

Authority over space and time is at the centre of human desire. These works look at the fragments, the moments of stillness in between the past and the future. Protected by the aerodynamic shell of the automobile we are outside time, heading away from our past and heading toward the future. Faster we go, in order to arrive in the future and leave the present behind.²⁰

The interest of the 1980s generation in urban subjects also led them to interiors, often with their friends posing or going about their daily lives, often in shady rented houses with second hand furniture. Kevin Robertson (b.1964), was an enthusiastic painter of city views but he is represented in the Collection by an unusual interior and two portraits. *Rebecca and Chris* (1992), is a painting of two of his friends in their bathroom in Sydney. Robertson spent some months painting the room observing the various reflections of light.

The light green tiles must have been a tremendous challenge but Robertson has handled them very well. The end wall and a number of shadows are worked in mid-blue shade with a variety of brushstrokes. The reflections of the woman's dressing gown lend a pink and purple glow to other parts of the image. Robertson has a remarkable gift for the way in which form can be made to appear within a network of carefully observed patches of light and shade.

For instance the hands, head and shoulders of the young man in the bath carry tremendous conviction. They exist partly in luminous cast shadows, but also in and through a system of coloured surfaces that sometimes coincide with a shadow, that almost but not quite overtake the coherence of the man's face. Robertson is working in the manner of the great painters of interiors, the French Intimistes, Vuillard and more especially Bonnard, who worked for many years on images of bathing.



Kevin Robertson, *Rebecca and Chris* (1992)



Kevin Robertson, *Megan Salmon in Studio* (1995)



Kevin Robertson, *Fontini Epanomitis* (1995)

As with many of his generation, Robertson was highly conscious of the quality of his paint surfaces. He often used this technique to suggest the softening of edges, the relaxed absorption of human presence within an interior, the rediscovery of urban leisure that was so much a part of that time. He may also have been affected by the work of Lucian Freud, in his detached treatment of faces and of expressive props such as the household plant on the right. The volume created by the turning stairs seen through the open bathroom door is a traditional device that is familiar in the work of seventeenth century artists from Velasquez to Vermeer. Robertson has adapted it so as to suggest a different, far more mysterious inner space, the psychic space of a new urban imagination.

The Collection holds two of his portraits *Megan Salmon in the Studio* (1991) and *Fontini Epanomitis* (1995). Megan Salmon was a Perth painter who later became a fashion designer. Robertson shows her reading in a loose patterned gown before a multi-coloured shaded background very much in the manner of Vuillard. The portrait of the writer Epanomitis was made after she won the Vogel literary award with her novel *The Mule's Foal*. Robertson hoped to exhibit it in the Archibald prize but was unsuccessful. Robertson used a vertical view of his subject on a sofa to suggest a domestic introspection.

Salmon took up portrait painting with a vengeance. She produced exhibitions of female portraits, sitting and standing in exotic decorative environments. One, the elegant *Portrait of Linda Orsulich* (1991), is in the Collection. In 2001 Salmon recalled this work and the sources on which she based it.

I had Linda sit for me about three times during which I painted her face, arms and dress. The dress was the inspiration for this painting. I remember creating the scene