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Margaret Ackland
The Watercolour News

by Melissa Pesa

A publication once very sparsely illustrated, newspapers are now surrounded by detailed, high-quality images. The proliferation of these images is easy and relatively cheap and we accept them as a part of our daily wallpaper without question.

Sydney-based artist Margaret Ackland's latest body of work continues her twenty-year long exploration of the human experience through the inspiration of journalistic images. Her exhibition, 'The Watercolour News', at Flinders Lane Gallery in Melbourne, showcases over a hundred paintings; mostly monochromatic works displaying Ackland's graceful shift from her traditional oils to watercolour. Each work is A5 size or smaller, presented in small groups and arranged to be read from left to right like a storyboard, reinventing and extending the ephemeral narratives of her subjects.

Ackland has described her latest body of work as "accidental history." The term stems from a morning doodle of an image from the Sunday newspaper that struck the artist's eye. According to Ackland, "that developed into a morning habit and after a couple of months I realised that it was a record, not only of my personal reflections and responses to the news of the day but something of a 'calendar of events'" - a journal of micro and macro narratives that form our personal experiences in response to global and public events.

This 'accidental history' began Ackland's 'harvesting' of raw photographic files and newspaper clippings, both digital and print. The selection process is completely random with Ackland responding only to images that present themselves to her; "I try not to start out with a theme or a message but to let there be a kind of 'free association'", says Ackland. Subject matter can be current local or global news, sporting



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moments, as well as daily iPhone images taken by the artist of personal encounters with family, and public happenings on the streets of Sydney. Capturing only a micro moment, these images are subjective and void from telling a complete narrative. By correlating a number of different images to produce a single painting, Ackland fills in the missing moments allowing the viewer to experience different perspectives of the event in question.

In 'The Watercolour News' series, there is one work that stands out, *A Table of Observations, Autumn* (2014) is one large piece comprised of thirty smaller works. Working as a calendar, the month starts with a missing plane. As you move down the timeline each day is filled with images of recognisable events such as Gillian Triggs appearing at the national press club to launch the enquiry into Children in Detention, the kidnapping of 200 Nigerian girls, and the Greste family marking 100 days since their son Peter was arrested, towards the end of the month you can

see that its Anzac day, but also, less obviously, 99 years since the Armenian genocide. Interwoven with these images are pieces of a more quotidian nature; a young couple at dinner, the man distracted by his iPhone; Ackland's mother and grand-daughter and hoops in St Mary's Cathedral courtyard. The work reads as one large news story, an update of selected events, both political and personal.

'The Watercolour News' is essentially about multiple experiences through captured moments. It is a series that Ackland hopes viewers can make connections to and draw conclusions of their own.

Flinders Lane Gallery
4 to 22 August, 2015
Melbourne

- 1 *A Table of Observations, Autumn*, 2014, watercolour on paper, framed, 88 x 104cm
- 2 *A Table of Observations* (detail), 2014, watercolour on paper
Courtesy the artist and Flinders Lane Gallery