

Heidi Yardley

Trick of the Light

10 June – 4 July 2026

Jan Murphy Gallery is pleased to present the new exhibition by Heidi Yardley, *Trick of the Light*.

My paintings are driven by an attraction to images that feel both familiar and strange; images that hover at the threshold between seduction and discomfort, memory and invention, presence and disappearance. Across works made between 2005 and 2025, I have returned consistently to the uncanny as a psychological and pictorial space; a place where beauty is never entirely stable, and where the figure, object or landscape can become charged with unease, longing and projection. My practice has long drawn on found imagery from vintage magazines, film stills and printed ephemera, particularly material from the 1970s, which I use not to illustrate nostalgia but to unsettle it and expose the latent tensions, desires and anxieties embedded in images of glamour and femininity. This interest in the unstable relationship between memory, identity and the image has remained central to my work.

The earlier works in this exhibition emerge more overtly from a gothic sensibility, though I have never understood that term as merely aesthetic. What interests me is the emotional and psychological charge that darkness can carry; melancholy, ambiguity, dread, sensuality, and a kind of haunted interiority. In works such as the floating wig, hair becomes a strange surrogate for the body that is sensuous yet disembodied, intimate yet anonymous. It suggests femininity as performance, relic and apparition all at once. The two landscape paintings operate differently but are connected by a similar sense of psychic displacement. They are not depictions of place in any conventional sense, but emotional terrains; quiet, suspended, slightly desolate spaces in which memory and atmosphere take precedence over description. These earlier paintings are shaped by a longstanding interest in the uncanny, nostalgia, and the obscuring or withholding of identity through fragment and absence.

The more recent paintings turn toward a world of faded glamour, but the underlying concerns remain. I am drawn to the promise of allure carried by old printed images; the glossy surface, the stylised pose, the coded language of fashion and desire, but also to their deterioration, temporal distance, and peculiar artificiality. In *Glamour*, the enlarged hand, ring and reflected surface become an image of elegance pushed toward distortion. The painting offers a kind of fetishised detail, but also a fracture; the reflection doubles and destabilises the image, turning sophistication into something brittle, uncanny and faintly menacing. In *Venus in Furs*, the figure is enveloped in theatrical luxury, yet the body seems withheld, masked by the excess of the coat, the stylised pose and the facelessness of the image.

Desire and concealment are held in tension. The untitled nude woman smoking likewise occupies an ambiguous register. She appears poised within a language of seduction, but the scene resists resolution; it feels staged and psychologically charged rather than simply erotic. I am interested in how these figures can operate less as portraits than as projected states of longing and performance.

Throughout this body of work, I want the paintings to remain open; suggestive rather than declarative, immersive rather than explanatory. I think of them as assembled psychological spaces in which references to fashion, cinema, vintage print culture and art history are filtered through paint into something slower and more contemplative. Painting allows me to hold contradiction in suspension and to render images that are seductive yet distant, intimate yet unknowable, elegant yet shadowed by disquiet. Across these twenty years, my work has continued to circle the same essential questions about how images shape desire and identity, how beauty can become strange, and how the past persists not as fixed memory but as a shifting, haunted presence.

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Heidi Yardley has been a finalist in numerous significant Australian art prizes including the Archibald, Wynne and Sulman Prizes, the Doug Moran National Portrait Prize, the UQ Art Museum National Artists' Self-Portrait Prize, the Percival Portrait Painting Prize, and the Brett Whiteley Travelling Art Scholarship. She exhibits regularly in solo and group exhibitions throughout Australia, and her work is held in major public and private collections including the National Gallery of Victoria, Artbank, University of Queensland Art Museum, Bendigo Art Gallery, and Art Gallery of Ballarat.