

KARLEE RAWKINS ***THE WILD FOX GARDEN*** **20 March - 14 April 2012**

The opportunity to visit a functioning kitchen garden, fertile and full of fruiting plants and scratching fowl, is something of a rarity for most urban dwellers. Small community gardens, run by altruistic green thumbs, provide a means to such an experience. Children run around after animals while adults amble, quietly looking at garden beds in various states of productivity. An hour or so in such an environment serves as a reminder of what life could be like if the garden became a stronger feature of our days- the smell of good soil, the sound of creatures going about their business, the feeling of fresh air against the skin.

The artist Karlee Rawkins has chosen a full time country life, taking in the cycles of seasons and the relationship of garden and gardener that goes with it. Bringing her rural surroundings into alignment with her art practice Rawkins' paintings attest to an emotive and genuine connectedness with nature. Breeds of poultry and livestock, both showy and rare, exist beside a variety of heirloom plants such as beetroots, artichokes, apples and figs. Indeed, the assortment of foods present here makes one think of hearty cooks like Maggie Beer or perhaps, if we were lucky, our grandmother's kitchen.

To encounter her paintings is to slip into a joyful observation of the active garden. Through gestural and responsive depictions Rawkins demonstrates a genuine delight in the blooming fecundity of the plants and animals around her. Insightfully capturing the characteristic silhouettes and gestures of wing, beak and snout, her attention to detail is matched by a freedom to include exaggerated and sometimes totally fanciful impressions of leaf, fruit and stem. In contrast to the depiction of garden produce seen within other painting traditions such as Dutch still lifes, in which poultry hang freshly slaughtered and abundant vegetables sit in a state of early decay, Rawkins' playful, accentuated shapes merge with whimsical filigrees, expressing something of the life force observed within her subjects. Her ability in selectively harnessing both an artist's eye for accuracy and an intuitive, almost naive zeal for colour and texture is central to the charm of these works.

Beyond their delightful aesthetic, however, Rawkins is also attempting to draw attention to the more serious side of our relationship with food and its production. As issues of genetic modification, global food miles and land management emerge as key concerns for a sustainable future, consumers must learn to responsibly determine how food comes to their table. Opting to include an element of self-sufficiency within one's lifestyle, understanding the seasonal patterns of growth and yield, and valuing the quality of life lead by livestock, are each a way of fostering positive change. Karlee Rawkins' bold, colourful images, loaded with decorative patterns and humorous gestures, suggest a bountiful experience of reality. Blending representation with imagination these works offer a sort of antidote to a detachment from nature, and a route toward gentle and observant appreciation.

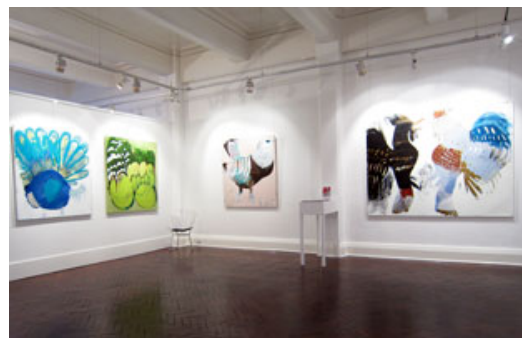
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Installation view



Installation view





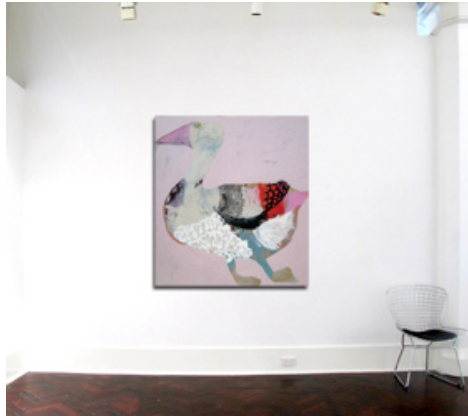
Peter & Paul
acrylic & charcoal on canvas
167 x 213cm



in situ on 3.7m wall



Pea King
acrylic & charcoal on canvas
152 x 137cm



in situ on 3.7m wall



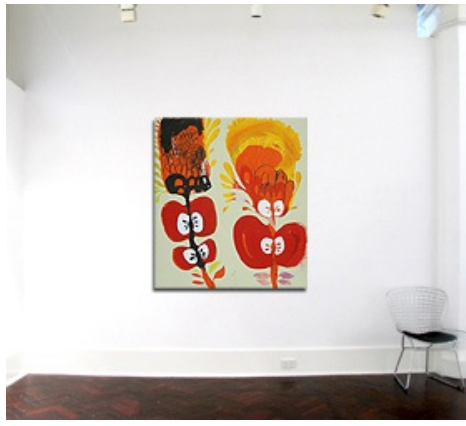
5 Beetroot
acrylic & charcoal on canvas
152 x 137cm



in situ on 3.7m wall



Vodka Pomme
acrylic & charcoal on canvas
152 x 137cm



in situ on 3.7m wall



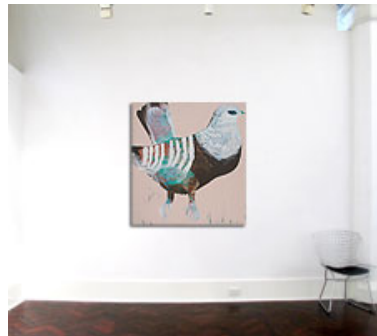
Strutting Bourbon Blue Tom
acrylic & charcoal on canvas
137 x 121cm



in situ on 3.7m wall



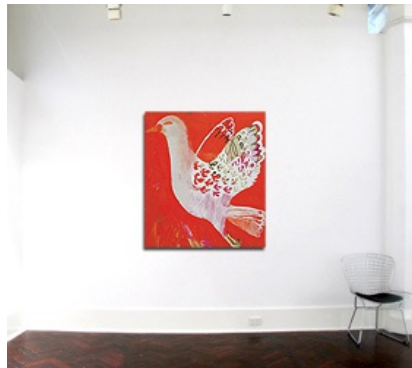
Lesser Male Prairie Chicken
acrylic on canvas
137 x 121cm



in situ on 3.7m wall



Fig Jam Dove
acrylic & charcoal on canvas
137 x 121cm



in situ on 3.7m wall



Artichoke
acrylic & charcoal on canvas
137 x 121cm



in situ on 3.7m wall



Highly Commended
acrylic & charcoal on canvas
91 x 122cm



in situ on 3.7m wall



A Proper Fox
acrylic & charcoal on canvas
91 x 122cm



in situ on 3.7m wall