



Pam Tippett
A survey exhibition

PAM TIPPETT

A Survey Exhibition

Originally from Lismore and a Bachelor of Science graduate from Sydney University, Pam Tippett's formal studies in drawing and painting were undertaken over three and a half years at Studio Simi in Florence where her training taught her 'to see' and gave her the skills and techniques admired in her paintings. She is perhaps best known for her beautifully and painstakingly executed still life works, however, she is equally proficient in portraiture and landscape. A Goulburn local for around ten years and now still living in the region, Pam regularly exhibits at Australian Galleries Sydney and Melbourne, she was an Archibald finalist in 2004 and 2011, was the winner of the Eutick Memorial Still Life Award in 2010 and she has been a finalist several times in the Portia Geach Memorial Award. This exhibition will consist of mostly new and recent works in the still life genre but will include older works in a variety of genres as a survey of past years of her practice.

Cover: *Self portrait (for a change)* 2011
oil on canvas 60 x 60 cm

Introduction

In 2011, you were selected as a finalist in the Archibald Prize with a self portrait, what was that experience like?

Being selected for the Archibald in 2011 was quite exciting. When there are over eight hundred entries, just being selected feels like winning. My painting was a small quite modest painting which makes its selection even more of a surprise. It's really a lottery and it is wonderful to be in it but you can't count on being selected- you just do your work and if you get selected it's a bonus. But I imagine that winning is life-changing! There is quite a lot of hoopla around the event with a media frenzy when the announcement is made. It's fun to be part of it – even as an observer.



Self portrait (for a change) 2011
oil on canvas 60 x 60 cm

Artist

Nerina Simi was an important influence on you as a student, in what ways did she teach and inspire you?

Nerina Simi was an inspirational teacher. When I started studying with her she had been teaching for 60 years. Her father had studied in Paris in the 1880's and on his return to Florence he started a school. Signorina Simi studied with her father and when he died she stepped into his shoes. The studio had two rooms – a small one for still life and a large room for figure study and portraiture. The small room could hold three or four students working on still lifes- drawing or painting, while the large studio could accommodate about twenty students and their easels, six down the side walls and twelve arranged across the back of the room. Mostly there were about fifteen to twenty students from all over the world.

Her approach was to teach her students to see what they were looking at. There were no formal lessons as such- she targeted her instruction to the level of each student and the problems each was facing in their work. We could all hear what she was saying to the other students as she did her rounds. For the beginning students she would spend a lot of time with at least one instruction each day until she felt that the student had got the idea. As we progressed she would leave us more to our own devices and just come by with comments on what needed attention. In my last year she only commented on my work about eight times. Students stayed for varying times – there was one man who had already been there for twenty years when I started (he was independently wealthy), others had been there for a number of years, others stayed only a few months finding the discipline irksome. I stayed for three and a half years.

Influences - World

She was an excellent psychologist knowing just how far to push recalcitrant students and being kind to the more sensitive students. She was very modest and when praised for her remarkable powers of observation she would say “In the land of the blind, blessed are those with one eye.” Her wit was a great teaching aid- she would make a criticism with a turn of phrase which you would never forget and therefore never make that mistake again. She would also work on our paintings or drawings – judiciously – sometimes to show how to create an effect with just a few lines or a little bit of erasing, to increase tonal variation. Sometimes she would ruin something to show how you can work on a mistake for two weeks – part of her teaching was about detachment. The studies were a way of showing what you could see and your hand had to learn to catch up. Whenever we thought we were doing ok she would bring out a brilliant portrait drawn by probably the most gifted student she ever taught when he was sixteen. Just to remind us how much further we could go. She didn’t much like egos.

Before studying with her, I’ d never worked on anything for more than a few hours and found one of my big challenges was to slow down enough to see more. It took me a few months before I felt like I was making progress and then the two week poses (36 hours for the figure and 24 hours for the portrait) were not long enough to do what I wanted. So the big legacy from my study with her is patience, another is a critical eye and willingness to change something that is not working even if it means hours more work. She was so skilled as a teacher that we knew we were in good hands and we could become like sponges soaking up her wisdom (as best we could).

She was also inspirational as an example of how an old person can be – fully engaged. The world came to her - she kept teaching until she was 95 because there were students who needed her.

Influences - World



You are influenced by many objects, household items, clothing and fruit just to name a few, how do you select an object to paint?

