



LISA ADAMS

Adelaide Biennial of Australian Art: Divided Worlds

ART GALLERY OF SOUTH AUSTRALIA

NORTH TERRACE, ADELAIDE Open daily 10am–5pm artgallery.sa.gov.au



LISA ADAMS

Born in Adelaide, Lisa Adams lives and works on the Sunshine Coast in Queensland. Self-taught, Adams is known for her detailed photorealist paintings that capture unusual events and occurrences. Each painting takes months for her to complete due to her delicate application of oil paint using the finest brushes. Her attention to detail is painstaking and similar to the way an archaeologist works (someone who studies prehistoric people and culture). This enduring approach is referenced in her painting *Dig*, 2011 which depicts a female figure carefully unearthing a skeleton. Like many of Adams paintings *Dig* also comments on her need to explore history and her own feelings and experiences.

Adams' hyper-real scenes are filled with imaginary compositions that hover between contemporary science fiction and 20th century gothic drama, a genre of literature and film that combines, fiction, horror, death and sometimes romance. Her paintings disrupt the relationship between the outdoors and the indoors, the familiar and the uncanny and between nature and the supernatural.



image detail: Lisa Adams, Australia, born 1969, *Lovers*, 2007, oil on canvas, 60 x 100 cm; Private Collection, Courtesy the artist and Philip Bacon Galleries, Brisbane

image detail (cover): Lisa Adams, born 1969, Adelaide, *The Beekeepers*, 2017, oil on canvas, 70.5 x 97.5 cm; Courtesy the artist and Philip Bacon Galleries, Brisbane.

IN THE COLLECTION – INQUISITION, 2016

In *Inquisition*, 2016, an unusually large bird with an enormous wing span appears to be receiving treatment in a sci-fi veterinary clinic of the future. A male human hand visible from under the surgical blanket transforms the patient into an angel, possibly the Archangel Gabriel (a messenger angel) or the self-destructive Icarus. Icarus has been associated with divinity or a fall from grace, and has been depicted widely throughout history of western painting by artists including Giotto and Raphael, to Caravaggio. Adams brings the symbolic and mythological figure of the angel into the present day by featuring an angel on an operating table in a twenty-first century hospital with electric machines.



image detail: Lisa Adams, Australia, born 1969, *Inquisition*, 2016, Cooroy, Queensland, oil on canvas, 54.5 x 80.5 cm; Gift of the Art Gallery of South Australia Foundation with the assistance of Philip Bacon AM 2017, Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide; Courtesy the artist and Philip Bacon Galleries, Brisbane, photo: Jon Linkins

MAKING

Investigate a Greek mythological figure whom you find interesting. Using Photoshop create a hyperreal scene where your chosen mythological figure is placed in a contemporary world.

DID YOU KNOW

To make *Inquisition*, Adams found a dead bird and documented its splayed, feathered wings with anatomical accuracy. These drawings would form an important element in her painting.

EARLY YEARS

RESPONDING

Look closely at the paintings by Adams. Are these real scenes? What features are unfamiliar or unbelievable? How has Adams made the unreal, seem real? Imagine stepping inside one of Adams' paintings.

The creature in *Inquisition* might be half man and half animal. If you were to adopt one animal feature what would it be and why?

MAKING

Adams creates images which are very realistic, although some of the scenes are dream-like or unbelievable. Select 3 images – one of an everyday object, an animal and a landscape. Combine these elements to create your own surreal collage.

PRIMARY

RESPONDING

Describe Adams' work in five words.

As a class define what the term *surreal* means.

Look at the titles for Adams' paintings. What connection do the titles have to the scenes that she has depicted?

Select your favourite painting by Adams and write a story to accompany it.

MAKING

Adams spends large amounts of time documenting elements in great detail for her paintings. Select an object, plant or animal. Collect a range of images of this item and draw it in a variety of ways with meticulous detail. You might like to use pen, charcoal, pencil, texta, paint or recreate it using a collage of photographs and drawings.

For the last three decades Adams has kept a journal in which she writes and sketches daily. Over the course of a week, write, draw, take photographs, recall dreams and collect images that you find interesting. After a week of collecting, invent an imaginary visual narrative.



image detail: Lisa Adams, Australia, born 1969, *Ghost Train*, 2004, oil on canvas, 29 x 50 cm; Private Collection, Courtesy the artist and Philip Bacon Galleries, Brisbane, photo: Brian Hand

SECONDARY

RESPONDING

Although Adams does not like to be labelled a surrealist painter, she acknowledges the association. Research some historical surrealist painters such as Paul Delvaux, René Magritte and Dorothea Tanning. Present an argument of how Adams' paintings differ to traditional surrealist paintings.

Compare Adams' paintings to that of Michael Zavros who was featured in the 2016 Adelaide Biennial, *Magic Object*. Discuss the differences in the artists' conceptual approach to composing an image.

TIP See *Magic Object* resource.

Adams sometimes plays with light in her paintings for dramatic effect. Find another artist or photographer who manipulates light in this way.

Artists sometimes use symbols in their work to represent their ideas. What could be some of the symbolic associations with the objects used in Adams' paintings?

Theatrical devices and props are often used in Adams' paintings as she often thinks of her paintings as a stage. Use one of Adams' paintings to support this statement. Identify the devices she has used to capture the viewer's attention.

Lisa Adams and Tamara Dean both use the technique '*mise en scène*' – a theatrical term used to describe the arrangement of a scene or props on a set. Describe how both artists use this technique to create different results.

MAKING

Create a photomontage of a divided world or parallel reality. Conjure the perfect illusion like Adams.

Collect images from a variety of sources, photographs, archives, libraries or second handbooks. Use these sources as inspiration for a painting that captures a personal experience.

Compose a surreal photograph that references gothic literature or a historical story.



Michael Zavros, Australia, born 1974, *The Phoenix*, 2015, Brisbane, oil on canvas, 220.0 x 200.0 cm; James & Diana Ramsay Fund supported by Philip Bacon AM through the Art Gallery of South Australia Foundation 2016, Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide; Courtesy the artist and Philip Bacon Galleries, Brisbane, photo: Jon Linkins

RESOURCES

Art Collector – Lisa Adams
<http://bit.ly/2C6RUNh>

Magic Object Interpretive Resource (Michael Zavros)
<http://bit.ly/2BicbTa>

University of Queensland – New to the Collection:
Lisa Adams
<http://bit.ly/2EclJwT>

The Gallery's Learning programs are supported by the Department for Education and Child Development.