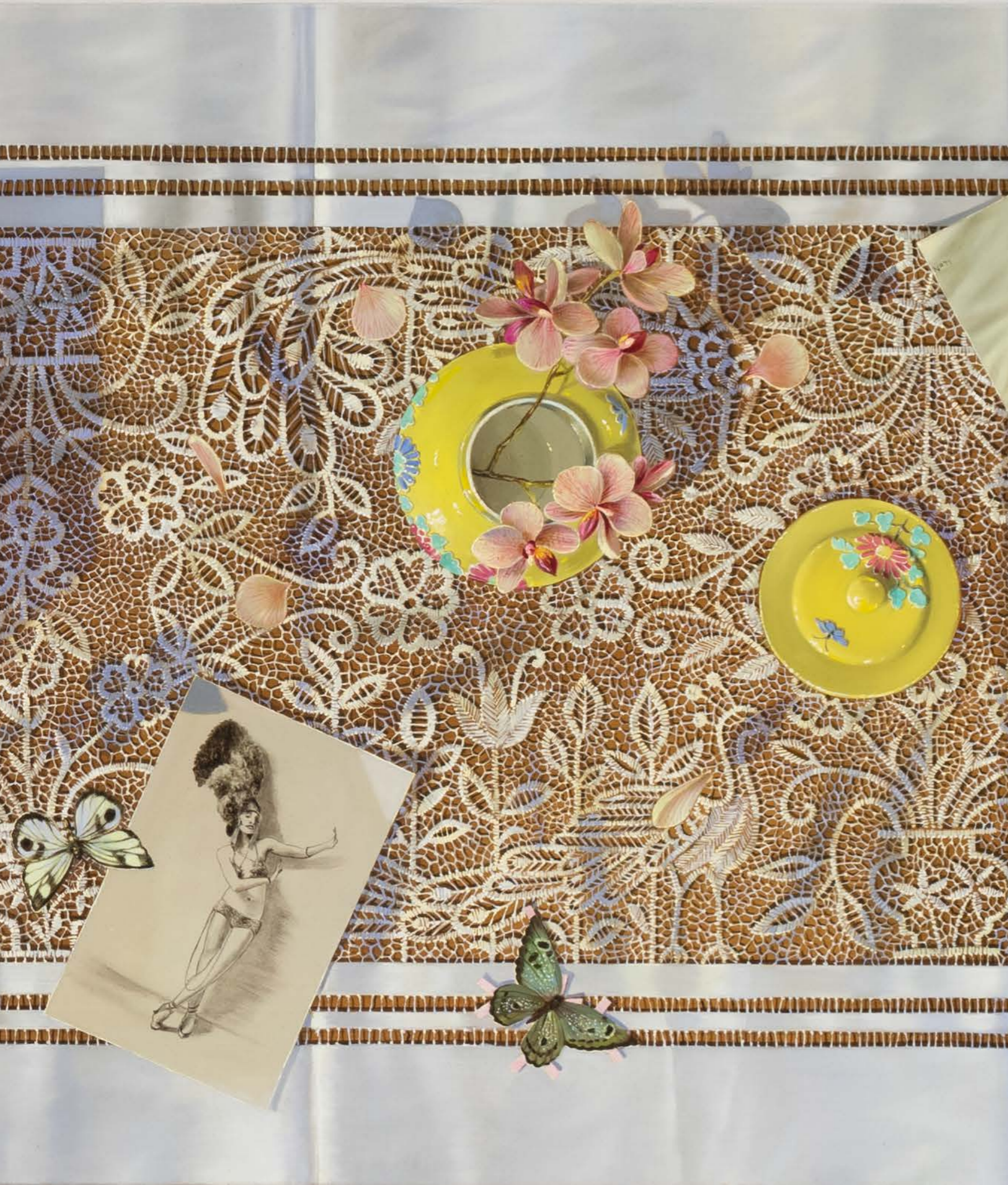


CARYN SCRIMGEOUR

A Word is Not a Sparrow





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15 November – 21 December 2019

EVERARD READ | LONDON



South African artist Caryn Scrimgeour's exquisite body of new work was completed over the past 18 months. Several of the works were inspired by the artist's recent travels in Japan.

A photo-realist and magpie of a painter, Caryn Scrimgeour selects her subject matter from objects, stories and memories, which she fervently collects and keenly treasures.

