful pursuits. And yet the works in *I want to break free* refuse any such assurances of reality, remaining as they do in an irresolute dialogue between fiction and documentary, illusion and reality. Deep in this cycle of endless repeat, however, Hibberd reveals a modicum of hope, where in one image, beneath a glowing doorbell, the words 'for the last time' offer the small possibility that maybe, just maybe, the cycle of existential entrapment might be broken.

Dr Kyla McFarlane is a writer and Assistant Curator, Exhibitions at Monash University Museum of Art, Melbourne



Above: *I want to break free* (*Clean sheets*), 91 x 137cm



Left: *Rubber glove*, 2006
66 x 50.5cm

