



HEIDI YARDLEY KNITS TOGETHER THE MANY TEXTURES OF FEMALE EXPERIENCE INTO A FABRIC THAT IS BOTH DARK AND ALLURING, SUBVERSIVE AND COMPLICIT. WORKING WITH OIL PAINT AND CHARCOAL, THE MELBOURNE ARTIST FRAGMENTS HER PROTAGONISTS THROUGH PREPARATORY COLLAGING TECHNIQUES, CREATING ANONYMOUS PORTRAITS OF SEXUALISED AND DOMESTICATED FEMININITY. EROS AND THANATOS COALESCE IN YARDLEY'S PSYCHOLOGICAL DRAMAS, WHICH PLAY OUT IN A SPLINTERED REEL OF FILM NOIR FORMATIONS.

# Heidi Yardley

Story  
ELLI WALSH



02



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**L**et's start from the beginning. When did you realise that being an artist was the career for you?

I was always drawing as a child, and when I was in high school I focused mainly on art in Years Eleven and Twelve. I didn't think much about what a career meant; I just knew that art was what I wanted to pursue. I maintained a studio practice after finishing my degree and, like most aspiring artists, had a number of part time and casual jobs to support myself. It was almost fifteen years before I could become a full-time artist.

**Many of your paintings and drawings are created from collaging and layering. Can you tell me about your art-making process?**

I work mainly from photographs due to my interest in figurative representation, but I don't make artworks that are specifically about the photographic medium itself, like photorealism. I'm interested in how images can trigger memories and what painting and imagination can do to alter and add to photographic image sources.

I scan found photographs from old books and magazines and I keep an archive of digital image files. I then work in Photoshop to manipulate these images. Most of the collages are made by physically cutting up the images that I print, which is an intuitive process and very time consuming. I then scan the collages back into the computer. Some of the drawings, particularly the larger ones, are replicas of my source material, but I always try to create a sense of form and depth in the work that isn't in the photograph.

**You engage with imagery from twentieth century archives?**

I'll probably always be interested in the varied aesthetics of the twentieth century, particularly the 1950s to 1980s, due to my exposure to TV shows and popular culture from that time period. Recently I've been working with some very early black and white nudes from the 1930s as well as some images sourced from the internet. I'm mainly working with images of the female figure, fabric, hair, hands and gloves for my next exhibition titled 'The Thin Veil'.

**In your works, objects such as florals and hair stand in for faces and identities. This is beautifully imaged in your 2013 painting *Glass Psyche*, and your drawing *Twoism* (2015). Can you explain the symbolism here?**

I like to work with the tonal aspects of hair, the way it can flow like fabric. Hair can contribute to identity, or perceived identity, and can be a kind of mask. It moves and is strangely fluid.

For *Twoism* I was making a reference to spirit photography of the late nineteenth century. In spirit photographs, people were tricked to believe that a ghostly apparition of their deceased loved one was captured in their portrait. This was due to the discovery of double exposure which allowed images to be manipulated by the photographer. Sometimes crumpled fabric was used to represent ectoplasm. I've always liked the idea of duality and the symbolic inference of 'the twin' or 'Doppelgänger'. For me this subject matter is very loaded.

*Glass psyche* was based on one of my first colour collages where I was using still life flower arrangements paired with female figures. I suppose there's something of the domestic realm imprinted on the female psyche, but this work is really open to individual interpretation.

**These notions of domesticity and docility seem to court eroticism, voyeurism and violence in many of your pieces. Is there a dark timbre at play here?**

My work is definitely on the darker side and this is mainly because of my interest in the subconscious and the subterranean world of dreams. I explore notions and representations of longing, desire and loss, and I also have a fascination with the occult and supernatural tales from the past.