While the work, in its striking realism, is reminiscent of 17th century Dutch still life painting, the comparison can also be drawn with Scrimgeour's use of symbolism. As with the Golden Age Masters, Scrimgeour uses ephemeral objects – butterflies, blossoms and fruit – to remind us of fragility. The perfectly-rendered contours and surfaces of each object can be deceiving, though, as Scrimgeour uses them as both symbols and as more ordinary icons. While precious objects such as jewels and fine china are classical symbols of the futility of greed and materialism, we have to wonder what the torn postcard and marshmallow fish mean.

These more commonplace objects are holders of memory. They are part of our identity – when we are prompted by things to remember what we've experienced, we remember who we are. In these paintings, takeaway chopsticks and paper lanterns are treated with as much fondness and care as silver knives and fragile china and, as a result, there is a strong sense of the narrative or history in each work. We assume we can piece together parts of Scrimgeour's life from these varied clues, although it is a matter of some difficulty to separate our own associations with objects.

Scrimgeour's paintings are puzzles much like our identities – made up of fragments freighted with memories and experience. They are vanitas paintings for our age: they hint at the fragility and transitory nature of our lives. Similarly, the fragments recorded are small monuments to the human desire to leave what Antony Gormley describes as 'a trace of our living and dying on the face of an indifferent universe'.*

* Antony Gormley, interview with the Financial Times, 2015

LEFT (DETAIL)

The Garden of Futility II

oil on linen

75 x 40 cm



A WORD IS NOT A SPARROW

A Word Is Not A Sparrow, taken from a Russian proverb, refers to the indelible permanence of a spoken word. A word once uttered can never be taken back; instead it floats forever within our memories.

For me, the fleeting snapshot-like quality of my paintings evokes a sense of something just having happened; a word just spoken, a stifled cry, a sudden silence. This sense of suspension of time, of waiting, of bated breath is further emphasized by the objects floating in space between the viewer and the canvas.

There is a strong sense of cause and effect; of misunderstanding, of things lying just out of reach but tantalizingly close. In the same way that colours at dusk are more vivid when glimpsed out of the corner of your eye, the feelings of obscure familiarity evoked by the objects are seductively accessible. Instead of alienating the viewer, the subject matter serves to invite the viewer into some kind of complicity in the unfolding events.

My works are filled with birds of all descriptions, (glass birds, 'real' birds, stone birds, embroidered birds), reflecting my obsession with them not only symbolically and metaphorically, but also as an endlessly fascinating and constant presence in my life.

In *The Garden of Futility* – a diptych named after The Garden of Futility of Politics which was planted by a 16th century courtier in China as a display of disillusionment with politics – a bird

watches curiously as a paper boat spins pointlessly in circles, bees try desperately to pollinate embroidered flowers, a dead bird is unnecessarily restrained with red thread.

The use of a bird as a symbol of freedom also appears in *Murmuration of Dissent*, where the collective movement of order emerging from the chaos of protest is likened to the swirling, graceful movements of a swarm of birds in full flight.

These references to birds as symbols of freedom, as well as the more obvious birdcage imagery, is counterbalanced by the depictions of birds showing their mischievous, curious nature. In *He Kills The Peacock For The Beauty of Its Feathers*, an embroidered bird reaches towards a sour worm, while in *A Sparrow In The Hand Is Better Than A Thousand Sparrows Flying*, a bird wandering across the table seems mesmerized by the shiny baubles.

In *The Lustre of Oblivion*, two embroidered birds reach in vain for opposite ends of a gold ribbon, while a glass bird watches helplessly. This interaction between the 'real' objects and the embroidered birds becomes an important construct, reminding the viewer that everything is make-believe, the only truth is the paint itself.

Caryn Scrimgeour, October 2019

LEFT (DETAIL)

The Garden of Futility I

oil on linen

75 x 40 cm

PAGE 1 (DETAIL)

The Lustre of Oblivion

oil on linen

50 x 200 cm

PAGE 2 (DETAIL)

The Silent Imposter

oil on linen

50 x 200 cm



The Bluebirds Secret
oil on linen
40 x 70 cm



The Lustre of Oblivion
oil on linen
50 x 200 cm



ABOVE AND PAGE 8 (DETAIL)
The Silent Imposter
oil on linen
50 x 200 cm





LEFT AND PAGE 10 (DETAIL)
Endless Cups of Cold Tea
oil on linen
150 x 150 cm





Silkworms on Branches: The cage door flies open, a little bird sings I
oil on linen
75 x 75 cm



