

CONTEMPORARY MASTERPIECES BY HOWARD ARKLEY LEAD SOTHEBY'S AUSTRALIA'S NOVEMBER SALE OF IMPORTANT AUSTRALIAN ART

Two Exceptional Compositions from Arkley's Renowned 1993 Interior Series to be Offered at Auction for the First Time

Included in Arkley's Historic 1993 Solo Exhibition the Works are Dramatically Reunited after 26 Years



HOWARD ARKLEY 1951-1999

Neapolitan Delight 1993

synthetic polymer paint on canvas,
175.2 x 134.7 cm

Estimate \$800,000–1,000,000

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HOWARD ARKLEY 1951-1999

Plain and Fancy 1993

synthetic polymer paint on canvas,
173 x 135 cm

Estimate \$600,000 – \$800,000

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MELBOURNE, 1 November 2020 – Howard Arkley's Day-Glo, Popist images of eastern suburb houses are indisputably iconic. Tracing their heritage to the artist's trailblazing 1992 exhibition, *Howard Arkley: Mix n Match*, these works build on the motifs central to that series, compounding his love of the everyday Australian interior, while permanently enlivening the genre in Australia and around the world. On 20 November 2019, Sotheby's Australia will have the honour of offering these resounding, fluorescent masterpieces for public auction for the first time and as star lots of our *Important Australian Art* auction.

ARKLEY AND THE GREAT AUSTRALIAN HOME

Arkley's house pictures have their beginnings in the 1983 *Urban Paintings* exhibition, where he found analogies and matrices for his airbrush abstractionist dots and stripes in the multi-coloured bricks and patterned wallpaper of *Suburban Exterior* (1983, Private Collection) and *Suburban Interior* (1983, The Baillieu Myer Collection of Art in the 1980s, Heide Museum of Modern Art, Melbourne). Five years later, his landmark 1988 *Houses and Homes* exhibition truly marked Arkley's fullest commitment to the theme and established the house-scapes as his most original and popular inventions. They were to remain a recurrent, even a signature device up to and including the Venice Biennale exhibition *Howard Arkley: The Home Show* in 1999, the year of his untimely death.

'Australian art has been dominated by the rural landscape and I think there is something false and overrated – it's romanticised or, at the very least, lopsided. Most of the population live in an urban environment. This environment affects us – the kinds of people that Australians are, and the way we behave. It affects our formative years, so it is a very important element.

Ordinary houses are full of pattern. You go into a house, there's no art ... but it's filled with a kind of second degree imagery – the patterning around the fireplace, on the curtains, in the carpet; and the different bricks on the different houses, and the pattern between the gutter, the nature-strip, the footpath, then you have the fence, then you have the lawn, the house, the tiles, then you have the beautiful sky ... and I missed the bushes in between ... it's rich.

It's where 95 per cent of Australians actually live – they actually don't live out in the desert ... Australians get my work straight away ... They understand that they're not being put down either – it's not satirical.'

(Howard Arkley, quoted in Jason Smith, *Howard Arkley: The Retrospective*, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, 2006, p. 21)

Geoffrey Smith, Chairman of Sotheby's Australia commented: 'Howard Arkley achieved international attention and acclaim for his images that explored the edifices and interior realms of suburbia. His suburban interiors remain the most coveted compositions by private collectors and institutions alike and, with their fuzzy black outlines and planes of fluorescent colour, act as a screen for the nostalgia and satire innate to all of Arkley's work.

Sotheby's Australia is honoured to offer *Neapolitan Delight* and *Plain and Fancy* for the first time for public sale since their acquisition by two private collectors from Melbourne and Brisbane twenty-six years ago. These seminal paintings extended, explored and re-defined Arkley's preeminent position as Australia's foremost commentator of the Australian urban/suburban experience and represent a defining moment in twentieth-century Australian art.'

HOWARD ARKLEY 1951-1999, *Neapolitan Delight* 1993

Whereas Arkley's sources for his suburban exteriors were gleaned from local images of Melbourne real estate, Arkley's interiors found their inspiration in various international architecture and design magazines and journals. Frances Joslin Gold's *The Instant Decorator*, published in 1976, proved particularly fertile, with advice on room layout, furniture placement, fabrics, and lighting, in the manner of a 'precursor of Martha Stewart.' (1) *Neapolitan Delight* 1993, one of the most dynamic and exuberant from the series and created immediately following the *Mix 'n Match* exhibition, bursts with a disruptive profusion of colours and shapes. One can sense Arkley's delight in selecting and collaging from magazine cuttings and interior design swatches that were then photocopied, projected onto the canvas, and meticulously coloured, undergoing their own renovation and transformation.