One of the greatest things about still life painting is that there us never a shortage of subject matter. There are literally millions of things to paint. Basically, when I'm thinking about subject matter, I paint whatever takes my fancy. There is always something that appeals to me – colour, texture, sometimes gorgeous sheen, or reflections. I tend also to paint a few of each thing that is taking my fancy so there have been series of jugs, purses, shells, and fruit. Another good thing about painting still lifes is that when I am out and about I can buy objects that interest me without any guilt as I will eventually paint them. As well as the elements mentioned above there is another aspect that some objects possess- a sense of personal history, or even being part of domestic history. For example a couple of years ago on a trip to Morocco I found myself searching out old ceramic ink wells, chipped and stained in several permutations, with a patina of age or use – all probably now redundant. Because the process of my still life painting is slow, the object has to be interesting or challenging enough to hold my attention for the duration of the painting.

Images – Pam's studio

Influences - World

Pam Tippett's studio has been purpose built for her artmaking practice. The studio is on an upper level with a south facing window. The window has no obstructions, allowing light to stream directly into her space. The corrugated iron roof below the window reflected into the studio, changing the light. Pam has painted the roof with black matt paint to stop the sunlight reflecting into her studio.

Lighting is very important for your work, do you prefer natural light when painting, if so why?



I always paint by natural light – the best light is unencumbered south light. By unencumbered I mean that there is nothing outside the window reflecting the light back in. For example if there is a red wall or a tree outside a south facing window when the sun is shining on it, it will reflect red or green light into the room. The aim is to have the light as constant as possible for as long as possible during the day. It just makes life easier if you don't have to struggle with your work conditions. Good natural light shows the true colours and shows off the object to its best advantage making it more interesting to paint.

Pam's studio

In the studio - World

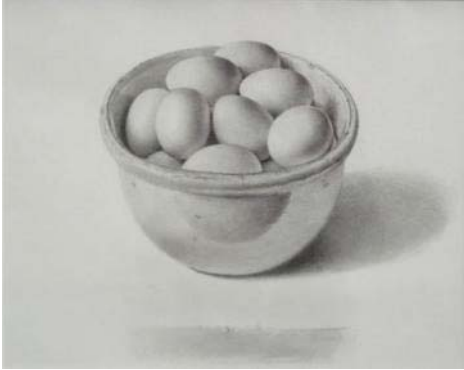
What are you currently working on in your studio?

Currently I'm working on a number of paintings – I like to have a few at different stages so I can work on detail if the light is good or an early layer if it is a bit dull. The main painting that I'm working on at the moment is a silk fur-lined vest- an extraordinary piece of clothing. And a still life with gorgeous piece of cream satin, an old ginger jar, a shiny old cream bowl and a little tortoise netsuke (which I hope to have finished for this exhibition). And some fruit. I have a number of interesting objects waiting in the wings.



Pam's studio

In the studio - World



Eggs 2001-04
Graphite on paper 26.5 x 33 cm



Blue and white Moroccan inkwell 2011
oil on linen on board 25x25cm

Pencil and oil paints are your chosen mediums for creating artworks, why do you prefer these?

Oil paint is my primary medium because I believe it best gives the richness and depth of colour that I am trying to achieve. Also it remains workable for the whole day so colours can be blended on the painting, and smoothed free of brush marks if I want that effect. For drawing, pencil is the most convenient as it doesn't need to be fixed. Its major drawback is that it doesn't have the contrast that can be obtained with charcoal. Every medium has its positives and negatives.

Artwork - Mediums

Each painting is extremely detailed and built up of many layers, how long would you spend on each painting from beginning to end?

It depends on the subject how long it takes me to complete a painting. Man made things usually take longer because there is a need to get shapes and symmetry right, whereas fruit and vegetables are variable. But on the other hand the skin of some fruit can be very intricately coloured or textured. The minimum time for a small (15x15cm) painting is around 8-10 hours. And usually at least four layers – each drying before the next is put down. I normally don't count the hours but for this exhibition I painted four panels of a small blue glass cup with a silver holder. The first layer was painted on all four panels, the second layer on three, the third layer on two and the fourth layer on only one which is the finished painting. The first layers took about an hour each, the second layers took about two hours each, the third layer took about three and a half hours each and the final layer on the fourth panel took about eight and a half hours. So in that series of panels, the time taken was one, three, six and a half and fifteen hours respectively.

small blue glass cup with silver holder, 2013, oil on linen on board, 15x15cm – work in progress



Artworks – Development of a
painting

Pam Tippett – small blue glass cup with silver holder

First layer

First I did a light charcoal drawing of the cup and its holder. Then I dusted off most of the charcoal so there were just the faintest of lines left. Next I blocked out the painting, making sure the paint filled all the gaps in the weave of the fabric. At this stage I didn't worry too much about colour or accuracy, I was just preparing it for the next layer. After this layer was finished, with a soft brush I ran it lightly over the whole painting removing brush strokes because I will probably have to correct the drawing and I don't want to have ridges of the paint where I've changed something. I left it to dry for a couple of days (this step depends on the weather and how much white I've used as white takes the longest to dry). This layer took one hour.



