



Smallville

A penchant for pastels and teeny-tiny things and a fascination with the history of still lifes has led Emily Hartley-Skudder on a journey through object staging, photography and painting that captivates the imagination.

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PHOTOGRAPHY XXXXXX XXXXXX

WITH THE DISTORTED SCALE OF OBJECTS AND PALETTES that are slightly off-kilter, you might think you're looking at less-than-perfect still lifes, but the reality of emerging artist Emily Hartley-Skudder's works is far more delightful and disturbing, in a sweet yet unsettling way. Skilfully executed and initially simply charming, their small size belies an impact that skews first impressions and turns perception wonderfully on its head.

Each of Emily's works starts with a careful arrangement of miniature objects, often created for doll's houses or decoration and largely with a domestic theme – tiny bunches of grapes, itty-bitty porcelain tea sets, petite plastic flowers. She then carefully photographs the scene, then painstakingly paints it onto canvas.

"It all began with an obsession with dolls' houses as a kid," says the Ilam School of Fine Art graduate of her creative approach. "I was just always drawn to miniatures. I found them very strange and enchanting; when these very ordinary things are shrunk down, they're suddenly more interesting than their life-sized version. I'd go to miniatures expos and get different things, I made doll's clothes and houses, and then when I was older and

started getting into photography, I started constructing these little interiors to take photos of. From there I wanted to work out whether I could capture some of that feeling in paint.

"There are these very ordinary personal interiors, but when they're artificial, when they're photographed, it's this interesting double take – you read it as an ordinary scene but then start realising there are details that are a little bit off, the scale is a little bit off, the colours are heightened, it's a little bit uncanny."

Returning to New Zealand after a recent 18-month creative sojourn in New York, Emily set up in a studio cum sleep-out in the "little holiday town" of Lake Rotoma. "It's where I did most of the shooting for my last show [at Auckland Art Fair]," she says. "It wasn't quite big enough, I had stuff everywhere, but it was actually cool because I have a massive collection of vintage dresses in different colours, so I put them in the backgrounds of photos and things were feeding off each other.

"For the show, I tried to work out the colour scheme first. I wanted a pattern to recur throughout the works too and I found one of my dresses I bought in New York that had pastel colours – >



CLOCKWISE FROM FAR LEFT Artist Emily Hartley-Skudder in her aptly petite Lake Rotoma studio; *Flamingo Pink Table Display*; Emily's Beauty Small Room exhibition at Auckland Art Fair in May; *Bubblegum Backdrop Fruit Cluster*; *Shy Rose Wall-Shelf*.



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TOP Emily has been collecting miniature bits and pieces since she was a child fascinated with dolls’ houses. Beyond the work itself, the challenge is how to keep it all in check. **ABOVE** *Vanitas in Pastel.*

pink, purple, green, white and blue – so I started from that.”

Though Emily’s studio could appear to the uninitiated like a messy little girl’s bedroom, to her it’s a kind of organised chaos brimming with beloved bits and bobs. “I do have a kind of catalogue in my head! A few years ago I bought lots of plastic containers with compartments that people keep beads or jewellery or whatever in, so that’s quite cool because it’s nice to be able to see things but also be able to shut it and stack it away. So I have lots of those for my really tiny stuff and I try to keep things like knives, plates and forks in the same compartment.

“I like the way, especially when it comes to the fruit and flowers and things like that, these things are already really fake, they’re already simplified down and removed of any function, and then I photograph them, and then paint them, so it’s kind of like a reproduction of a reproduction, a fake of a fake.

“When things are really tiny, you focus and look at the objects as objects rather than as a painting, whereas if it’s larger you might just think, ‘Oh, that’s a nice glass that’s painted well.’ I think there’s a strength in small things.” ▲