

sophie gralton

Funny By Accident

July 27 – August 10, 2024

Sydney-based Sophie Gralton's signature imagery again explores the realms of vulnerable innocence, curiosity, spontaneity and unbounded potentiality which characterises childhood. The exhibition's title, *Funny By Accident*, is a tribute to her daughter Isadora who was an inspirational muse for many years. "She was hands down the funniest kid without meaning to be, 'funny by accident' was what we used to call her," relays Gralton.

The imagery in Gralton's works always contains a child. However, they are not conventional portrayals as the cropping of eyes from the figures and posterior stances connote. Gralton explains that this is not a means of ensuring anonymity. She stresses that there is no need to know whom the subject is - it is 'every child'. Her paintings seek to evoke a universal resonance that transcends any sense of specific location or personality.



"Back by popular demand", the exhibition features several collaged works where the subject is positioned against a richly patterned, multi-media backdrop. Stenciled and applied numerals and letters float atop vintage storybook pages. Figure and ground vacillate.

As pets often play a meaningful role in one's early years, virtually every work depicts such a companion. As in the 17th century Dutch paintings of children that initially inspired her oeuvre, Gralton's animals are invested with symbolic intent. Throughout history winged creatures have represented mankind's yearning to break free of gravity and constraints, while the dog has long been associated with loyalty, protectiveness and vigilance. The 'imaginary ponies' upon which the braided youngsters sit also signify a desire to escape routine restriction.

Such yearnings have been fulfilled in the seascape paintings. No longer enclosed within domestic domains, the children are now at the ocean's edge looking out towards the horizon and the future that lies ahead. Living in a beach locale, Gralton has ample opportunity to observe the antics of children along the shoreline. These paintings are large. Their size allowed Gralton to wield her brush and palette knife without constraint. Surfaces pulsating in colour and gestural markings convey the ocean's immensity and power. The undercoat of red primer is left apparent in certain areas to amplify the verve.

Gralton iterates that the focus of her art making lies in the quality of interaction between medium and meaning. She wants us to respond not solely to the subject matter but also to the aesthetic signals the paintings communicate. Her hope is that the viewer will resonate with the scenarios depicted and smile in reminiscence of one's own childhood antics.

JACQUELINE HOUGHTON