Artworks – Development of a
painting - Stage 1

Second Layer

In this layer I concentrated on getting the shape right and consolidating the colour, and placing the highlights, the reflections and shine on the silver, and the different blues of the glass. I let it dry overnight. This layer took about two hours making a total of three hours on this panel.



Artworks – Development of a
painting

Third layer

This is where the detail starts happening. In this layer I corrected any drawing errors (it helps to see if it is symmetrical if you turn the painting upside down and/or look at it in the mirror) and redefine the detail of the silver on the holder. Once the shape and positioning of the features were in place to my satisfaction I could concentrate on the colour. I started to render the silver with its shine and reflections. I also started trying to make the blue of the glass transparent by closely observing and painting the variations of the blues across the cup. This layer took three and a half hours, making a total of six and a half hours on this panel.



Artworks – Development of a
painting

Fourth layer

This and the first layer are the most enjoyable. The shape and colours are already well prepared for the final layer. I repainted all of the cup and the background around the edges so that the surface of the painting has integrity, concentrating on the finest of detail and the intensity of colour. This variation in colour is what gives the appearance of transparency. I repainted the silver paying attention to the tiny details such as the thickness of the metal, the shine, or the darkness along the edges, the reflections on the welds and the minute variations in colour. At this stage I put in the shadow of the metal on the glass, the reflection of the table top on the glass and the shadow of the metal cast by the reflection of light from the table. The reflection of the window also had its own variations in colour and tone. The clarity of this reflection indicates the shiny nature of the glass. And the reflection of light on the rim of the glass gives an idea of its thickness and weight. Lastly I painted the background- the blue of the shadow made by the light passing through the transparent glass along with the more dense shadow cast through the thicker sides of the glass, blending the shadow to give it a soft edge on the surface of the table. The last thing I painted was the rest of the background again blending it into the shadow of the cup. This layer took another eight and a half hours making a total of fifteen hours for the finished painting

Artworks – Development of a
painting

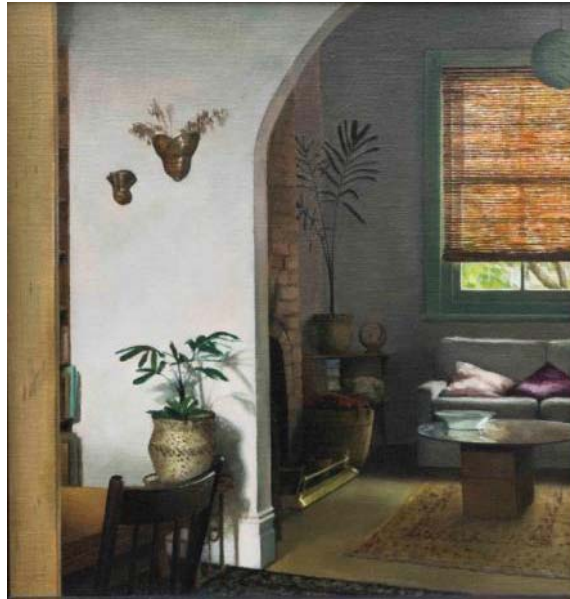


small blue glass cup with silver holder, 2013, oil on linen on board, 15x15cm

Artworks – Development of a painting

The interior is another important subject, how do you select angles to focus your work on?

When painting an interior I'm often recording a room for myself so will choose an angle which shows the character of the room, sometimes looking through a door to the outside or sometimes through a door to the inside of a long hall. I also take into consideration the play of light over objects or reflected off a floor or wall.



