ARTIST’S STATEMENT

I think of myself as a painterly realist; an object painter. That means I select things from my environment, set them up in front of me or set up in front of them, and take the information for the paintings from these objects.

That has not always been the case. Paintings up until 1977 were large abstract expressionist works based on the various colours, rhythms, and textures found in the fencing combinations used to isolate one part of suburbia from another, i.e., wooden palings, brick and corrugated iron. Sketches formed the foundation for the colour and then the forms were pushed around to let the colours and shapes create their own boundaries. It meant destroying some forms or amplifying others to come up with the end result - an arrangement which was unified. Each part of the surface was meant to enhance the other parts.

Toward March 1977, the work seemed to be up against a brick wall literally and was not evolving. There seemed to be two choices, quit painting or start all over again. I decided to start again and used some simple still life objects as a device to learn more about handling paint and as a tool to come to terms with the formal elements. Painterness, for me, is some evidence of the personality of the artist, a signature, a way of making marks that is inherent in the make-up of the artist. It is a way of describing a form that lets the viewer know that paint is the vehicle for the representation. The objects are there to carry the paint and to act as a vehicle for gaining some understanding of my environment.

Paintings must work formally to be successful aesthetically. The formal elements - drawing, composition, value, colour and texture - should come together to create work that is complete, ordered and harmonious. The objects were useful in setting particular problems, how to make a warm colour sit back, how to make a cool colour come forward, how to get an object to sit on a surface and yet separate from its surrounds, etc. What began as an exercise became a long term pre-occupation. Suddenly, a two dimensional painter discovered the joy of working with the illusion of the third dimension.

Some time later, the still life included a honey tin that had not been sealed up the side and had no top or bottom. It was interesting for the obvious element of reflection but also because light could get inside more easily and the inside of the can, reflecting on itself, presented a whole range of abstract images. These paintings were considered as interior landscapes with a consistent image that, because of its reflective quality, took on the character of the objects and colours placed in and around it.

There were three levels of seeing in these paintings - the objects around the cans, their distorted image reflected in the outside surface of the cans, and the abstract images within the cans where the inside of the can reflected on itself.

The subject matter over the past few years has shifted from objects to posters to landscape and back again. The work has been about acquiring knowledge of the environment through refining perception. “The closer you look, the more you see. You see a world within a world.” (Peter Dombrovskis on the S.W. Tasmanian wilderness)

I considered that a penetrating look at finer and finer levels of the surface value of objects might expose something of their inner quality and thus allow appreciation of the full value of the objects. Fromm says that there is a difference in seeing and seeing, that few are able to see the full value of an object because they project their hang-ups onto it, and that to respond fully and completely to an object is to become one with it. Exhibiting the work allows others to see how much insight has been gained through this study. It is an ongoing project requiring the development of both painter and paintings.

The paintings have been done with a limited palette of oil colours made up of the three primaries, including a warm and cold of each, and white. Black oil was used as a medium which consists of one part litharge, one part bees wax, and ten parts linseed oil.
Robert Adamson belongs to the group of Australian painters who brought realism to prominence in contemporary Australian painting in the 1970’s.

His work was included in the touring exhibition, Still Life Still Lives, of 1979 which surveyed the work of contemporary realist artists. In the same year his work was acquired by the National Gallery of Victoria, and it is his most recent work which has gained him recognition.

In Still Life Adamson has simplified most forms and heightened the color and it offers a glimpse of recognizable objects and a carefully observed reflection of them. His preoccupation with the distorted effects of reflected objects allows an interesting analysis of the painter’s attitudes to reality as well as being an innovative change to the still life genre.
Two black boxes, jar, paint tube and pastels. April 1981, oil on canvas, 23.5 x 23.5.

Black box, three paint tubes and pastels. April 1981, oil on canvas, 30.5 x 30.5.

One can on film box. August 1981, oil on canvas, 100 x 83.

Two cans on blue poster with white ‘P’ and ‘E’. November 1981, oil on canvas, 33 x 45.

Two cans on blue poster with yellow ‘NED’. December 1981, oil on canvas, 61 x 61.

Two cans on ‘ing-get’ poster. January 1982, oil on canvas, 61 x 61.

Two cans on black and orange poster with face. January 1982, oil on canvas, 46 x 51.


‘RA’ poster with landscape. February 1982, oil on canvas, 90 x 90.

‘REAS’ poster with landscape. February 1982, oil on canvas, 127 x 100.

Landscape and gum tree from end of car park, Mt. Nelson. March 1982, oil on canvas, 92 x 143.

Paint box with paint tubes on green table. April 1982, oil on canvas, 33 x 45.

Paint box with tools and things on red surface. April 1982, oil on canvas, 61 x 61.

Eleven paint tubes. May 1982, mixed media on cardboard, 33 x 35.

Two paint tubes. May 1982, mixed media on cardboard, 20 x 20.

Tripod, mitre box, hammer and corner clamps beneath trolley, no.1. May 1982, oil on canvas, 41 x 71.

Tripod, mitre box, etc., no.3. May 1982, mixed media on card, 41 x 71.

Tripod, mitre box, etc., no.4. May 1982, mixed media on card, 41 x 71.

Miscellaneous items on paint trolley. June 1982, mixed media on c/board, 121 x 91.

Box with jars, white box, paint box and can beneath paint trolley. June 1982, oil on canvas, 38 x 76.

Box with brushes, triangle and can in box with tubes and tent. June 1982, mixed media on c/board, 64 x 76.

Box with brushes, etc., no.2. June 1982, oil on canvas, 64 x 76.


‘Drum girl’ poster and landscape with drawing. April-July 1982, oil on canvas, 100 x 75.

Bottles, tins, tubes and brush, white box and can on paint trolley. July 1982, oil on canvas, 100 x 75.

Can on ‘Witching’ bag; can on red surface with five pencils; can on paint trolley with nine pencils and pastel stick. April-August 1981, oil on canvas, 93 x 30.5.

Can on red cardboard; can on blue surface; can on black, yellow and red paper. March 1981 - July 1982, oil on canvas, 93 x 30.5.

Can on ‘Miss Fitz’ bag; can on white strips of paper; can on yellow surface. March - July 1981, oil on linen, 93 x 30.5.

White boxes in white box, no.1. August 1982, oil on canvas, 75 x 75.

White boxes, etc., no.2. September 1982, oil pastel on card, 75 x 75.

Eighteen paint tubes, palette knife and white box in paint box, no.1. September 1982, oil on canvas, 33 x 39.

Eighteen paint tubes, etc., no.2 September 1982, oil pastel on c/board, 33 x 90.


Nine tubes on painted surface. October 1982, oil on canvas, 33 x 40.

Seven tubes on painted surface. October 1982, oil on canvas 33 x 40.

Seven tubes and box on white surface October 1982, oil on canvas, 40 x 40.

Seven tubes on red surface October 1982, oil on canvas 40 x 40.

Measurements are in centimetres, height then width.
The work presented in this exhibition was produced during 1981-82 within the Master of Fine Arts Course at the Tasmanian School of Art, University of Tasmania.