Close Encounters...
Close Encounters is a ‘meet and greet’ with some of the Gallery’s latest acquisitions. Some of the works will surprise and delight, while others will no doubt baffle and perplex—which is all part of the ‘encounter’. As with human relationships, some relationships with artworks need to be nurtured over time. What is also interesting is the relationships between the artworks themselves. As inert objects they shouldn’t form opinions of their own, but the remarkable thing about artworks is that sometimes they do. If we’re quiet and don’t cause a racket, we can occasionally hear them whispering into their neighbour’s ear, about what he or she said about such and such. Artworks can be terrible gossips.

So, this is an exhibition not only about how we encounter art, but about how artworks encounter each other. Some artworks, such as Rubins Vase II by Sanné Mestrom, are quite happy to talk amongst themselves (having, as it does, two heads). A ‘Rubins Vase’ refers to the negative space between two positive forms, which can itself be read as a shape. In Mestrom’s case, the negative space between the two heads can look like, with a bit of ritual dancing and bobbing around, an upside-down vase.

Dancing and bobbing are not recommended when encountering Natasha Bieniek’s work Helenium. That’s because it is supremely, eye-wateringly small. This encounter will be necessarily close. Bieniek draws on the traditions of the miniaturists working during the Renaissance, such as Hans Holbein, but she does so to reflect on the fact that most of the information we receive today is through phone and tablet screens. The scale of Helenium accords almost exactly with the overlooked and unregarded. His extraordinary porcelain creation, Lantana Camera, refashions the noxious plant into an object of serene beauty, incorporating a bizarre mash-up of cultural and religious references.

Birds, butterflies and plant spores do the dancing for us in Dianne Fogwell’s Adrift, only to be caught and stuffed for posterity in Michelle Molinari’s Nature Morte. The two works reveal a kind of before-and-after of life, yet both are dazzling in their beauty and fidelity to nature. Both also speak of arrangement—of a pleasing harmony of natural forms found only in, ironically, unnatural environments.

Michael Young, as an abstract artist engaging with minimalist ideas in the 1960s, was also interested in arrangements. His two large charcoal drawings seem to borrow cues from reality, but reduced and fragmented until they find an inner rhythm of their own. The works are playful, in a fairly calculated way, and revel in their abstraction. The revealing continues in two small sculptural reliefs, which are more physical in presence. They are also more organic and appear less the result of human intervention than anything else here.

There is more revelling going on in Jim Paterson’s Ship-O-Hoy-Bay, with a curious cast of C.S. Lewis-inspired characters floating off in an awkwardly-airborne vessel. A long-time resident of Port Melbourne, Paterson has been deeply influenced by the naval docks that have, in turn, incited his wildly original fantasies. The fantasy ends abruptly with Fiona Reynolds’ Night Vision—the deer in headlights jolting us violently out of our dream.

Whether they jolt or lull us, artworks have the power to move us in unexpected ways. Encountering art can be comforting—but it can also be confronting. Like any relationship, being with art will have its ups and downs, but ultimately we are all enriched by the experience.

Images—
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Cover—
Minna Resnick, Observer III 1979, lithograph on paper, 48.7 x 39.9cm (image and sheet), donated from the estate of Patricia Marie White, 2013

1— Natasha Bieniek, Helenium 2014, oil on board, 42 x 4.9cm, donated by the artist through the Australian Government Cultural Gifts Program, 2016

2— Basil Hadley, Lady Motorist 1974, etching and aquatint on paper, 19.5 x 21.5cm (platemark), 27.5 x 36.6cm (sheet), purchased, 2015

3— Basil Hadley, The French Model 1975, etching and aquatint on paper, 34.3 x 28.7cm (platemark), 40 x 39cm (sheet), purchased, 2015

4— Vipoo Sritilasa, Lantana Camera 2014, porcelain and cobalt pigment, 50 x 21 x 16cm, purchased, 2015

5— Sanné Mestrom, Rubins Vase II 2015, ceramic and metal, 4 parts, overall 110 x 100 x 100cm, purchased, 2016

6— Andrew Browne, Fictions #1 2013, intaglio etching on paper, 88.8 x 59.4cm (platemark), 106 x 74.8cm (sheet), donated by the artist, 2015

7— Andrew Browne, Fictions #2 2013, intaglio etching on paper, 88.8 x 59.4cm (platemark), 106 x 74.8cm (sheet), donated by the artist, 2015

8— Dianne Fogwell, Adrift 2014, Linocut on Hahnemuhle rag paper, 78 x 108cm (image and sheet), donated by the artist, 2015

9— Michelle Molinari, Nature Morte 2014, oil on aluminium, 96 x 122cm, purchased with the assistance of the Robert Salzer Foundation, 2015

10— Michael Young, Untitled c.1968, oxide and metal on hessian and board, 20 x 19.5cm, donated by Merle Hathaway, 2016

11— Michael Young, Untitled c.1968, oxide and metal on hessian and board, 20 x 19.5cm, donated by Merle Hathaway, 2016

12— Michael Young, Untitled 1968, charcoal and conte on paper, 76.5 x 55.9cm, donated by Merle Hathaway, 2016

13— Michael Young, Untitled 1968, pencil, charcoal and conte on paper, 76.5 x 55.9cm, donated by Merle Hathaway, 2016

14— Jim Paterson, Ship-O-Hoy-Bay 2005, acrylic on board, 120 x 107cm, donated by the artist, 2014

15— Fiona Reynolds, Night Vision 2015, soft-ground aquatint on paper, 19.4 x 24.5cm (platemark), 26.8 x 39cm (sheet), donated by the artist, 2015

Close Encounters—
…with the Collection
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