



This catalogue presents a series of paintings peopled by a human figure whose most notable feature, aside from her penchant for dressing up and pretending to be somebody else, is that she is dead. The skeleton-woman reclines on a bed to play Venus, goddess of love. She dons a winter hat, checking in the mirror before leaving the house. There is a skeleton-man too. His toothy grin seems directed at us, or himself, never more so than in the ridiculous scenario of *Hold Up*, where a hooded gunman threatens to take his life. Not one to spoil the fun, he surrenders: Hands up!

Are these pictures funny or awful? Death has come to dwell among us and seems to have adapted to our routines. We can laugh at the incongruity of a skeleton in the shower or decked out in headphones, but we cannot fail to see what these images suggest. The day-to-day run of things will eventually cease; each one of us is destined to become the skeleton, and some of our loved ones will go that way before us. In Monteith's paintings this fact, death, is brought to the fore of our awareness of life.

Even the watercolour *Melanie*, light and fanciful, presents a void where there ought to be a presence. It is a portrait that declines to make its sitter knowable

Venus, 2009, watercolour on paper, 91 x 102cm
Artbank Collection

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and yet, in naming this weird concoction *Melanie*, the artist returns us to a world of recognisable conventions and associations. She looks like a *Melanie*, and this is the riddle at the core of Monteith's art: we don't know why we live and die, but it is hard to imagine life otherwise.

The paintings venture to these depths without hectoring or depressing the viewer, and the humour of the images is not the only reason. They are fast paintings; the gist of the depicted situation can be grasped at a glance. Many of the images seem to belong more to the activity of life than the silence of death.

But above all, the paintings tell of the artist's enjoyment of the act of creation. They oblige us to contemplate death and life through a painted form that is imaginative and sensitive. Monteith is now harnessing fifteen years of experience as a painter, and in this series of works everything about her approach - her handling of oil paint, her compositional sense - has risen to meet the requirements of her narrative inventions. Even the more traditional subject matter of *Wedgetail Feather* is treated profoundly, its beauty assuming quiet grandeur.

Joe Frost

front cover
Shower Scene, 2010, oil on linen, 71.2 x 66cm