

## 14 / MONICA ROHAN

Just seven years ago, **Monica Rohan** was showing in the little window project space in front of Brisbane's Ryan Renshaw Gallery. The gallery has gone now, and so has the artist-run window space, but Rohan has not – a lucky thing for the collectors still patiently waiting for her work.

Last year, Melbourne's Sophie Gannon Gallery took two of her paintings of women surrounded by colour to the Sydney Contemporary art fair. "I told my collectors to wear their sneakers because they're going to have to run," said gallery manager **Edwin Nicholls** during the fair's VIP opening. By that time, the race had been run and both works had sold.

Earlier in the year, Rohan held her third solo exhibition, *Looking down at the ground*, with her Brisbane dealer **Jan Murphy**. "Her exhibitions sell out within hours of their release, including *Looking down at the ground*," Murphy says. "We have had an ever-increasing 'waiting list' since her very first show [in 2014]. While this can sometimes be frustrating for clients, most people have been extremely patient and very supportive."

Nicholls says it's been a similar story in Melbourne. *Funny Peculiar*, her first solo exhibition with Sophie Gannon Gallery in 2016, also sold out within hours, and the gallery now has a "significant" waiting list for her work.

There's an immediate, dreamy appeal to Rohan's paintings. She captures women in movement—bending, falling, flying or simply curling up. In *This Time Maybe*, we see only a woman's legs as she travels through a gap in green foliage. But Rohan's worlds are hardly uncomplicated love affairs with pattern and colour. The flowering shrubs are walls as well as nets. Crocheted comforters are both straightjackets and nests. In *Forget It*, she paints a woman in duplicate, set against the red leaves of a tree. It's unclear whether she's just been snagged like a kite, soon to come free, or whether she's being somehow consumed by the canopy. This sort of uncertainty is the heart of Rohan's work.

"Monica's work is essentially about the human condition, it is both highly emotional and extremely sensitive," says Murphy. "There are not many of us who can't relate to her intensely personal feelings of fragility, isolation and shyness."

They are works that convey the tumbling, shifting, inner workings of a mind. But unlike traditional portraits, the faces of her subjects are rarely visible. Instead, Rohan considers the whole body and its relationship to its environment, rather like a

dancer. The physical and emotional are intertwined; impossible to pull apart.

Rohan has also been a finalist in the Archibald and Sulman prizes, and had a solo exhibition, *In the detail*, at Tweed River Regional Art Gallery in 2015. She recently returned home from her first overseas trip, to Europe, and is working towards a solo exhibition at Sophie Gannon Gallery in September.

Jane O'Sullivan

1. Monica Rohan, *This Time Maybe*, 2017. Oil on board, 80 x 61cm.

COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND JAN MURPHY GALLERY, BRISBANE

2. Monica Rohan, *Forget It*, 2017. Oil on board, 90 x 120cm.

COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND SOPHIE GANNON GALLERY, MELBOURNE



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