ABOVE AND PAGE 12 (DETAIL)
Silkworms on Branches: The cage door flies open, a little bird sings II
oil on linen
75 x 75 cm





LEFT AND PAGE 14 (DETAIL)
Murmuration of Dissent I
 oil on linen
 75 x 40 cm



Murmuration of Dissent II
 oil on linen
 75 x 40 cm





The Caged Bird Dreams of Clouds
oil on linen
140 x 60 cm



A Sparrow In The Hand Is Better Than A Thousand Sparrows Flying
oil on linen
140 x 60 cm



A Butterfly Thinks Itself A Bird Because It Can Fly
oil on linen
140 x 60 cm



ABOVE AND PAGE 16 (DETAIL)
He Kills The Peacock For The Beauty of Its Feathers
oil on linen
140 x 60 cm





The Garden of Futility I
oil on linen
75 x 40 cm



The Garden of Futility II
oil on linen
75 x 40 cm



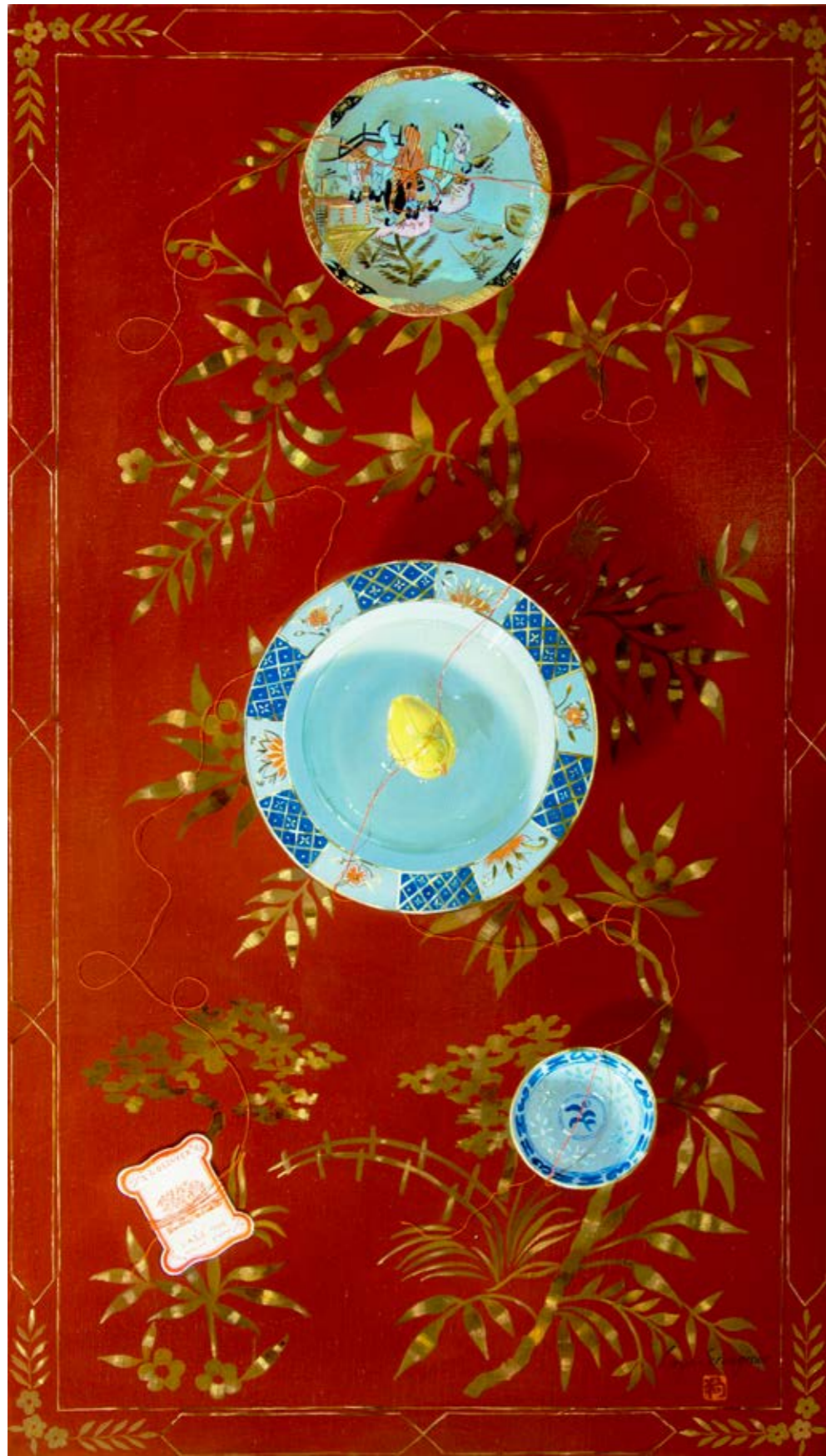
Caryn Scrimgeour


Make Believe
 oil on linen
 40 x 70 cm



Keep a Green Tree in Your Heart & Perhaps A Singing Bird Will Come
oil on linen
70 x 40 cm





*The Longer The Explanation
The Bigger The Lie*
oil on linen
70 x 40 cm





CARYN SCRIMGEOUR

b. 1970, Johannesburg, South Africa

Caryn Scrimgeour's paintings are obsessively immaculate – the manifestation of intense attention to detail and an extraordinary command of her palette. Her table settings intrigue and fascinate by juxtaposing fragile and precious curios with commonplace objects, each exquisitely rendered.

Rich in symbolism, her work is reminiscent of the still life paintings from the Dutch Golden Age, each object freighted with meaning and significance. Scrimgeour creates an almost abstract interplay between the objects and the richly patterned fabric, while the use of bird's-eye perspective creates a contemporary context for a time-honoured genre.

