

NIGEL MILSOM

JUDO HOUSE PART 6 (THE WHITE BIRD)

Andrea Bubenik



Dramatic contrasts, surface tensions, and theatricality mark the approaches of many Baroque artists. Australian artist Nigel Milson evokes similar themes with his explorations of dichotomies: light and dark, pleasure and pain, real and imagined.

In *Judo House 6 (The White Bird)*, Milson appropriates the supreme emblem of the Baroque ecstatic experience, Gian Lorenzo Bernini's *Ecstasy of Saint Teresa*. The marble forms of Teresa and the heart-piercing angel are translated into paint, dramatic protagonists who emerge as stark white forms from an enveloping darkness. Milson has extricated the saint and angel from their original surroundings—gone are the cloud, heavenly canopy, crowning rays of light, and the coloured marbles of the Cornaro Chapel. Instead, Milson depicts Bernini's figures in isolation as if suspended in air, with a pitch-black background, forcing contemplation of the figures in and of themselves, with his stark tonal approach and surging lines highlighting the emotional drama at hand.

As noted by Rachel Kent, Milson came to know Bernini's *Teresa* through a reproduction: "It struck him as uncannily painterly, rather than sculptural ... there was also an acute sense of recognition that struck Milson between the two opposing figures, or life forces, and the overwhelming

emotions depicted."¹ Another painting in the *Judo House 6* series also bears the subtitle of *The White Bird*—Milson's portrait of barrister Charles Waterstreet, which won the 2015 Archibald Prize.²

Born in 1975, Milson lives and works in Newcastle, New South Wales. He has had nine solo exhibitions in Australia since 2002, and in addition to his 2015 Archibald Prize, he has won the Doug Moran National Portrait Prize (2014) and the Sulman Prize (2012). As Milson himself has stated, "The question is, always, can painting be continually stretched further into the future? ... Always, I have one eye on the past and the other on the future."³

1. Rachel Kent, "Nigel Milson: Surface Tension," *Art Monthly Australia* 280 (2015): 41. Rachel Kent is chief curator at the Museum of Contemporary Art Australia (Sydney).
2. Milson's interest in Japanese-style judo houses has resulted in a number of his series being titled this way: *Judo House 6* was a series from 2014–15 shown at the yuill | crowley in Sydney.
3. Nigel Milson quoted in Ingrid Perez, "Nigel Milson: Fresh Paint," *Art and Australia* 51, no. 1 (2013): 103.

Nigel Milson (Australia, 1975–)
Judo House Part 6 (The White Bird) 2014–15
 oil on linen
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