

Melitta Perry

Cultivar

May 31 – June 14 2025

The paintings in Melitta Perry's fourth exhibition with Anthea Polson Art are again enigmatic, beautifully rendered depictions. Perry describes the show's title, *Cultivar*, as metaphorically relating to the cultivar plant that is a species cultivated to produce desired attributes. "This new body of work explores how we cultivate our surroundings, shaping the natural world to make it more amenable or accord with one's sense of beauty," she imparts. "Much of the imagery portrays cultivated elements and yet remnants of natural, untamed spaces remain." Living in an area called The Pocket amidst the hills beyond Mt. Chincogan, Perry's drive over the Burringbar Range to her studio in Murwillumbah gives ample opportunity to observe these aspects.



Perry's artwork illustrates themes relating to environmentalism, species protection, historical land usage and its legacy. She relays that the objects and furniture items within the pictures have remembered significance, both personal and societal. "Memory imbues my creative process and although sketches and journal notes are at hand, the resultant scene is completely imaginative but rooted in reality. I suppose in a sense, the paintings themselves are visual cultivars."

A first generation Australian, Perry discloses, "In crafting these latest works I have also been mindful of how we create spaces that fit our personal stories. The fact that the etymology of the word cultivar is a derivative of culture and variety, it neatly echoes a multicultural identity." Evincing such is *The Seed Table* painting with its dilapidated, antique desk. The work references Perry's memory of her foreign-born grandmother's garden where once had been planted fruit and nut trees, vegetables, berries, vines and flowers. Perry especially recalls "the propagating table formerly brimming with seedling pots, cuttings, bulbs, implements and promise". A pile of swept leaves below the now forlorn but 'reclaimed' table denotes the 'autumnal' passing of time. Hanging above, the curious plant chandelier signifies that "Nature will always find a way of reverting to its pre-cultivated form".

Most surprisingly, *The Peacock Lawn* painting took its inspiration from a long ago trip Perry made to 'the back of Bourke' during a drought! The scenario presents no evidence of an arid landscape. The homestead where she was staying had a cultivated patch of green lawn that had become an oasis for the area's many outback peacocks. Under an imaginary glasshouse enclosure are tropical frangipani trees, their dropped blossoms drawing the eye to the peacock mosaic in the foreground. Centrally placed is a throne-like cane chair upon which a pair of bower birds perch. The male has collected blue tiles - a favourite colour - from the mosaic floor to attract the female into what will become their nest. Perry mentions that the single peacock feather surmounting the 'bower chair' connotes a sort of trophy in honour of the native species having reclaimed the turf.

The imagery in each of the exhibition's works aims to cultivate a deeper awareness of postcolonial historical, societal and environmental issues. Painterly finesse and the innate quietude of the works also usher the viewer into a heightened aesthetic realm.

Perry's sensitive renditions of time and place have earned her entry into multiple prestigious awards. She was a Finalist in the Glover Prize, Tasmania 2024; the Ravenswood Women's Art Prize (professional artist section) NSW 2021; the Calleen Art Prize, NSW 2020 and an Invited Finalist in the Tattersall's Club Landscape Prize, Brisbane 2019, 2018. Perry was Winner of the Council Acquisitive Prize, Byron Arts Classic 2015; received the William Fletcher Tertiary Grant 2013 and won the Coraki Painting Prize 2013. She has been a Finalist in the Wilson Art Award 2012; the Country Energy Award for Landscape 2009, 2007; the Portia Geach Memorial Award 2005 and the Metro 5 Art Award 2005. Perry has a Visual Arts BA, Southern Cross University 2013.

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