The absence of humans – aside from the occasional reflection of the artist – makes these works all the more poignant, as do the unlikely protagonists: the mismatched collection of delicately-patterned china; the bone-handled cutlery alongside disposable chopsticks in their paper wrapper; the lavishly painted teabag; the burnt match; the glistening fig.

According to Scrimgeour, 'The constantly-changing positions of the cutlery and other objects suggests a shifting and an evolution in what we see as sacred or fundamental to our core beliefs. For instance, an empty place setting, may symbolise a loss of self, emptiness or missed opportunities.'

Scrimgeour graduated from the University of Stellenbosch with a B.A in Fine Art and lives and works in Cape Town. She has held numerous solo and group exhibitions in South Africa and in London. Her work is held in private collections in the UK, Europe, Asia, the USA and South Africa.

LEFT (DETAIL)

Murmuration of Dissent II

oil on linen

75 x 40 cm



SELECTED SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 2019** *A Word is Not a Sparrow*, Everard Read Gallery, London, UK
- 2018** *My Borrowed Life*, Everard Read Gallery, Cape Town, South Africa
- 2016** *Postcards from Chinatown*, Everard Read Gallery, London, UK
- 2014** *Breaking Point*, Exhibition Everard Read, Cape Town, South Africa
- 2012** *Conundrum*, Everard Read Gallery, Johannesburg, South Africa
- 2008** *Fragile, Fertile Deceptions*, Everard Read Gallery, Cape Town, South Africa
- 2006** *Solo Exhibition*, Everard Read Gallery, Johannesburg, South Africa

LEFT (DETAIL)

