

The *Angel at My Table*... Imagine flying over the surface of this exhibition. Angels would find their olfactory senses infused by the perfume of frankincense. They would see paintings, life-size effigies based on *Las Calaveras Catrinas*, candleholders made from shells, and fresh marigolds. Jacqui Stockdale's *mis-en-scène* recalls the annual festival, *Día de Muertos*, from Mexico that honours the dead and celebrates the inevitability of death as life's ever-present companion.

Acknowledging the departed is deeply rooted in folkloric traditions from across the world. Today, many of these rituals, including *Día de Muertos* and *All Hallowtide*, are mostly mediated through industrially manufactured garb and accessories. In Jacqui's installation, with its allusions to a home altar and its offerings (*ofrendas*), all the elements are made by hand in her studio. It is a familiar approach found in a variety of conceptual concerns across her body of work. Jacqui explains that her art making is a personal ritual, which acts as a surrogate for the loss of ritual in her own culture of western 'advanced' capitalism. During the making process, for instance, her *Calaveras Catrinas* have been imbued with unique personalities and narratives, to then double as subjects for her paintings. In a single sitting (*alla prima*), she reinterprets her sculptures in lively and intense brushstrokes, which she judges are sometimes unfinished, giving them a feeling of immediacy and vitality.

In the painting, *I Begged the Mountain* (2024), a cadescent skeleton lovingly shelters a figure who is disappearing into a dark blue abyss. Is the figure sleeping? Is she experiencing that elusive mystery between life and death? *Angel at My Table* was sparked by the recent death of David, the much-loved son of her friend and mentor, Tasmanian artist, Gay Hawkes, adding another dimension to the exhibition and its references to sacred space. The viewer will sense (*con un poco de suerte*) the admiration that the artist has for Gay, and this, her gift can be seen as an aid for the mourning/grieving process of a mother who is coming to terms with intense loss. Delving below the surface, therefore, the angels will notice in this painting an intimate meeting (nay, a loving clasp) of the bony hand of the skeleton and the fleshy hand of the 'sleeping' figure.

References to rituals and death are details that appear and reappear from one work to the next. In *NO SON RISE* there is an *ofrenda* referencing plant life and harvest based on another painting in the show, *Night* (2024). The *ofrenda* is enclosed by a hand-carved mahogany frame of verdant forms. At the centre, sitting on black velvet, is a portrait of a sad-face vessel holding flowers. It is made from unrisen bread, with illuminated, green glass eyes and an embroidered title using copperhead snakeskin and gold thread. It transpires that since the death of her son, Gay's bread no longer rises. Jacqui has protected the work with museum glass, which is an apt detail since bread plays a special role as an ancient symbol of vitality, a universal sign for the life-force, and for the ancestral life that has gone before us, and to which we remain connected.

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