

Domestic Dystopias

Creating dystopian scenes with the utopian aim of recognising and laughing at our lived reality.

These paintings using bitumen paint and oil are tributes to carers at home with small children. They humorously represent the day to day lives of the domestic.

Domesticity is heralded and celebrated as a kind of Utopia, an ideal place where all is calm and sweet, yet more often than not it is a scene of carnage, with mothers struggling to cope and filled with guilt at their failure. The paintings are historically inspired chaotic scenes that mimic political works by famous 'masters', male painters who wanted to inspire political change or depicted hell in order to inspire a religious desire to get to heaven. Here there is no heaven and far from ideal, babies and children create devilish mayhem. They call for political change and transformation by representing women carers in ways that are at once beautiful and disturbing – a more fitting metaphor for their lived realities.

Painting has the potential to show our lives in ways that create new understanding through metaphor, colour, form and tactility. Here children and babies are not cherubs but *putti*, with nappies not wings. They are shown hanging on to skirts, playing and wrecking otherwise peaceful lives for mothers, who are presented in gestural postures of patience, weariness, guilt, and anger. The association with historical art, and layered paradoxical associations with both Christian and mythical symbolization is utilized to convey the distressing ambivalence of everyday experience of mothering and represent the domestic in non-stereotypical ways.

Each new day homes can be a dystopia for mothers of young children. Far from idle mothers are busy coping with the continual housework and mess created by children and families. Disclosing the hidden, showing that things are otherwise and that women are constantly worn down by failure and day-to-day drudgery makes visible the idea that women deal with a terrible reality of ambivalence and silence. Making it visible could change the way we see women and the domestic and enable women to cope, laugh, and demand more help.

These paintings are not gentle, decorative and safe, they are meant to be an emotional and intellectual challenge to a society that undervalues caring roles and all that underpins it.