



Painted

Kirsten McKenzie

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If art can capture a soul, what happens when one of those souls escapes?

When art appraiser Anita Cassatt is sent to catalogue the extensive collection of reclusive artist Leo Kubin, it isn't only the chilly atmosphere of the secluded house making her shiver.

Upon entering the house, Anita stands before a silent audience of portraits clustered on every wall. Every painted eye is watching her, including those of the unfinished portrait on the artist's easel. A portrait with an eerie familiarity.

Kubin's lawyer didn't share the detailed instructions regarding the handling of the art, and Anita and her team start work in ignorance of the very instructions designed to keep them safe.

Disturbed, a man eases himself out of his portrait and stretches. Free at last from the confines of his canvas, he has no intention of ever returning. *He has a painting to finish...*

Painted Details

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Author : Kirsten McKenzie

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From Reader Review Painted for online ebook

David Carter says

Painted is one of the most engrossing reads I've ever come across. I nailed it in record time; I just couldn't stop turning the pages!

Kirsten "Painted" an impeccable image with her words and writing style in my mind - of which I was captivated from the opening line.

The story was so haunting and descriptive. There is no way I want to be left alone in a creepy old house full of paintings!!

I feel so proud to be a fellow New Zealander after reading this novel, as Kirsten truly has something special on her hands here - something that lets the world know there are some world class authors hiding out down-under.

I would absolutely recommend this to anyone who enjoys reading, and that applies to people of all genre-preference.

5 stars!!

Nicole says

Leo Kubin is dead and he has left the law firm headed by Alan Gates, some very specific instructions on how to dispose of his art collection. All paintings must be taken from the wall and immediately crated. Under no circumstances must they be leant against the wall or left on a table or crated with other items. Alan has no patience with such frivolities and arranges for a team from Nickleby's to visit the house and assess the artwork and other treasures in the hope that there might be a valuable asset hidden there.

Anita Cassett, junior assessor, and hiding a secret, is hoping to make a good name for herself by properly assessing the artwork. She arrives at the house ahead of the team to make a start with the paintings and totally unaware of the instructions for the crating of the paintings. She ignores the spookiness of the house but when Alan Gates arrives at the house to check on her progress, her uneasiness grows.

Kirstin McKenzie has done a fantastic job with this book. Her first step into the supernatural she has created some very strong characters and her descriptions of the house and its contents are beautifully described and sent shivers down my spine. Painted is the spookiest book I have read in years. The chapters when Anita is alone in the house freaked me out in a way that I haven't been since the early novels of Stephen King. I really hope that Kirstin continues writing books in this genre as I think she has a real talent for it.

Judith says

Painted is a paranormal horror and thriller.

'If art can capture a soul, what happens when one of those souls escapes?'

It was well-written, and I was engaged in the story throughout.

McKenzie's creation of build-up and tension was subtle but well-done, creating a consistent tone of uneasiness, which made the climax of the book even more exciting.

There are strong parallels to Susan Hill's horror novel *The Woman In Black** and this is a good thing, because I enjoyed both the novel and its film adaptation a lot.

*A lonely protagonist moves into an isolated house in order to complete work commissioned by their employer, but gradual ghostly occurrences unnerve them.

However, unlike *The Woman In Black*, the protagonist doesn't remain completely isolated in the house; introduction of her co-workers adds new characters and allows McKenzie to develop a good cat-and-mouse style of horror, in addition to the paranormal activity.

My criticisms are small.

I think *Painted* occasionally relies too heavily on informing the reader of what the protagonist hasn't seen. This is an understandable technique – its horror film equivalent would be zooming or panning to reveal a detail within the frame the audience can see clearly but the protagonist hasn't. If *Painted* were a horror film (which I wish it was), I've no doubt this would be incredibly effective. However, translating this into written prose often within the story doesn't have quite the same effect.

Furthermore, I would have preferred a more malignant ghostly presence – the ghosts were a little sympathetically written for my liking! For example, in *The Woman In Black*, although the reader learns the sad back-story behind the woman in black's haunting, the reader also sees her as a ruthless and malignant ghost, which adds to the horror of the book.

These are nit-picky problems because all in all I really enjoyed this book, and I will most likely try to grab a paperback version at some point, in addition to my free e-book copy!

