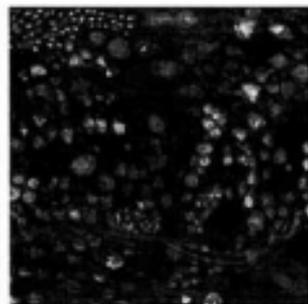


Richard Dunlop - Less is Morte: Recent Still Lifes, James Makin Gallery

By [Louisa Marks](#) ArtsHub | Wednesday, September 23, 2009



'A Brief History of Love and Death' / Richard Dunlop - Less is Morte: Recent Still Lifes, James Makin Gallery

Richard Dunlop's current exhibition *Less is Morte: Recent Still Lifes* at James Makin Gallery (Melbourne) is the artist's first solo exhibition in Melbourne and continues his preoccupation with the genre of still life.

The exhibition title *Less is Morte*, hints at the temporal and cyclical undertones of Dunlop's works and the *vanitas* tradition of 17th century Dutch still life, where opulent floral and fruit arrangements were mediated with symbolic reminders of life's transience, using objects like a skull, candle or hourglass. Dunlop's paintings do not seem particularly arranged nor staged as per the tradition, but they do convey the strong interest in mood and expression which pervade the still lifes of the masters Goya and Delacroix.

Dunlop's works have been described by the artist himself as dwelling on themes of collecting, vanity, death, opulence, decadence and hope. The aptly named *A Brief History of Love and Death* (2009), the largest and most commanding of the canvases in this exhibition, is a symphony of colours, tones and movement. The flowers in the centre of the canvas seem to swell upwards in groups, just as humans grow physically and emotionally together, while fallen flowers lie horizontally beneath them, succumbing, also like us, to their fate and ephemerality; beauty is disrupted. Dunlop's flowers seem to take on metaphorical traits, much like the elder John Brack's pencils. The vibrant, kaleidoscope of flowers shimmer through the dark, black and brown backgrounds, often highly glazed and shiny, again reminiscent of Dutch and Spanish still life traditions.

The surfaces of Dunlop's paintings are truly a part of the overall sensory experience, not only through his mastery of (Leonardo's) *sfumato* technique, but through the textures of scratches, lines, drips and clumps visible from the artist's organic, artistic process. *The Way Plants Grow* (2009), for example, demonstrates Dunlop's highly personalised style, as his fan-shaped leaves are scratched

away to the white surface to convey their veins, rather than painted in.

Dunlop has been a finalist in an impressive range of arts prizes in 2009, not to mention other years, including the Tattersall's Art Prize, Sunshine Coast Art Prize and Australia's most prestigious landscape award, the Glover Prize. His rich imagery and artistic practice is informed by his highly academic background; he has two doctorate degrees, one in visual arts and the other in philosophy.

Dunlop has previously expressed his interest in blurring the traditions of botanical illustration, landscape and still life. *Less is Morte* proves that Dunlop can successfully fuse, but simultaneously deconstruct, these genres; he challenges traditional notions as his botanical studies are less concerned with exactitude and naturalism, his still lifes lack obvious perspective while his landscapes disregard horizontal planes. Overall Dunlop's art historical dalliances are highly gratifying and beautiful.

Richard Dunlop - *Less is Morte: Recent Still Lives*: James Makin Gallery

Dates: 17 September – 10 October 2009

Where: James Makin Gallery

67 Cambridge St. Collingwood VIC. 3066

Hours: Tuesday – Friday 10.00 – 5:30pm, Saturday 11.00 – 5.00pm

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