

Collection leads: Kate Beynon—kindred spirits

Kate Beynon's painting *Graveyard scene/the beauty and sadness of bones* (2014–15) was the winning work in the Gallery's 2016 Geelong contemporary art prize. It forms the basis of this 'Collection leads' exhibition, one of an ongoing sequence of projects in which key works from the collection are displayed in a broader context of the artist's practice.

Graveyard scene/the beauty and sadness of bones is part of a series of paintings, watercolours and soft sculptures in which Beynon reinterprets an ancient Chinese myth. In the richly illustrated *An-Li: A Chinese Ghost Tale*, Beynon and co-author Laura Murray Cree re-tell the story of An-Li and Rose, two young protagonists who fall in love and become kindred spirits.

Beynon has described this story—in which love extends beyond the grave—as being both 'strange and marvellous'. She elaborates:

Slipping from the tail of a dragon boat, young An-Li crosses over in more ways than one. In the realm beneath the river he falls for a dancer, Rose of Evening. From secret meetings in a lotus field, their story traverses two worlds: one magically aquatic, the other earthly.

Within this tale I have imagined the guiding spirit of Kwan Yin. Through strength of character, initiative and compassion, tragedy morphs into new life. This is a supernatural story of hope, healing and transformation.

Graveyard scene/the beauty and sadness of bones represents a significant moment in the narrative, when the ghostly form of An-Li makes a nocturnal visit to his grieving mother. In Beynon's contemporary interpretation of this scene she incorporates recognisable symbols and personal references including a heart signifying the connection between An-Li, Rose and his mother, a hand emerging from a lotus flower referring to Kwan Yin/Guanyin, the Goddess of Mercy, hybrid animal/human skeletal figures that act as memento mori, lion-dogs symbolising Beynon's Chinese zodiac year, and oranges representing the offerings made by Buddhist ancestors. These symbols assume three-dimensional form in suspended garlands: the stringed charms recall ancient forms of communication and storytelling such as Egyptian hieroglyphs or Chinese characters.

In works that follow the 'An-Li' series, Beynon expands upon the concept of kindred spirits (the people in our lives who 'get' us, who share our values), protective guardians and shamans. In recent paintings, watercolours and a new soft sculpture she conjures an array of characters and mythical creatures that navigate the world in kindred proximity.

Kate BEYNON

born Hong Kong 1970; arrived Australia 1974; lives and works in Melbourne

An-Li: A Chinese Ghost Tale, 2015

editors: Kate Beynon and Laura Murray Cree

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Kate Beynon is represented by Sutton Gallery, Melbourne, and Milani Gallery, Brisbane