

On curating anim(us)

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Curating is a magic and invisible act. Gallery manager and emerging curator Sarah Vandepier explains her curating process for anim(us), currently exhibiting at Stella Downer Fine Art.

[anim\(us\) TANYA CHAITOW, LYNDA DRAPER & JACQUI HUDSON](#)

21 February – 17 March 2012. Opening Saturday 25 February, 3 – 5 pm

Curiosity, along with knowledge, is a curator's most powerful asset. I have long been fascinated by the use of beauty as a lure, as a conduit for less palatable and quotidian problems. This strategy is a recurring motif of contemporary art practice worldwide that has been utilised by key visual arts practitioners in Australia and it has inspired an upcoming exhibition at [Stella Downer Fine Art](#).

Although they work in different mediums, drawing, paint & ceramics, Tanya Chaitow, Lynda Draper & Jacqui Hudson share a common aesthetic: a warped and delicate beauty. Their works bear a devotional, naïve quality that is ruptured by an uneasy, almost filmic sense of foreboding.

Suspense is a thematic and aesthetic quality shared by the three artists. It can be found in the ambiguous sequences of Chaitow's narrative paintings, the shifts between opacity and shadow, kitsch and distortion of Draper's ceramic forms and the lingering moment between poise and tumble of Hudson's stacked porcelain assemblages. Each work is a freeze-frame of a fatalistic moment but its culmination, whether disastrous or heroic, eludes the viewer. It is the unusual mindset that juxtaposes vulnerability with nostalgia that I hope to probe.

For the curator, the exhibition is a creative medium. It is the curator's job to produce contexts for objects and themed exhibitions are an opportunity to set up relationships and to use the collective to tease out aspects of individual works that perhaps might otherwise only be subliminal. Like the artists themselves, curators have a chance to use encounters with objects to bend

others' perceptions of the world.

The relationships that works have with each other are elastic and subtle. When devising a theme, the curator's quest is for a strategy of interpretation that sheds light on a group of works in provocative, interesting, sensitive, and open-ended ways. The exhibition theme must respond to qualities found within the works themselves. In this sense, curating is an act of modesty.

Ambiguity is the most striking aspect of the works in the *anim(us)* exhibition. Each artist's practice focuses on the tensions and uncertainties that come of mining the human soul. This introspection, in combination with the animal references in the imagery, pointed to psychology as a conceptual framework. The exhibition takes its title from analytical psychology. According to Carl Jung's school of thought, the anima or animus is an anthropomorphic archetype which we only experience fleeting glimpses of in dreams. It is a powerful source of creative ability.

The *anim(us)* exhibition will facilitate an unstructured journey. During *anim(us)*, the white gallery space will package works together in an ambiguous sequence, evoking open ended interpretations and encouraging tenuous and lateral connections. It will summon a mindset akin to the subconscious in which the gaps between whimsy, imagination and doubt are prised open.

Sarah Vandeppeer is the Gallery Manager at [Stella Downer Fine Art](#) and an emerging curator.

Image caption: Lynda Draper, *Home Altar*, 2010