If you'd like to read a well-written horror story that doesn't rely on cheap scares but genuine thrills, I strongly recommend *Painted*.

Sheri says

an odd but well done book. There were some parts that felt a little overly wordy, but otherwise a great, fast read.

I really enjoyed The pace and the real terror that you feel as you go along. I only docked 1 star cause the ending wasn't exactly to my liking. But still, you should read this book.

Tabitha Ormiston-Smith says

Most horror being written nowadays is of the 'splattergore', more-is-better school of thought, so it was refreshing to encounter this subtle, delicate narrative where horror peeps slyly out from picture frames and the reader's palate is never overwhelmed with an excess of foulness. Admirable restraint and a real gift for story combine to produce an unforgettable experience.

Worthy of note is McKenzie's treatment of her female protagonist. Unlike most in this genre, the woman is neither a feisty, indomitable kick-arse heroine nor a wilting violet. I found it intriguing to see both of these tired old tropes nicely avoided, and the book is the richer for it. All around a pleasantly creepy read.

Kimberly says

PAINTED is not only the first novel I've read from author Kirsten McKenzie, but also her first foray into the horror genre. There have long been sayings regarding *'the eyes being a window to the soul'*, and the way that McKenzie chooses to utilize this idea to shape her book gives it an incredibly fresh outlook.

When Leo Kubin, an extremely reclusive artist, sends over very specific instructions as to how his vast art collection is to be handled--to the law firm he'd always dealt with--he had no idea about the recent changes there. Mainly, the gentleman who always dealt with his clients in a supportive and protective manner, has died. Unfortunately for the firm's elderly clients, his son--Alan Gates Jr.--is *nothing* like his father. Concerned only with the bottom-dollar line for himself, this arrogant, lecherous man disregards Mr. Kubin's explicit instructions as a senile old man's nonsense, and more importantly to him, a waste of extra time and money. Therefore, it is without the benefit of these "safety measures" that the company hired to itemize and catalog for auction the contents of the late Mr. Kubin's vast estate are sent to begin their jobs. Art appraiser, Anita Cassat arrives at the out of the way mansion days before her colleagues, as it is expected that the sheer number of paintings assembled there will take much longer to appraise.

Once there, Anita is instantly filled with a fear that she is being watched, despite being the only human present.

"An audience of eyes, immortalized in portraits clustered on every wall . . . "

McKenzie does an incredible job in the characterization of the people in her novel. With each and every one, I came away with the feeling that I *knew* them--down to even the secrets they kept hidden from each other. When one of them startles, you can practically *see* the physical shiver and changes that affect them. These are complete individuals--even the ones that have ceased to exist, as we know it.

". . . Their eyes the brightest part of every portrait, capturing the essence of their humanity . . . more than the subjects thought they would ever reveal to anyone . . . "

When Anita begins handling the portraits, the uneasy atmosphere in the story begins to ramp up incredibly. The tension remains so thick, that I found it difficult to find a place to stop reading for a time, reluctant to leave the world that was unfolding before me. The portraits are--at first--the primary source of Anita's apprehension, and plant the seed that something is "off" about this job. As she handled one particular picture, she noted: *". . . The edges were indistinct, and the eyes smudged beyond recognition as if someone had tried to gouge them out . . . "*

". . . It was easy to ignore the known. It was the unknown which made her mouth dry and her pulse race."

Some elements of the sinister atmosphere the old estate had festered are provided by the few thoughts and comments from an elderly farmer, who'd lived next to it his entire life.

". . . the house had a reputation . . . Most threw themselves off the cliff and were swallowed by the sea . . . "

"

There was so much complex mystery twined in this tale, that just when I thought I figured out something, a new element would present itself to decipher and add to the confusion.

"... This wasn't a life he wanted to lead. It wasn't his life either. That was over."

Eventually Anita is joined by her colleagues, each specializing in a different area of appraisal. Even here, McKenzie's skills shine through as we get to intimately know the new arrivals. The tension--even with the additional bodies--continues to maintain and even increase its presence, until all around harbor a silent fear of . . . something, yet intangible, to them.

"... You're next, you're next, you're next."

