

VOGUE

IN STORE & DECOR

Franque's front window features a rotating curation of contemporary art by academic and artist Michael Vale. The opening exhibit is by Natalie Ryan, whose otherworldly taxidermy foam cast sculptures include (CLOCKWISE FROM TOP) Devoid Matter (Polar Bear) (2009), the blue possum Untitled (2012), Devoid Matter (Black Hare) (2009), the 22-karat gold-dipped deer Untitled (2015) and the blue cheetah Untitled (2016).



Franque talk

THE SECOND COMING OF A MELBOURNE RETAIL INNOVATOR SATISFIES THE APPETITE OF ALL WHO CRAVE ORIGINALITY.

By ANNEMARIE KIELY
Photographed by SEAN FENNESSY

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WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE may not be the brains trust on best retail practice, but over 400 years ago he penned a truism that remains the cornerstone of today's consumer engagement. "This above all — to thine own self be true." Sarah Hook, founder of Melbourne store Franque — a potted hybrid of gallery, perfumery and antiquary — doesn't quote the Bard or bang on about 'authenticity', but she is Shakespearean in her pursuit of self-truths, as told across every surface of her former Armadale salon. There, in domestically scaled rooms where the wares of multi-generational European makers mixed with the art of Melbourne's maverick contemporaries, you could read her disregard for the rules on retail. Franque was both a slip back in time to when service assistants were well read and mannered and a fast-forward to the new sociology of the shop, but its potential was inhibited by physical size. Enter Pitzzy Folk (see *Folklore*, page 148), an entrepreneurial brand-builder who, like Hook, subscribes to the Shakespearean logic of thinking illogically and trusting your gut. They partnered to help grow the store into a full sensory experience — a small emporium where 'taste' would also be sated in a private dining room that simmered with all the influence and prestige of the late-19th-century French art salon. "I wanted it to be about all the good people," says Hook, imagining Bruce Armstrong's Brutalist beasts guarding Viennese glass cabinets filled with swarms of Richard Stringer's blanched art bees, Saint-Louis crystal, Liz Williams's ethereal ceramic figurines and Peter D Cole's marble-and-brass landscapes. "Franque has always been premised »



CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE: A swarm of Richard Stringer's alabaster bees *Replicas* (2016) settle on the brick walls of Franque. A portrait by English artist Oswald Birley (1880–1932) hangs above an antique, marble-topped French commode decorated with a bronze candlestick by Peter D Cole and a bronze maquette, *Tree* (1999), by Richard Stringer, guarded by Bruce Armstrong's sculpture *Owl* (2012). Another view of Natalie Ryan's *Devoid Matter (Polar Bear)* (2012). An 18th-century cherub from the Milanese House of Visconti keeps watch over a table of Lucy Folk's fine jewellery with Richard Stringer's sculpture, *Tree* (1999).

OPPOSITE PAGE: Bruce Armstrong's impish bronze figurine, *Dancing* (2016), offsets the creamy Cire Trudon wax casting of a revolutionary slave sculpted by Jean-Baptiste Carpeaux (1827–1875).

IN STORE

« on relationships, those I have forged with the artists, the artisan makers, the places and the people who appreciate them,” Hook says.

Dreaming of more space to spread her stable of artists into situational contexts, Hook searched for idiosyncratic bricks and mortar in which to flesh out a more fulsome version of Franque. “A place to feed the mind, eyes, hands, heart and the stomach,” she says. “I always imagined the artist and academic Michael Vale,

creator of the *Smoking Dog* series, curating and rotating exhibitions of the artists he deems deserving of attention. I want the new Franque to have gravity, collaborative energy and the company of people we like.”

Her year-long hunt ended in Toorak’s Hawksburn Village, a resilient retail strip that protects its character and community. Hook signed the lease on an old antiques dealership smothered in dust and dark and set a crack team of contractors to realising her vision of an Eastern Bloc ballroom — “a raw, haunted, uncomfortable space resonating with hundreds of stories and beckoning with history’s scent”.

Now open to the public, Franque has begun the Proustian pull on Melbourne, seducing shoppers in with its bergamot-laced promise of a Florentine summer (thank you, Santa Maria Novella), then enveloping them in a world of exotic narrative and exclusive agencies. “It bucks the business model,” says Hook. “But where’s the future in following?” Shakespeare would concur: “To do a great right, do a little wrong”. *VL*

Franque, 597 Malvern Road, Toorak; (03) 9827 9940. Visit franque.com.au.



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: Natalie Ryan’s *Devoid Matter* (Black Deer) (2009) presides over *Cire Trudon* candles and wax busts of *Alexandre and Louise* — the children of French architect *Alexandre-Théodore Brongniart* (1739–1813). *Bruce Armstrong’s* sculpture, *Bear* (2012), faces *Peter D Cole’s* sculpture, *Landscape* (1990); the background murals are by English artist *Gustave Barnard* (1877–1921). *Viennese glass cabinets* filled with *Saint-Louis* crystal. An 1880s *Spanish elm table* furnishes a corner of the dining area. *Richard Stringer’s* column sculpture (2015) and *Carlo Golini’s* print (2015) provide the counterpoints.

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THIS PAGE: Franque's private dining room features a bronze-and-enamel mobile by Peter D Cole above an early-19th-century Spanish poplar-and-oak dining table set with bronze-and-enamel candlesticks by Peter D Cole and vintage Thonet bentwood dining chairs. The gilt frames of a wall-bung collection of early Australian art complement Richard Stringer's bronze column light sculpture (1999).