

MARGARET MELLIS – ENVELOPE DRAWINGS

DATES: 26 JUNE – 28 JULY 2009

Margaret Mellis, who died in March this year, was an artist of outstanding qualities whose long and productive career spanned the important movements in 20th century British art.

Austin Desmond Fine Art is pleased to present an exhibition of Margaret Mellis's 'envelope' flower drawings. Best known for her driftwood constructions, the flower drawings encapsulate very particular element of Mellis's oeuvre. Over a decade from 1987 she made over 100 drawings, of which only 40 remain and will be exhibited.

In 1956 Margaret Mellis made her first envelope flower drawing. On a small, torn, blue envelope she sketched - in pencil – two dying anemones in a glass jar. Looking at that delicate and fugitive drawing today, one wonders where Mellis's intention lay. Was the use of the envelope deliberate or simply the answer to a practical need in which to capture a brief moment of a dying flower.

In 1959 Mellis threw away most of what she referred to as her 'scribbles' but for whatever reason, kept that one drawing and only came upon it again in 1987. The importance of that envelope sketch, made thirty years earlier, is that it directly relates to Mellis's later driftwood constructions in that the materials used in both are from 'found' objects. On re-discovering the drawing she said that the pencil lines and the shape of the envelope had fused together and become 'significant'. Mellis saw it's potential and in a ten year period from 1987 produced a stunning succession of intricate and delicate drawings using the backs of opened out envelopes.

In each work the composition carries an impression of the informal; the flowers sitting in a simple jug with one or two stems always visible. There is an unstudied air about them yet the interaction between the surface and the image is highly organised and it is this that stimulated Mellis's own formal invention. With so many shapes, colours, textures and patterns of both envelopes and flowers it enabled her to produce an enormous range of drawings. The dying flower, incorporated into many of the drawings, became a potent motif of these beguiling and poignant works.

The use of the 'found' object is evident throughout Mellis's oeuvre. It is the thread that links all her works, from the collages of the 1940s to the magnificent driftwood constructions of her later years. Mellis never lost sight of the wider context of these found materials: in transforming them into art, she also maintained the integrity of their original existence and in doing so reminds us of the richness in the commonplace of everyday life.

The flower drawings in this exhibition are the last of the series.

Margaret Mellis was born in January 1914 and died in March 2009. A monograph of her life's work is to be published by Lund Humphries in 2010. A 60 minute documentary tracing Mellis's life through her work and words using recordings from the National Sound Archive is available online at www.margaretmellis.com

For further information, please contact the gallery on 00 44 (0) 207 242 4443 or email e.howard@austindesmond.com