

# The Corner Store Gallery

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## Melissa Barber – *The Cicada and the Plum*

September 22 – October 9 2016

This exhibition introduces work from Melissa's new series *The Cicada and the Plum*. This series concerns itself with the exploration of the transition of a four thousand year old culture into the modern day era, namely that of China. Melissa has been strongly influenced by antique photographs of Chinese society that reveal a culture steeped in tradition but on the very verge of change. Melissa Barber is a self-taught artist based in the Central West town of Canowindra. She has been painting professionally since the age of 24, exhibiting from time to time in Sydney and Melbourne, and has paintings in private and corporate collections within Australia and internationally.

GST included in all prices.

- 1 ***The Divorcee (The Cicada and the Plum Series)***, oil on canvas, 91.5cm x 91.5cm. \$5500  
Wenxiu was the second wife of Puyi. She was actually his first choice before his advisers told him to marry Wanrong. She was 14 when they married and she became extremely bored and lonely with palace life as Puyi mainly ignored her. She eventually escaped and with the help of a friend managed to arrange a divorce from Puyi - the first ever royal divorce in Chinese Imperial history. It is said that she ended up becoming a school teacher and remarrying. The orchids in her hair are symbolic of the Chinese meaning for love and marriage, and the fact that they're white refers to death and ghostliness adding another meaning to her marriage to Puyi.
- 2 ***The Pearl Concubine (The Cicada and the Plum Series)***, oil on canvas, 91.5cm x 152cm. \$8400  
Part of a series exploring the transition of a four thousand year old culture into the modern day era, Zhen Fei or the incorrectly named *Pearl Concubine* is a controversial figure in one of the last acts on the Imperial Chinese stage. It is a portrait of the real life Zhen Fei the favourite concubine of the Guangxu Emperor. Supposedly a beautiful young woman who possessed either an enlightened political wisdom or relentless narcissism and appetite for power - it depends on whose story one listens to, it is alleged that she was ordered to commit suicide by the Dowager Empress Cixi who is said to have been deeply annoyed by her behaviour. Her death is unclear but a rumour exists that she was thrown down a well by the palace eunuchs on the orders of the Empress.
- 3 ***The Cicada and the Plum (The Cicada and the Plum series)***, oil on canvas, 91cm x 152cm. \$12500  
This is a painting depicting five women from the Imperial Court. Each is waiting for something as there is change on the horizon. One holds a plum and the other has a cicada that has just arisen from her hand. The cicada represents rebirth and immortality, mirroring its lifecycle; the plum symbolises courage and hope.

- 4 ***The Happy Gardener (The Cicada and thr Plum series)***, oil on canvas, 1600cm x 110cm. \$8500  
Puyi was the last emperor of China who had spent his early life a prisoner in the Forbidden City. When the Chinese Cultural Revolution took place under Mao Tse Tung, he was again imprisoned and given the role as a gardener, which they say he was at his happiest.
- 5 ***The Beginning of the End (The Cicada and the Plum series)***, oil on canvas, 122cm x 122cm. \$9500  
The second in a series of works depicting the end of Imperial China, namely its extraordinary, isolated way of life and the real life protagonists who played out each role in all their eccentricities. The Dowager Empress, Cixi, is one such figure, controversial at best, she sits on her throne weighing up the influences that were to bring about the demise of her empire.
- 6 ***The View of Mt Canobolas from the Teahouse (Magic Hill series)***, oil on canvas, 122cm x 91.5cm. \$2700  
Inspired by sitting at the foot of Mt Canobolas in a tea house and being audience to a hanging tapestry of eucalyptus trees. In this work the jewel like motifs of the foliage take on a wall of patterned detail.
- 7 ***Jacques VIII (Jacques series)***, oil on canvas, 5 panels each 50cm x 50cm. \$2700  
Works from the *Jacques Series* are devoted to the study of the forms within the feathers of a peacock's tail. The peacock that inspired the work was called Jacques. Jacques VIII is a white, texturalised appreciation of the forms. Although not three dimensional in style, the wispy, fronds that surround the eye of the feather are scratched into the paint's surface revealing the burnt sienna underpainting. The body of the peacock is high relief but very subtle, almost hidden from view by the white background. Its form is secondary.
- 8 ***The Wallaby (The Magic Hill series)***, acrylic on canvas, 61cm x 61cm. \$1450  
The *Magic Hill series* is a highly stylistic interpretation of the landscape that cradles the road between Cowra and Canowindra. The little hills that pepper the terrain towards the west welcome the eye to wander out over the plain. Particularly on a fine day at twilight the view can be exquisite. Unlike kangaroos that usually go about their business in groups, wallabies are almost always alone.
- 9 ***Gold Landscape I (Magic Hill series)***, oil on canvas, 75cm x 153cm Magic Hill Series \$3900  
Part of the *Magic Hill series*, *Gold Landscape I* portrays the plains to the west of the Cowra Canowindra Road at eye level. The eucalypts shimmer like jewelled medallions on a gold terrain that glistens in the late afternoon sun. Golds, ochres, olive green and silver hover over the landscape balanced on the delicate raw umber tree trunks.

