Natasha Bieniek
Home

18 November – 12 December 2026

Most of what happens at home is forgotten almost as soon as it occurs. Clothes are folded, floors cleaned, meals prepared and cleared away. These actions are repeated so often that they rarely survive the day in which they happen, too ordinary to become memories or consequential enough to become stories.

Natasha Bieniek paints them anyway.

In *Home*, there is a striking disproportion between subject and attention. Bieniek's paintings measure 15 by 20 centimetres, yet are extraordinarily laboured, compressing hours of looking and painting into moments that might otherwise vanish in seconds. Their diminutive scale feels particularly suited to this world. To see the paintings properly requires proximity. We have to move towards them, our attention narrowing as Bieniek's must have while making them.

There is something faintly absurd about the seriousness with which these everyday moments are presented. Bieniek constructs her interiors with the expectation of narrative: figures are framed by doorways, light falls theatrically across rooms, bodies slump or disappear from view. The scenes seem poised for something to happen, yet the action remains resolutely ordinary. Appearing repeatedly in the same white T-shirt and jeans, the central figure begins to resemble the protagonist of a quietly surreal film, moving from room to room while the rhythms of domestic life become the narrative itself. The humour is quiet, but the repetition has a more wearing edge. A room is cleaned only to become untidy again; the washing is finished only for another load to appear. There is no real conclusion, only maintenance.

This repetitive rhythm recalls Chantal Akerman's *Jeanne Dielman, 23 quai du Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles* (1975). Akerman gave cinematic duration to the domestic routines of her protagonist, allowing actions conventionally pushed to the margins to occupy the centre of the film. Bieniek's paintings operate very differently, but share this insistence on sustained attention: what might ordinarily disappear into the everyday is made impossible to overlook.

Bieniek also looks further back to seventeenth-century Dutch genre painting and its close observation of domestic interiors and everyday life. In *Home,* this attention to detail draws us further into the scene without directing us towards a single narrative. We are brought remarkably close to the figure while she remains absorbed elsewhere, usually turned away or looking down. The intimacy of Bieniek's scale is accompanied by a peculiar distance: we are permitted into these private spaces while the inner life of the person within them remains her own.

Perhaps the most tangible labour in *Home* is contained in the paintings themselves. Bieniek's meticulous process creates a quiet correspondence between making and subject. The repetitive attention required to maintain a home finds an echo in the repetitive attention required to construct these small images. A woman folds fabric; Bieniek paints every fold.

Much of a life takes place this way, through actions whose importance is difficult to separate from their repetition. Bieniek holds them still for far longer than life ordinarily permits, allowing their intimacy, monotony and occasional absurdity to coexist. Nothing dramatic happens in *Home*. Everything simply keeps happening.

– Milena Stojanovska

ABOUT THE ARTIST:
Natasha Bieniek (b. 1984, Melbourne) graduated from the Victorian College of the Arts in 2006 and received the post-graduate Nino Sanciolo Art Scholarship to study ancient painting in Florence, Italy. She has been awarded significant art prizes including The Wynne Prize (2015), The Portia Geach Memorial Award (2015), The John Leslie Art Prize (2026) and The Metro Art Award (2012) and is a twelve-time Archibald Prize finalist. Her 2016 Archibald Prize portrait of Wendy Whiteley was named highly commended and toured Nationally in 'Archie 100: A Century of the Archibald Prize'.

Other short-listed prizes include the Darling Portrait Prize (2020), Arthur Guy Memorial Painting Prize (2019), Geelong Contemporary Art Prize (2018), Glover Prize (2017), Brett Whiteley Travelling Art Scholarship (2015) and the Doug Moran National Portrait Prize (2012,2013,2014). Bieniek's work has been curated into major exhibitions at the Art Gallery of New South Wales, National Portrait Gallery, Mornington Peninsula Regional Gallery and Warrnambool Art Gallery.