This novel literally took my breath away in places. Some of the prose took on dual meanings when faced with an unknown threat. Even the secrets that were revealed remained cloaked in a thin layer of mystery that we, perhaps, weren't meant to ever unravel.

"Twilight is the master of disguise. The champion of falsehoods and fiction. The eye wasn't designed for twilight . . . "

While there were moments in the story where the action slowed considerably, overall I felt this novel was a fascinating read, full of explicitly presented atmosphere, realistic characters, and a supernatural force that hadn't been overdone in other novels. The ideas were shown with a "fresh" approach to the subject matter, leaving behind a shred of mystery for readers to ponder over after they finished.

"... Hindsight is a terrible gift when you realize you've destroyed more beauty than you created."

I am greatly looking forward to reading Kirsten McKenzie's next horror-themed novel.

Highly recommended!

Elke says

I am the lucky winner of a goodreads giveaway copy of this title, thank you Ms. McKenzie! I was sucked into the unusual story from the beginning and just couldn't stop reading. 'Painted' expertly combines elements of a ghost story with those of a thriller. There was one main plot twist towards the end which at first I thought would ruin it all because it seemed such a convenient coincidence, but turned out it worked pretty well and the ending put a mean little smile on my face...

The writing was a flawless and hypnotizing treat on its own, and I wonder why I haven't heard or read anything from this gifted author before. Highly recommended!

Maxine (Booklover Catlady) says

I've discovered a new author that I love. This book is a hidden gem amongst many. **A very unique, addictive and creepy horror tale with a difference.** Bravo!, Kirsten for such a fantastic book idea!

I was totally enthralled with this book from very early on and eagerly came back to it whenever I could over a few busy days. It's one of those books where you just *need to know* what's going to happen next. Where is this story taking me?

The author builds a backdrop in this creepy old house where Anita goes to stay that gives you that **delectable chilling tension**. Anita is appraising an enormous collection of portraits for the firm she works for and waiting on other colleagues to arrive so they can appraise their own areas of speciality.

This is no ordinary house and these are no ordinary portraits. **The plot is sensationally addictive and the creepy factor kept me alert page after page**. The author teases you with a story that reveals its secrets slowly, bit by bit - mesmerising.

The writing is sublime. Kirsten's writing style is unique and beautifully descriptive without ever going overboard. She has a way with words that made this book really stand out for me. I found the writing beautiful despite the dark theme of the book.

Anita is alone in this huge old house with the eyes of each portrait watching her every move. **Something wicked this way comes**. When you are given the full reveal of the story it's just a great moment. I felt like a very satisfied reader.

This is not extreme horror, it's not graphic nor gory. It would appeal to many. It's moody, full of tense moments, ghostly and creepy. It would make a stunning movie. It should be a modern horror classic.

I do hope the author continues to write in this genre. It's her first horror story and she has written 2 books prior that I'm keen to dabble into. I really liked this book a lot and I read hundreds every year.

It's found a place in my long list of Top 17 Reads of 2017. No easy feat. Much competition for these places. This one deserves to be there. 5 delicious stars for a book that I enjoyed for so many good reasons. Very highly recommended dear book lovers.

You may think twice when you look at a portrait after reading this one.

I requested a copy of this book to read from the author when it was offered in a Goodreads group I'm part of. I'm so glad I did! All review opinions are my own and totally unbiased.

Stacey Broadbent says

When I saw that fellow New Zealand author, Kirsten McKenzie had written a horror, I jumped at the chance to read it! I'm a sucker for anything that will have me on the edge of my seat, and this book did that.

First of all, I'd just like to touch on the wonderful writing style of Kirsten. This book was so beautifully written, with such attention to detail, you couldn't help but feel as though you were right there with the characters. She painted such an eerie picture of the house and its surroundings, and don't get me started on the creepy artwork.

What I loved about this book was how it played out almost like a movie, where small things would happen but go unnoticed by the characters in the beginning. The fleeting shadows behind them, the objects shifting, the paintings... well, you'll just have to read to see what happens with the paintings.

There seem to be twists and turns everywhere in this book, and I love that! The ending was something I didn't see coming either, which doesn't often happen for me, but this was not predictable at all. I don't think I've ever read anything quite like this before, and it makes such a nice change. I will definitely be looking out for more books by Kirsten McKenzie!