Redfern Interior 1986
oil on canvas on board
39.5 x 37.5

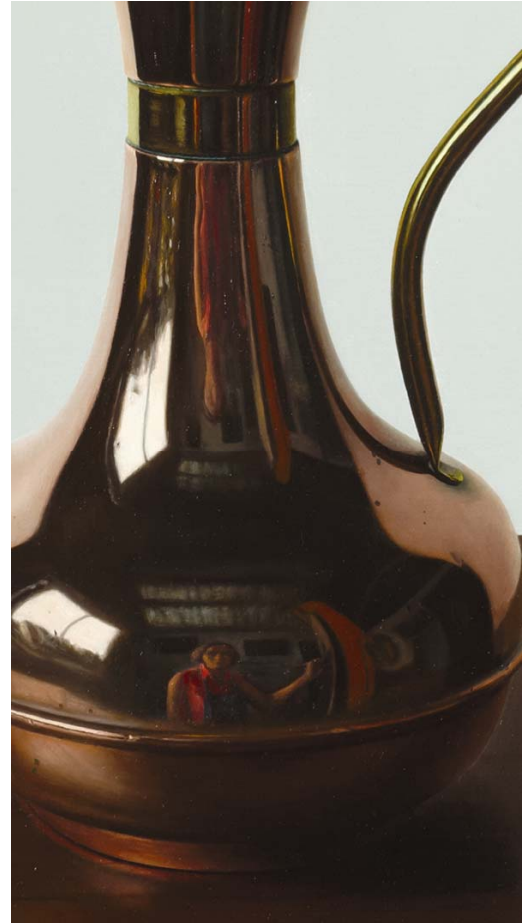
Artwork – Interiors

Reflections are a reoccurring theme in your work, often there are reflections of the studio and yourself in still life objects. Does reflectivity play an important role in the selection of objects to paint?

For a while I was very interested in reflections and I painted a series of metal objects which had reflections on them. It was a challenge to define these reflections and still have them appear to be on the surface of the object. If you look closely there are reflections everywhere in the most unlikely places – even on shiny pieces of fruit. And red onions! I don't put them in as it detracts from the clarity of their colouring.



Copper jug 2008
oil on linen on board
60 x 60 cm (Detail on Right)



Reflections

Preschool Activities:

1. Set up a table with drawing paper and pencils – on a separate table set up various containers of flowers and vases. Allow children to choose their own flowers and arrange them to make a still life. Children then draw their arrangement.
2. Ask children to bring a quirky object from home to create a painting
3. Use the costume cupboard and dress up like Pam. Set up mirrors for children to draw self portraits.
4. Look at photographs of Pam's studio, start a cabinet of curiosities at preschool, add interesting objects and arrange them
5. Provide children with a felt board and still life shapes, allow children to arrange them to create various scenes

Preschool Questions

1. Look at the painting *Copper jug*, 2008. Do you think this artwork is a painting or a photograph? Who can you see looking back at you?
2. Where do you think that Pam finds all of her objects to paint?
3. Look at photographs of Pam's studio, what things does she collect? How have they been organised.
4. Imagine you are at a market, what object would you purchase to paint? And why?

Questions and Activities Preschool

Primary School Activities:

1. Research Cabinets of Curiosity, what are they? Look at Pam Tippett's collection of items, how do they relate to cabinets of curiosity?
2. Explore the classroom and find objects of interest. Set them out on tables and create a painting
3. Use mirrors to draw self portraits, ensure that the background is included in drawings.
4. Select a shiny object, draw the object as well as your reflection looking back at you.
5. Read the information about Nerina Simi, imagine you are one of her students. Create a postcard to send home explaining your experiences, paint the image on the front.

Primary School Questions

1. Why do you think light is so important to Pam?
2. What is realism? Research this movement and select an artist to compare to Pam Tippett.
3. Look carefully at the background why do you think that some still lifes have nothing in the background?
4. Imagine that you were having your portrait painted by Pam, what pose would you take, don't forget that Pam paints for a very long time?

Questions and Activities Primary School

High School Activities:

1. Research cabinets of curiosity and create one in the art classroom, select objects and arrange them in the cabinet so as they are aesthetically pleasing.
2. Select an object to paint from the cabinet, set it up on a plinth and paint in one lesson. The following lesson set up the same object exactly the same way as the previous lesson. Rework the painting, what can you see that you didn't see last time, add special highlights and details.
3. Research scientific drawing, make a drawing of your object in this manner compare it with your painting. What are the similarities or differences. Which is more like Pam Tippett's style?
4. Set up full length mirrors in the classroom, create self portraits of yourself as you make and artwork.

High School Questions:

1. Before Pam began her art studies she graduated from Sydney University with a Science degree. Using two examples of artworks or photographs of her studio, explain how her science background influences her work.
2. Explain how other cultures have impacted Pam Tippett's work, use the information provided in this kit and 2 images of work.
3. Using examples, discuss how objects can tell us something about an artist
4. Research other still life artists, compare your selected artist with a work by Pam Tippett. What things are similar or different, which you prefer and why?

Questions and Activities High School

This education kit has been compiled by Michelle Stuart, Education Officer, Goulburn Regional Art Gallery.

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Pam Tippett is represented by Australian Galleries

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