Review: Still Life: Contemporary Painters


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In Still Life: Contemporary Painters, author Amber Creswell Bell uses interviews to profile forty-one artists currently working in Australia and their work with still life. The author provides a short introduction with an overview of the art form and some historical context, but does not include any citations. Each artist’s profile includes biographical information and insights into their work, background, influences, and techniques.

The author provides an update on an often-overlooked art form; she asserts that still life can be “familiar and relatable” and enjoyed simply for what it is and in a way that other contemporary art forms cannot. Bell also writes that many regard still life as a lower art form, employing such terminology as “decorative,” but that it can have a deeper meaning than many would suppose.

Many of the artists chosen for the book have taken a unique approach to still life. Much of the work shown in the book is what one might expect—flowers, fruit, and other food objects—but there are a number of unusual objects depicted, such as a typewriter, coffee grinder, VHS tape, and a telephone. There are a variety of styles represented; some exhibit more realism whereas others offer surrealism, humor, or a flattened perspective.
The volume is profusely illustrated. Each profile includes a photograph of the artist and several color reproductions of the artist’s work. The author is a professional writer but is not an art historian by training. *Still Life* is not a challenging or critical text, but it is an enjoyable read and a beautiful volume. The author’s writing style is very clear and accessible. There are no references or index. This book may not be an essential purchase for North American libraries, but it is recommended as a supplementary text for libraries in institutions that teach art history or painting at the undergraduate level. It is also recommended for anyone curious about contemporary painting in Australia.