Andrew says

Anita is an inexperienced, young art appraiser who jumps at the opportunity to catalog an artist's collection following his death. The reclusive artist painted abundantly. He left such an extensive collection that Anita has to spend several days at his remote coastal home. There is no phone service or WiFi. It's a daunting task to stay in the portrait filled old house alone.

The author brings us a classic haunted house vibe. The aging building is all creaks and groans. To begin with, mysterious little things happen as the tension and the notion that all is not right builds. The atmosphere is fueled by the portraits and their sadness as presented in oils. Anita cannot feel relaxed for a moment, as she has the feeling that the eyes in the portraits are watching. You feel the sense of isolation in the house, with just Anita and the paintings and the cold, creaky house. Anita's situation is made more complicated by a past traumatic experience that also haunts her.

A foreboding messenger arrives, coming in out of the rain to warn against staying in the house. Despite this being a familiar trope, it is naturally blended into the story so it doesn't feel cliched, and the character does return during various points of the book. Following her initial few days alone, Anita is joined by the lawyer for the estate and then by other members of her valuation team from the auction house. The introduction of these characters changes the dynamic. The subtle haunting gathers pace and the new arrivals provide victims for the evil that is present in the house. People start disappearing, nerves become fraught, and paranoia envelops the rest of the group.

Painted is an effective haunted house book, favoring tension and subtlety over outright violence and kills. As such, this may appeal to a broader audience, both in terms of age and those who are not fans of overt gore. The truth behind the haunting is slowly revealed, along with how it ties into the many paintings in the house. In Painted, we see that the eyes are the windows to the soul, and in this case the eyes are on canvas.

Vicky says

I am not usually a reader of horror novels. I came to know McKenzie's writing through her historical fiction novels which display her love and knowledge of antiques. Painted continues her love of antiques with descriptions of the amazing rooms in this novel. Room by room, character by character and painting by painting the author delivers a page turning, gripping novel of a house that is haunted - if only they had listened to the owner who left specific instructions in his will.

Lucretia says

This is a story dripping in atmosphere. I loved the creepy feeling that permeated every page. Let's face it portraits are creepy, I've always felt watched by them, then again, I watch a lot of horror, and that's what

they do, so that may just be me.

Talk about a clear message, follow instructions! The descriptive narrative gave me a clear image of the house, paintings, and people with a subtlety and balance that was impressive. The plot of this was a beautiful slow burn that built on the opening dread until the unexpected conclusion. I absolutely love the end.

I'm not sure if I was supposed to or not, but I connected with Ruth as well as Anita, and that really added to the mounting tension. If you are looking for a Gothic horror, something that could easily sit alongside a classic in the genre, then you'll want to read this.

Susan Hampson says

This is a story of one man's cruse and another man's greed. When artist Leo Kubin dies his isolated home's contents have to be catalogued so that the paintings and other items of value can be sold. The task is given to Anita Cassatt to go to the house to catalogue the collection before it is taken away to be auctioned. What isn't given to her is the explicit instructions which must be followed but a greedy partner in the firm of solicitors is prepared to cut corners to increase profits.

This is one eerie and creepy read that gets under your skin to raise those goose bumps! From the moment that Anita enters the house the whole tone of the atmosphere changes. For one thing, there is far more art work than was first thought and for another every person in every picture seemed to be watching her. Talk about the atmosphere changing, every page seemed darker as she was forced to face her own instability of past mental health issues. She was far from the right person for a job as she was questioning her own sanity with the strange happenings in the house.

There are some brilliant descriptions of the paintings and house which became more intense when nature seemed to be joining forces with much darker elements, making it an isolated house of gothic terror. There is also a feeling of less means more as there are only a handful of chapters in the story, each one richly described both physically and by their thoughts.

This is an intriguing story, loved the end. I wish to thank the author for an e-copy of this book which I have honestly reviewed.

R. Claire says

I enjoyed the author's attention to detail about art—it's obvious she knows her stuff—and her vivid descriptions helped to bring the setting to life. The story worked best for me when the protagonist, Anita, had a clear adversary in the form of the sexist lawyer, Alan. With his early disappearance, the story became somewhat muddled. I did, however, enjoy the eerie atmosphere and the overall ghost story. Cool cover too.