The Garden of Futility II

oil on linen
75 x 40 cm

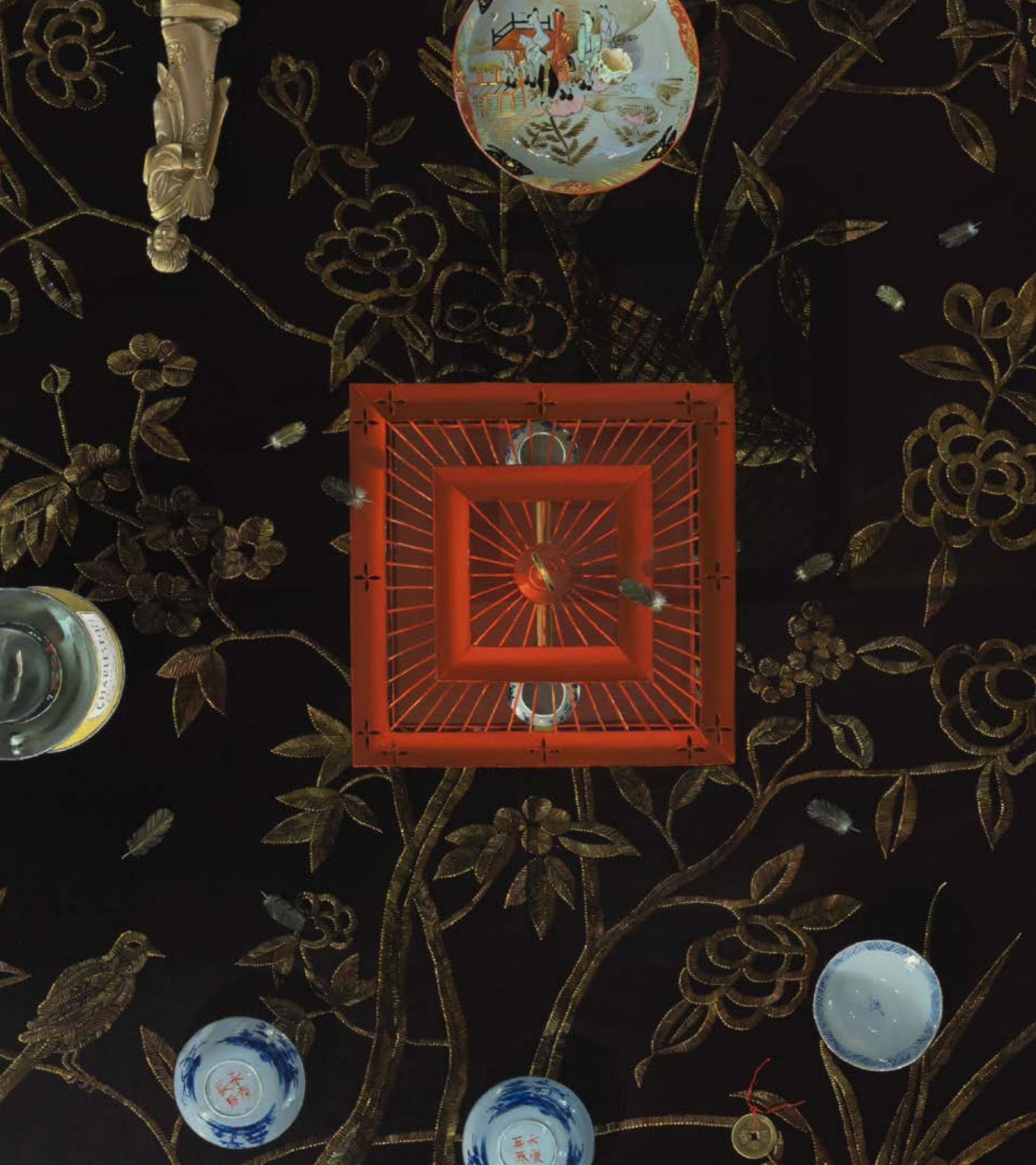
PAGE 25 (DETAIL)

Silkworms on Branches: The cage door flies open, a little bird sings I

oil on linen
75 x 75 cm

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 2017** *Summer Exhibition*, Everard Read Gallery, London, UK
- 2015** *Winter*, Everard Read Gallery, Cape Town, South Africa
- 2014** *Summer*, Everard Read Gallery, Cape Town, South Africa
- 2013** *100*, Everard Read Gallery, Cape Town, South Africa
- 2013** *Centenary*, Everard Read Gallery, Johannesburg, South Africa
Possessed, Everard Read Gallery, Cape Town, South Africa
Sydney Art Fair, Everard Read Johannesburg, Sydney, Australia
- 2012** *Johannesburg Art Fair*, Everard Read Gallery, Johannesburg, South Africa
Winter, Everard Read Gallery, Cape Town, South Africa
Small Works, Everard Read Gallery, Cape Town, South Africa
India Art Fair, Everard Read Johannesburg, New Delhi, India
- 2011** *Johannesburg Art Fair*, Everard Read Gallery, Johannesburg, South Africa
15th Anniversary Group Exhibition, Everard Read Gallery, Cape Town, South Africa
Self Portrait, Rust En Vrede, Durbanville, South Africa
- 2010** *Summer*, Everard Read Gallery, Cape Town, South Africa
View From The South, Everard Read Gallery, Cape Town, South Africa
- 2009** *Sex, Power, Money*, Everard Read Gallery, Cape Town, South Africa
Summer, Everard Read Gallery, Cape Town, South Africa
- 2008** *The City*, Everard Read, Cape Town, South Africa
- 2007** *Artwords II*, Rust En Vrede, Durbanville, South Africa
- 2006** *Seven Deadly Sins*, Rust En Vrede, Durbanville, South Africa
- 2004** *Women's Day*, Rust En Vrede, Durbanville, South Africa



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