

## Tanya Chaitow: Nothing Personal

Stella Downer Fine Art, Sydney  
19 February – 17 March 2007

It's not surprising that a fascination with people – the masks we wear and the games we play – coupled with a curiosity for human conditions like vulnerability and an interest in exploring what's real and not, led Tanya Chaitow to the theatre.

Showing at Stella Downer Fine Art, Chaitow's latest body of paintings celebrates the inherently theatrical nature of the artist's practice and process. Writes Chaitow: "In theatre the playwright calls for identification and participation. He wants us to identify with the characters and enlist us within his world." It's an appeal that resonates within Chaitow's paintings with her figurative, whimsical characters evoking a strange sense of familiarity and earnest empathy. These latest works particularly were driven by Chaitow's desire to explore the idea of vulnerability and there is certainly a fragile, quirky melancholy traceable in her work.

Says Chaitow: "I've always been interested in people and how we relate to each other and vulnerability was a notion that I particularly wanted to explore. I think that sense of vulnerability is a human condition we've all felt at some point and I suppose as an artist you deal with it every time you start a new painting or any new creative endeavour. It's at that point of commencement."

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For this exhibition, Chaitow's point of commencement was literally the theatre, where she spent five weeks drawing the rehearsal period of Bell Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*. In no way intending to capture literally Shakespeare's famous tale, what Chaitow sought to represent were her immediate, instinctual and raw responses to both the text and its physicalisation by the actors.

The opportunity provided Chaitow with an enormous emotional landscape to mine for her paintings and it also, unsurprisingly, encouraged her to seek other forms of theatrical inspiration.

Currently in the final stages of her Masters of Fine Art, Chaitow is heading to Paris in April for a three month residency at the Cité Internationale des Arts de Paris where she plans on visiting the city's mime schools and puppet and drama theatres, with their strong traditions of bold theatre and movement. "I'm also interested," says Chaitow, "in being in a country where I speak the language very badly and where I will be pushing the boundaries of vulnerability and communication. It's all about communication and getting an immediate emotional sense of the place. The emotional truth."

Jo Higgins



Tanya Chaitow, *Rock the Cradle*, 2006, acrylic on board, 25.5 x 17cm. COURTESY: THE ARTIST AND STELLA DOWNER FINE ART, SYDNEY