

## MINDSCAPES FOR ALL SEASONS

*Two of a Mind*

Bungendore Woodworks Gallery, 18th July-August 22.

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It often strikes me as odd when an exhibition enumerates an artist's output across different media, as if there is something freakish about mastery of diverse skills. The core skill after all is to do with a certain perception, and having the means to communicate this to the outside world.

This exhibition houses portraits of people, objects and landscapes, and the life processes of organisms. Together the works play off and against each other, refreshing our visions of the natural world and rekindling our curiosity on how we frame what we see.

Richard Moorecroft's panels invert our usual relationship to landscape. Each image, within its tall, narrow frame, diverts attention from the more usual horizontal view. Through slow-aperture exposure, we focus on a crystal-clear depth of field, full of textures, patterns, formations and rhythms. It strikes me that if we could view our own bodies from within, we would perceive in a similar way.

The titles of these images capture motion within solids—a 'storm surge' within clumps of Spinifex, amoebae forming within rock. The camera eye passes its lips over each phenomenon. A golden strip of sand edging a riverbank becomes 'Midas' pool'. The nice irony here is that the camera, like Midas, can't *possess* what it transforms. I like the way the landscape remains the hero, beyond the artists' eye and the mechanics of his medium.

In "Fire fighters", charred eucalypts bristle with spirals of lush re-growth after fire. They are show girls with feathers-- yet this is also a rather serious observation of bush resilience. Whilst there is irony in the seeing, the lens pays deep respect.

It's a great choice to hang the works of Jason Chen besides the photographs of Moorecroft. The play of light, layered perspective, spreading horizon and textural detail make Chen's landscapes look like early silver gelatin photographs. The surprise is that these are paintings, rendered with a fine calligraphic brush technique, more usually associated with flat-plane calligraphy and Chinese landscape painting. A number of his other works, however, move away from vegetative detail through to more impressionist and finally colour-wash abstraction. *Outline of the mountain, shadow of water, mist of the sky* is perhaps my favourite: a triptych of small square-framed pieces that present an abstract meditation. A map of the mountain's spirit or soul [agash of red through a field of darker hues]; leaf greens swimming in the juice of trees; the delicate crinkle of paper kissing a cloud. The third image captures the seeming contradiction that air is both space and matter at the same time.

Very different to this is the work of Elizabeth Hawkes, magazine publisher, photographer and graphic designer, who paints firmly within a super realist style. Here, photographic detail is translated in to the flattened perspective, clear lines and clean colours familiar to us through the graphic arts. I hear many gallery visitors stop and admire these paintings, with their immediately recognisable subjects. The works refer to their own flattened plane and from comments I hear around me, people seem to take comfort from this.

Hawkes' eye is in contrast to that of Merv Moriarty. Over five decades of work, Moriarty's style has journeyed through figurative to abstract expressionism and returned to figurative again. Here his charcoal portraits invite us to contemplate a depth of texture achieved via very fine technique. His *Lyzzy on a Chair*, for example, is a lyrical essay in light and mood, the garden behind the sitter both a subject in its own right but also a structural tool helping to frame the sitters' thoughts and moods. The picture manages an interplay of abstract and figurative means, whilst remaining compassionate to the human subject.

Between 1971-1983, Moriarty set up an outreach programme--the "EastAus Flying Art School"--into remote areas of Queensland's top end [which still continues today as "Flying Arts" from out of Brisbane]. Reaching remote communities has also been a concern of jazz saxophonist Don Burrows. His photographic portraits are of people famous, infamous, or anonymous, in geographical locations as disparate as India and Coober Pedy, but the most poignant [and his personal favourites] were made during his journeys taking music to and teaching in outback places. Music makes the invisible audible, and these portraits make visible a world unseen by many, even in Australia. The look on Mindi's eyes as she plays a flute is haunting and unforgettable.

His landscapes display an intensity of pattern, light and shade, and a skilful capture of visual rhythm. Light dances across his sea-pictures, the sea becoming solid as land.

By contrast, in Prue Acton's still lifes, a table is a table. Each painting focuses on colour balance and a disciplined placement of elements. Tending towards soft-focus, her tea sets, fruit and flowers display delicate pastel qualities, and an almost powdery texture, holding both the present, and an unexpressed memory. Yellow lemons, pale green bowls, red apples and banksias [this is Margaret Preston's red, but without her blacks. Acton's fields of white resist stark contrasts]. These paintings do not attempt to capture life-force, but a hovering beauty of order, placement and form. As such, they offer a settling experience.