In the midst of life we are in death. Memento Mori artworks prompt us to ponder on the emptiness and transience of earthly pleasures and reassess our moral progress as we move toward the certainty of death. The extraordinary video work Allegoria Sacra by the Russian collective AES+F is an evocation of Purgatory as an international airport and together with selected works from the University of Western Australia’s Art Collection, the Cruthers Collection of Women’s Art and commissioned works by contemporary Western Australian artists, the exhibition exhorts viewers to contemplate their own mortality.

Pondering on death was intended to emphasise the emptiness and transience of earthly pleasures, of ambition and self-aggrandisement, all of which mean nothing at the end of life. One of the most potent ways of reminding believers of the need for moral rectitude was through the visual imagery associated with still life paintings of everyday objects. In Robyn Stacey’s Vanitas still life Leidenmaster I, objects are given symbolic meaning; skulls remind the viewer of the certainty of death, flowers that earthly pleasures fade and decay and butterflies, bubbles and smoke symbolise ephemeral, fleeting time. It is a complex pictorial language that illustrates the concept of transience in its multifarious forms.

Also as part of the exhibition four composition students from the UWA School of Music have composed new works to play in the Gallery and TROVE, the online student journal, has run a competition for poems on the theme of Memento Mori to be included in the exhibition.

For further information, interviews and images, please contact Clare McFarlane, Assistant Marketing, Cultural Precinct, The University of Western Australia, on 08 6488 7806 or at clare.mcfarlane@uwa.edu.au or Ted Snell, exhibition curator on 08 6488 3627 or at ted.snell@uwa.edu.au

Image: Robyn Stacey, Leidenmaster I, 2003, type C print, 96 x 150 cm. The University of Western Australia Art Collection, University Senate Grant, 2008. © the artist