HOWARD ARKLEY 1951-1999

***Neapolitan Delight* 1993**

synthetic polymer paint on canvas,

175.2 x 134.7 cm

Estimate \$800,000–1,000,000

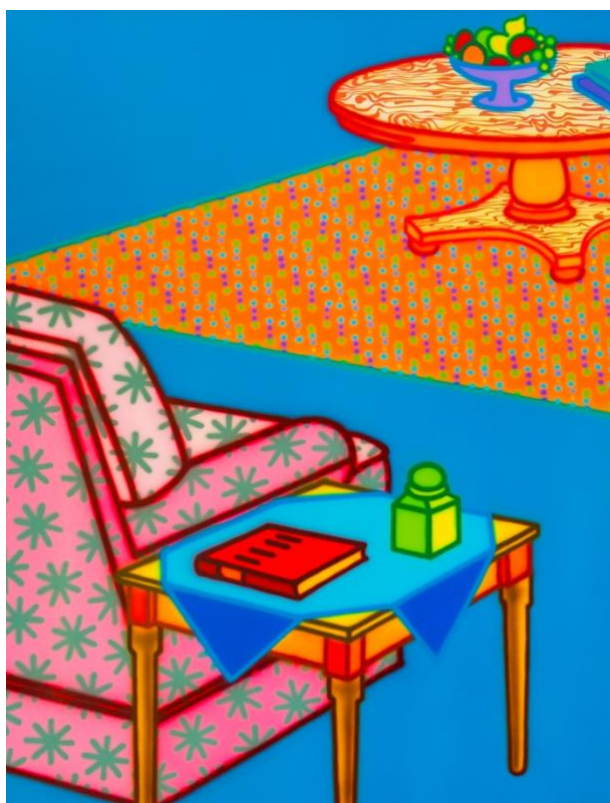
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Of Arkley's series of interiors, *Neapolitan Delight* is one of only two representations of the kitchen (the other being *Ultrakleen* 1992, Private Collection), the traditional epicentre of every home. Offered for the first time for public sale since its acquisition, *Neapolitan Delight* is a

painting of enduring appeal and represents a defining moment in the history and development of twentieth-century Australian art. Renowned as one of Arkley's finest interior subjects and one of the most significant ever offered for auction, *Neapolitan Delight* is a painting which is at once critique and celebration of the Great Australian Dream.

HOWARD ARKLEY 1951-1999, *Neapolitan Delight* 1993



HOWARD ARKLEY 1951-1999

Plain and Fancy 1993

synthetic polymer paint on canvas,
173 x 135 cm

Estimate \$600,000 – \$800,000

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Plain and Fancy 1993, one of Arkley's most referenced and iconic interior compositions, combines all of the artist's concerns with creating a new visual vocabulary to celebrate the Australian suburbs. The living room interior, shown from a titled angle and combining upholstered lounge chair, side-table, patterned carpet square, and round coffee-table, derived from Frances Joslin Gold's *The Instant Decorator*, published in 1976. The page entitled 'Lounge Room #2' provided Arkley with particularly rich source of reference material in relation to the selection and placement of furnishings on a two-dimensional surface. From this modest, spare black and white drawing composed of thin skeletal lines, Arkley conjured a series of remarkable large-scale paintings that teemed with colour and pulsated with pattern.

Plain and Fancy featured in Arkley's solo exhibition at Bellas Gallery, Brisbane in 1993. This show, which represented a logical continuation of his interior scenes of suburbia, became his most significant commercial exhibition ever staged outside of Melbourne.

The exhibition included six major paintings: *Crisp and Tailored* (1993, Private Collection), *Neapolitan Delight* (1993, **illustrated above**), *Room Rite* (1992, Private Collection), *Floriated Room* (1993, Private Collection), *Dining in a Glow* (1993, Private Collection) and *Plain and Fancy* (**the present work**); together with *Homefront Strips* (1993, Private Collection) and *Recommended Room Tableau* (1993, Private Collection), a series of interior décor samples and a three-dimensional furniture installation that acted as a precursor to Arkley's 'Sampling' exhibition at Tolarno Galleries in 1998.

(1) John Gregory, *Carnival in Suburbia: The Art of Howard Arkley*, Cambridge University Press, Melbourne, 2006, p. 30

AT A GLANCE

Lot 33

HOWARD ARKLEY 1951-1999

Neapolitan Delight 1993

synthetic polymer paint on canvas, 175.2 x 134.7 cm

Estimate \$800,000–1,000,000

Lot 35

HOWARD ARKLEY 1951-1999

Plain and Fancy 1993

synthetic polymer paint on canvas, 173 x 135 cm

Estimate \$600,000 – \$800,000

Important Australian Art

Estimate: \$10,061,000–13,733,000, 79 lots

Auction in Sydney, 20 November 2019, 6.30 pm

InterContinental Sydney, 117 Macquarie Street, Sydney

Exhibition in Melbourne, 6-10 November 2019, 10 am to 5 pm, 14-16 Collins Street, Melbourne

Exhibition in Sydney, 14-20 November 2019, 10 am to 5 pm, 30 & 34 Queen Street, Woollahra

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