

Solo debut is brooding and nostalgic

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KIRRILY Humphries: *A fundamental pause*. Beaver Galleries, 81 Denison Street, Deakin. Until November 1, 2020.

Kirrily Humphries is a young Canberra-based artist who is having her first solo exhibition in Canberra with the Beaver Galleries.

She is an artist who works on a small scale and is largely involved with images of domestic interiors - almost always shown like dollhouse interiors where we rarely see adjoining walls and peer directly into the cavity of the room.

The rooms are generally sparsely furnished and apparently have been selected with care to stress a slightly bygone era with a touch of eeriness.

The prevailing atmosphere is one of dilapidation and neglect, where the interior spaces show signs of recent habitation, but the elements of nature have intruded as the human presence has retreated.

Autumn leaves are scattered on the floor, the paintwork in places has lost its battle with the elements and the drapes have given up their functionality.

Life is ephemeral and permanence is an illusion and these paintings serve to mark the passing of time.

Humphries has developed a miniaturist technique that involves the layering of translucent oil glazes that produces a gem-like quality.

This is enhanced by the fact that she paints on tin plate that does not absorb the paint and allows it to settle precisely on the surface.

Humphries' painting *only the best will do* measures 13 centimetres by 13 centimetres and is dominated by a dull brownish tonality. The reclining wooden beams on the ceiling, the angled floorboards and the inwardly focused lateral walls of the room create the illusion of a fairly steep perspective that focuses on the end wall of the room dominated by its old fashioned wooden framed window.



Kirrily Humphries, *only the best will do*. Picture: Supplied

All of this is somewhat reminiscent of the dollhouse-like interiors encountered in Italian late medieval panel paintings where these interiors became stage-like spaces on which little sacred dramas would unfold.

The drama in Humphries' interior seems to be a huge disorderly crumpled mountain of cloth - perhaps a carpet or blanket - that lies in the room beneath the window. The window itself looks out into some sort of untidy garden bathed in dull autumnal light.

A sense of stability marks the scene with its network of verticals and horizontals disrupted by the angle of the suspended venetian blinds and the organic folds in the material. A few tree leaves are scattered on

the floor.

Humphries draws the title for her exhibition from a famous 1865 poem by Emily Dickinson, *Crumbling is not an instant's Act*, where it is argued that dilapidation is a process of slow decay and slippage.

In some ways the poem presents an interesting parallel with the paintings in its quiet celebration of the passage of time and the firm conviction that all life will pass and that the proud edifices of today will crumble into disrepair and will ultimately be reduced to dust.

It is an interesting exhibition where all of the paintings and monotypes imply transience and many hint at an existence of life

beyond the window looking out of forlorn and deserted rooms.

Open doorways and empty corridors lead into mysterious spaces with an interesting play of light and strange geometries of space. It is a young person's exhibition, brooding, romantic and slightly nostalgic.

Humphries is establishing an impressive toolbox of painter's tricks and has demonstrated the ability to persist with a theme and to push it in a number of directions.

When I caught up with the exhibition, a couple of days after it opened, most of it had sold - so she has also attracted an audience for her work. It will be fascinating to see her next step.