

Celebrating Australian Playwriting



Australian Script Centre



Un-Still Life

by Elizabeth Bennett

EXTRACT

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Note

I hope that the three paintings will be hung somewhere in the performance space, at eye level, so that the actor will be able to stand near them, point at them, laugh at them, haggle over them, etc.

My main aim in the monologues is to enable some sort of interaction between the characters, the audience and the paintings. It's like a three-part conversation.

Characters

There are four characters in *Un-still Life*. Apart from the **March Hare**, who arrives, running, on stage, the audience sees the transformation from character to character. Costumes are minimal, just enough to give a clue to the identity of each character. I'd imagine the actor would wear basic leggings and top, to which could be added ears, a shawl, a skirt, etc, as required. The changing of costume from character to character becomes the break between each monologue and in keeping with the themes (how we view things and how we present ourselves to be viewed) could be made part of the performance itself.

March Hare The mad hare from Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland*, now retired and living in Hobart in 2006. The March Hare has long grey ears.

The Artist's Wife The fictional wife of a fictional version of W.B Gould in the 1830s. She is not a lady. She's in her late forties, tired and fed up with all this death on canvas.

Alice Liddell Alice Liddell is the grown up Alice of *Alice in Wonderland*. She is now thirty, in the present day. She wears stripy blue and white socks, Mary Jane shoes, an Alice band and a knee-length, full skirt.

Since being the model for Lewis Carroll and his illustrator, John Tenniel, Alice has gone on to be model and muse for every painter and sculptor there has ever been. She is every model, every muse, every movie star. She is Object, the thing that everyone looks at.

Mr Brewer, the Art Collector Gentleman. In his fifties in the 1830s. Mr Brewer wears a top hat and waistcoat.

1. The March Hare

The March Hare is the mad hare in Alice in Wonderland. He has been running through the open land, trying to avoid being shot by someone like the artist. He runs on to the stage area, short of breath.

Mercy! ... Sorry! ... Completely ... out ... of ... breath... It's the spaces. And time. Catching up. Time catches up on me and where am I? In time's clutches.

(spins around) Who said that? ... Alice?

Just catching my breath. ... Too many clear spaces, too little time. I blame it on the minimalism. Spaces, I blame on the minimalists. Time, I blame on the surrealists (on account of their melting all the watches – waste of the best butter, that...)

Oh just give me cover and a good landscape and I'll live forever!

(sees the paintings)

Oh! Mercy! Oh my hat and ears! Is this someone's idea of a joke? No! It couldn't be! I demand to know whoever is responsible for this... this... *(looking around again for Alice)* Alice? Do you know? Oh, I'm deeply, deeply, offended. I'm highly outraged. I'm deeply, highly in-raged. I can't begin... or end to tell you... Oh mercy!

(looks more closely at painting, recognizes the hare) But... do I know this..? Do I? Yes... I know this gentleman!

(looking at second painting) His brother!

(looking at third painting) His brother's brother!

This is indeed shocking.

(notices birds) And ... cousins? of the deceased? ... And not a tie or a waistcoat between them! Has she gone mad? What on earth was Miss Beatrix Potter thinking when she did *(points at each painting)* this, this, this?