

everyday inspiration

The experiences of dreams, stuffed toys and the pleasures of home baking all make appearances in exhibitions by three women artists inspired by daily life

Kate McCarthy, Mica Still and Beck Wheeler may follow very different art practices, but they are connected by shared themes of common and basic life experiences.

Their themes dwell on such things as childhood toys, half-forgotten dreams and home baking, presenting domestic life as it occurs in the kitchen, bedroom and playroom. They are exhibiting from today at 19 Karen Contemporary Artspace, Mermaid Beach.

Tasmanian Kate McCarthy says her current theme is based on stuffed toys being such a constant and happy presence during her childhood.

Her show is called *The Fellows and the Bloodies*.

"I had hundreds of them as a child and turned to them for fun and comfort," she says.

"When we were children, my brother Ben and I used to despise anything in our play or entertainment that resembled the human form, so

dolls were called *The Bloodies* and the stuffed toys – the goodies – were *The Fellows*.

"We are encouraged to learn through shape, colour, patterns and friendly characters.

"I believe that by incorporating these suggestive elements into my artwork I am then able to transport the viewer back to childhood."

McCarthy's work processes also reference her personal history.

"I often put secret references in my work, such as in the name of the piece or by using a snippet of old curtain

from my childhood room or part of a boyfriend's shirt. The reasons are known only to me."

She even works on the art principles she used as a child who loved to draw, calling the style "immediate, simple and direct".

"When we needed red, we reached for the closest red we could find."

Her palette is chosen by eye from the bold colours used in the children's TV show *Sesame Street*.



Above: *Sugar*, by Beck Wheeler

Left: *Dream Eater*, by Mica Still

Below: *Grape Ape*, by Kate McCarthy



Beck Wheeler's show, comprising paintings and sculptural works and entitled *Tarts and Flours*, explores her connection to painting and baking.

"My day is made up of stints in the kitchen and the studio. I feel like the process of mixing paint and mixing baking ingredients comes from the same creative space," she explains.

"I apply colour to canvas as I apply flavour to flour. This show is an homage to the domestic goddess within, the search for perfection in colour, texture and flavour."

Tarts and Flours reflects Wheeler's memories of baking as a child, the cakes her mother made from the *Australian Women's Weekly Children's Birthday Cake Book* and "the daily process of discovery in my own kitchen and studio".

Each exhibition she produces is another story in her art journey.

"I like my exhibitions to be read like a chapter in a book. The chapter is the exhibition and the book is my life as an artist."

American-born and Wellington-based painter Mica Still refers to lost dreams in her current body of work, entitled *Runaway With Me*.

"Bears, lions and wolves used to make recurring appearances in my dreams," she says, "although *Runaway With Me* was produced during a time when I stopped remembering my dreams.

"I had come to rely on the vivid memories of my dreams, as they were often the catalyst for my art. Here I've attempted to paint a body of work without that initial inspiration.

"I often draw animals or characters interacting with each other as a starting point. The characters lead the narrative and can be quite bossy.

"What they end up doing in the art is often a direct response to how I am feeling on a particular day."

Kate McCarthy, Mica Still & Beck Wheeler at 19 Karen Contemporary Artspace, 19 Karen Avenue, Mermaid Beach, until October 8.