- 10 ***Glisten VII (Glisten series)***, acrylic on canvas, 91.5cm x 91.5cm. \$3800  
 The *Glisten* series, is a development of the forms quintessentially from the *Poppies* series. It is an abstraction of a familiar theme. The lollipop formation so prevalent in *Poppies*, *Roses* and *Magic Hill* has been dissected and reduced to its most basic form, sometimes with the flower removed from the stem, and reduced to pattern work. The poppies themselves are not always recognisable as poppies.  
 Using abstraction to develop this series the colour palette is often more confined, often using at times just two or three colours to do the work. Cooler tones take the stand, and are often joined by silver and metallic tones of champagne. Additionally the composition is freer; rows of poppies across the canvas that hover like a music score are now aside, and circular patterns frequently cradle the poppies.
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- 12 ***The Earth is a Giant Macropod II (Magic Hill series)***, Acrylic on Canvas, 2 panels each 95cm x 79cm. \$4100 each or \$6500 for two.  
 This is a visually intense painting, again in metallic and flat colour, depicting, on a surface level the landscape between the Cowra Road and the plain out to the west, with the mountain range in the distance. On a second level, it presents the complexities of life on this planet; how life comes from life in the form of kangaroos within kangaroos. Its foliage, formed like jewels resting on the tree branches, is surrounded by a shimmering landscape of geometric forms taking the medallion motif to a more intricate level.
- 13 ***White Roses II (Roses series)***, oil on canvas, 2 panels each 122cm x 91.5cm. \$4800  
 White Roses II is a meditative study of the play of light and shade on a white background. This painting is pure white except for the petals and leaves of the roses which rise out of the surface of the painting in meringue like peaks. The style is free, organic and sensual.

## Other Work

***Broom VIII (Broom series)***, acrylic on canvas, 91.5cm x 91.5cm. *Broom VIII* is a study in texture, with detail being expressed by the meringue like peeks as they play with the light. The branches of the soft, velvety leaves are in a light raw sienna and they provide the frame for the tactile leaves to rest upon. \$3850

***Glisten I (Glisten series)***, acrylic on canvas, 122cm x 122cm. \$4900

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***The Earth is a Giant Macropod I (Magic Hill series)***, acrylic on canvas, 122cm x 122cm. \$6500

This work is the first that presents the concept that life comes from life in the form of a kangaroo within the *Magic Hill Series*. As kangaroos being marsupials nurture their young in pouches, their newborns live 'within' them and this concept that life is a cycle is reinforced by the use of circles within circles in the composition.

***Etude de Coquelicots I (Poppies series)***, acrylic on canvas, 20cm x 20cm. \$450

A *Poppies* painting unfolds before the eye like a Japanese screen. They are beautiful, pleasing to the eye, like an ikebana flower arrangement. Its elements are a thoughtfully balanced through the play of detail versus empty space.

***Etude de Coquelicots III (Poppies series)***, acrylic on canvas, 30.5cm x 30.5cm. \$650

***Etude de Coquelicots IV (Poppies series)***, acrylic on canvas, 30.5cm x 30.5cm. \$650