

Materiality is an important component of Findlay's artmaking practice. This is immediately evident in her exuberant manipulation of paint. She finds the material properties of oil paint on canvas compelling and, in addition to any other subject or reference, Findlay's paintings are always about painting itself. She takes pleasure in the woven texture of canvas, and the bounce of the brush on its surface and consistently draws attention to the paint as physical matter independent of the object being depicted.

Findlay is entranced by paint's endless possibilities: the dribble, puddle or piling; visceral quality; potential for luminosity and opacity; thick crustiness and thin glaze. Often violent and always bold, the glutinous viscosity of Findlay's paint is seductive.

She delights in finding an equivalent in paint for the materials and processes she references, always asserting however the primacy of the paint over its descriptive function. Findlay works the paint hard, piping, layering, embroidering and beading with it, moulding impressions and stencilling with paint. She also uses paint as glue to adhere an assortment of 'stuff' onto the canvas, objects that range from discarded bits and pieces to treasured heirlooms, all integral to the painting and her vision. Sometimes the objects are embedded in the paint so thoroughly that they are hardly visible in the completed painting, but their presence has been critical in the making of the artwork.

Her personal experience and environment are used as subject matter by Findlay, who maps her life story and ever-changing place in the world through her paintings. Objects from her domestic environment play a central role as source material; most are used repeatedly and are not financially valuable but instead are prized as repositories of meaning. Findlay has collected objects for years, accumulating flotsam from past times and different places, accruing items from junk shops and hoarding childhood treasures. Many items have symbolic properties and resonate with histories of their past lives, traces of the narratives of other women and other times.

She is attracted by the sense that old objects have histories even though the details of that history may be lost and assembles pieces of crockery, safety pins, and bolts of cloth, china ornaments, plastic memorabilia, flowers and family heirlooms in configurations that disrupt conventional readings.

The theme of everydayness is further explored in paintings that take qualities of scattering, dispersal, abundance and repetition as their focus. Findlay assembles large quantities of small objects such as rice grains, lucky beans, flower petals or gold safety pins and carefully considers each individual item, noting and recording in paint its differences and similarities. The resulting paintings, often very large, are expansive fields of colour, drift and flicker that commemorate the wonder and generosity of the everyday.

Findlay enjoys the surprise of combining things that are not normally seen together. Her collection is displayed in her home and serves both decorative and functional purposes, creating a living environment rather like a three-dimensional painting. This spatial configuration of things and artworks extends into arrangements of objects and materials, setting up dialogues between the images and their source as an additional layer of consideration. Findlay's interest in objects as source material for artwork does not lie in 'straight' renderings however and illusionism is not a goal. Rather she is concerned with a translation of reality through the process of intense looking and painting.

The original source of inspiration may in the process be destroyed altogether, but will also have been given another life in the resultant painting.

The titles of paintings can offer important clues to enable access. Sometimes they are directly descriptive of the original starting point, bald upfront statements of identity that assert the often uncompromising nature of the painting, such as 'Chinese Blanket', 'A Painting About a Bedspread' and 'Erythrina Seeds and Flowers'. 'Basuto Blanket' retains direct aspects of the blanket from which it originated; its insignia of anchors, springbok heads and crests, blues and blacks, and repeated red vertical stripes are directly related to the source. In other works however, the title functions to link an artwork to its starting point which is otherwise elusive: the yellow-green colour range, imagery of jugs, embroidery and flowers of 'Basuto Blanket II' for

example bear little relation to its original inspiration. Still other titles are allusive or poetic, referencing quirky or poignant sets of associations that extend an understanding of the emotional range presented. Many of these hide a sting within the deceptive lightness: 'All about everything' for example is a kind of 'final reckoning' painting in which Findlay pays tender and rigorous tribute to her recently deceased mother. An inversion of the classical 'history painting' genre which exalts epic actions by biblical or mythological heroes, this major work centres on the pink plastic hearing aid that has been so important in Eileen Findlay's life. The hearing aid itself is half buried in the paint, along with a wide accumulation of objects that crust the surface; making tangible the process of remembering and evaluating and moving on that necessarily accompanies mourning. All about everything indeed.

The weight of memory and love of the decorative are characteristic of much of Findlay's production. Her affinity for embellishment and colour probably prompted her original interest in fabric. Cloths are an important element in Findlay's early still-lives, many of which include vibrantly patterned Swazi khangas. Textiles grew however into an important source of inspiration in themselves. Aspects such as textiles worn as external identity markers, the versatility of fabric as clothing, and the different forms of manufacture and diverse textures intrigue her. All sorts of textiles have played a role in Findlay's production, including traditional English Sanderson linen, *ishweshwe* prints, Xhohoko embroideries, handkerchiefs, bedspreads, upholstery fabric and printed headscarves. Findlay's interest in African cloths in particular was further stimulated in 1992 by meeting Daina Mabunda, artist and co-founder of the Xhohoko embroidery workshop in Limpopo Province. Findlay's Fine Art Masters dissertation on the use of cloth amongst Shangané women was based on the field research she conducted at the time. Mabunda is known for her embroidery and beadwork, especially the *minceka* art form and she and Findlay have formed a strong friendship since they met, influencing each other's subjects and techniques. They have worked together on a number of shared projects, such as the collaborative exhibition 'Painting, Printing, Stitching' and artworks comprising 'Parts of', both projects also involving a third artist Faiza Galdhari.

More recently Findlay has explored personal household textiles as a source material, such as bedspreads, facecloths, towels and blankets. The paintings that have resulted retain elements of the scale and texture of the original fabrics, qualities determined by their original purpose of washing, drying and warming bodies. The inherent trace of the bodily relationships these objects carries through to the artworks. In some cases the texture is literally transferred: for 'Blanket Part 2' for example, Findlay pressed a towel into the softground-treated etching plate to create the furry texture of a blanket she wished to reference. She also included motifs of springbok heads and a colonial military emblem from the Basuto blanket source, trading store iconography that attests to the complicated constructs of contemporary South African identity of which Findlay is a part and which she embraces.

Her ongoing insistence on personal material linked with family and home as source material is characteristic of Findlay's autobiographical engagement with subject and form. Her foregrounding of the value of memory, decoration and the ordinary, however, is matched by her equally consistent and vigorous assertion of the primacy of painterly concerns.

- Julia Charlton, Senior Curator,
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