**The elegant gloved hand in *Rechannelled* (2019) smother's the figure's face in a gesture that feels both affectionate and aggressive. What's happening in this work?**

This is about the loss of my mother, who died just over a year ago. It feels like someone being stolen from you, so I used the mysterious gloved hands to disguise the identity of the face. The image of the woman is not directly from a photo of my mother, but it looks very much like she did in photographs from the 1960s before I was born. Death is inevitable for everyone, but it doesn't seem to provide answers, only more questions. It's difficult subject matter for me but seems to be part of my grieving process.

**The trope of the human hand seems to feature heavily in your latest series ...**

I'm particularly interested in hands at the moment as a symbol of connecting to the afterlife. I'm fascinated by gestures of connection, kindness and longing. In symbolic terms, the right hand can represent the rational, conscious and logical mind while the left can symbolise weakness, decay and death. Then there's terminology such as 'hand in glove', which refers to a very close relationship or agreement. Early tribal cave paintings show hand prints that seem to have been made in order to communicate a message to other tribes and possibly to reference a communication with ancestors who had passed. There's so much more to the symbolic nature of the hand in history and art.

**In *The thin veil* (2019), a naked woman kneels expectantly, her soft flesh illuminated by a stark spotlight. Yet this seductive sexuality is ruptured by the triangular shard ventering her face, its razor-sharp edges daring the voyeur/viewer to approach. Can you elaborate on this work?**

I'm trying to represent an idea of other dimensions that exist outside of our own awareness. The title refers to the thin veil between the living and the dead which is a spiritual reference to

01 Heidi Yarley in her studio, 2018, photograph Lisa Barry  
 02 *Twoism*, 2015, charcoal on primed paper, 110 x 152 cm  
 03 *Rechannelled*, 2019, charcoal on primed paper, 110 x 84 cm  
 04 *Glass psyche*, 2013, oil on linen, 122 x 80 cm



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a concept that the other dimensions are not far from our own. Playing around with collage led to this image and it made me think of the film *Metropolis* (1927), even though I can't recall the last time I saw that film. There's something futuristic about the triangular shard and the central part reminds me of a fencing mask. So protection is also a part of the idea behind the work.

**It's interesting you mention *Metropolis*, because it does seem like your work resembles the disorienting distortions, displaced shapes and anti-proportion characteristic of German Expressionist cinema. Are there any other conscious influences in your latest series?**

The drawings in particular have been influenced by early film and photography, partly due to the fact that they are black and white and that I've used some images sourced from the 1950s and 1960s. I'm fascinated by posters and illustrations of horror films from the 1960s, so that's a conscious influence, as well as photographs by Man Ray and many other works from the Surrealist movement. My mother was always fascinated by the Hollywood movie stars of her era and I often work with images from books she gave me about Jane Fonda, Ann-Margret and Brigitte Bardot.

**While your primary subject is that of the female figure, you also delve into still lifes and landscapes. Are there any thematic links here?**

I like to have a counterpoint to the figurative images. They could be places where these figures reside or dream spaces. Sometimes I just like to capture something of a domestic realm that has a familiarity but an eerie undertone. For example, my painting *Dreaming the dark* depicts a satin tablecloth that appears suspended, as if hovering in some sort of paranormal way. I'm interested in the aesthetics around the occult, magic and trickery.

My landscapes are more contemplative. I find parts of the landscape so awe-inspiring that I only intend to capture some of the magic of being in it rather than to try to turn it into something overcomplicated.

**What inspires you?**

I'm inspired by people who go to extreme lengths to turn the ordinary into the sublime. ■

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#### EXHIBITION

Heidi Yardley: *The Thin Veil*  
22 May to 9 June 2019  
Nicholas Thompson Gallery, Melbourne

05 *The thin veil*, 2019, charcoal on primed paper, 153 x 115 cm

06 *Tarantula*, 2012, oil on board, 85 x 56 cm

07 *Dreaming the dark*, 2012, oil on board, 25 x 30 cm

Courtesy the artist, Nicholas Thompson Gallery, Melbourne and Arthouse Gallery, Sydney



06

121



07