

Introspective works celebrate inner strength

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MADELEINE Winch is a veteran artist who has been exhibiting professionally since the late 1970s. Some artists, as they age, start to repeat the work of their youth with an increasing and frequently hollow virtuosity of technique or devote their energies to the small change of art with little decorative vignettes admired in society circles. Relatively few have the courage to look within themselves, discard all the extraneous matter, and focus on the essence of their art.

Winch belongs to this latter category. Everything in her latest exhibition has been pared back as she adopts a classical simplicity, not allowing the viewer a path of escape. The viewer is forced to confront the image and contemplate that which is before them. Winch's new work could be described as

Madeleine Winch: Inside stories

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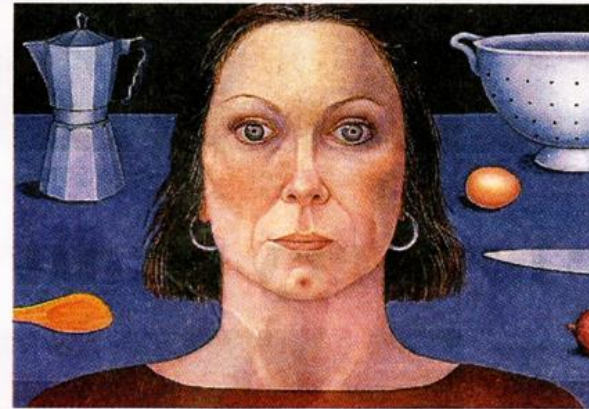
a quest for profundity or a confrontation with a reality that has been born from a long period of contemplation, solitude and introspection.

Even before COVID-19, circumstances in Winch's life imposed certain restraints on her social mobility and her home increasingly became a sanctuary and the focus for her existence. There is much lyricism in a well-loved and well-known interior space that possesses its own sense of magic. The more severe recent periods of lockdown have simply heightened this sensation of home as an enchanted sanctuary, where the inanimate objects contain their own spiritual

powers, store memories from the past or, in Rupert Sheldrake's famous expression, they have a morphic resonance.

A key painting in this exhibition, titled *Solitude*, is an extremely focused work with considerable intensity. In the dead centre of the composition is a frontally posed woman's face with the eyes wide open and caught in a penetrating gaze. When you see the painting, something that you cannot convey in a reproduction, they are wonderfully painted eyes - hyperrealist in style. The gaze catches the eye of the beholder leading to an inevitable confrontation.

This central head is almost guillotined by the table be-



Madeleine Winch, *Solitude*. Picture: Supplied

hind it with an arrangement on it of a still life. The objects of the still life form the rhythm of the day - a coffee maker in the top left corner and next to it a cup. In the top right-hand corner, a metal colander and below it an egg. On the next "register" below is a wooden spoon on the left and a knife pointing at the head on the right with a couple of Spanish onions

below it.

All of the objects are lovingly and exactly painted with a high degree of realism, although the composition itself seems awkward, simplified and appearing as if belonging to a naive tradition of painting. By clearing the field of competing objects, we are forced to make sense of what we see before us, so that

each element is imbued with its own sense of alchemy. The head - possibly a self-referential image - the knife at its throat and the everyday objects cast their own web of associations. It is an image of a person confronting solitude, not dramatically or heroically, but in a sort of matter-of-fact manner within her own domestic space.

Other paintings at the exhibition, including *Thoughts afar*, *Morning quiet* and *Solace*, continue with these contemplative, intense images of introspection where every element is distilled and carefully and strategically arranged.

Although one may be tempted to describe the exhibition as introspective and wistful in mood, it also celebrates an inner strength where memories of the past feed the present and arm the person for the future.