



Struggling Artists

July 20, 2011

ARTWORK "ISOLATION"

Represents the isolation that some feel. You may enjoy the thinking behind the work or just have fun and think it's quite random. Comes with wire on back for hanging. \$30 EAGLEBY 0422 690 326

Michael Lindeman, Artwork - Isolation

A reader, Glenn Stelzer, has emailed me to suggest that his brother, Bevan, is an artist worthy of attention. He says, quite rightly, that there are a lot of talented but "struggling" artists who never get their time in the sun.

A painter, Edwin Smith, has written to alert me to his exhibition with Bruce Herps at [Artarmon Galleries](#), a first-ever show, coming at the age of 70. Edwin Smith is also a poet, and although I'd never dare venture into the cut-throat field of poetry criticism, when I browsed the Collected Poems that arrived with the letter, I was impressed by the verve and confidence of his writing.

The perennial problem for artists is to attract an audience. Most shows live and die within a few weeks, while potential admirers – and collectors – remain ignorant of the exhibitor's existence.

Even with well-established artists, the situation is not very different. I've found that the general public prefer those columns that deal with the great artists and big exhibitions, even when the show may be interstate or overseas. Yet the art dealers, and many artists, are far more concerned with securing coverage of the shows with which they make their livelihood. In the current climate, when commercial galleries are struggling to make sales, attention becomes even more imperative.

The idea of a separate newspaper column devoted to the Sydney commercial galleries has been mooted many times, but nobody seems willing to act, partly (I suspect) because the Powers That Be don't wish to pay for another column without a corresponding rise in advertising income.

Back in Sydney after a few weeks away, I plunged back into the galleries and saw a succession of excellent shows, starting with Bruce Armstrong's works on paper 1981-2011 at the [Ray Hughes Gallery](#); new paintings by John Peart at [Watters Gallery](#) and Allan Mitelman at [Liverpool Street Gallery](#); Peter Booth at [Rex Irwin](#)'s; Michael Lindeman at [Sullivan and Strumpf](#); and Angus

Nivison at [Utopia Fine Art](#). And this is only a small selection from a very crowded field.

The Bruce Armstrong show represents a new direction for Ray Hughes. It comes with a hard-cover book, with a text by the Young Master, Evan Hughes. As the show is a survey, it appears that Ray is becoming more MCA-like by the month. Armstrong is a good choice to launch the new Hughes Kunsthalle approach: a much underrated artist, known mainly as a sculptor, and mainly in Melbourne. His drawings are consistently inventive, denoting a strong artistic personality. Ever since seeing his 1999 survey at Heide Park, I've thought of Armstrong as an artist who has never had the prominence he deserves.



Bruce Armstrong, Self Love

John Peart's recent show at Watters continued a line of impressive solo exhibitions that stretches back more than three decades. Over that time Peart has rarely stopped experimenting. The inevitable result is that some paintings work better than others, but the overall quality is remarkably high. The work that stood out for me in this exhibition was Mantra Moment 3 which had echoes of the Orphist paintings produced by the Delaunays – a kind of multi-coloured abstraction with suggestions of popular culture, aspects of modern life, disjointed words or phrases. Peart's emphasis is more introspective, more spiritual than popular, but the effect is just as vibrant.



John Peart, Mantra moment 3

To call Allan Mitelman's paintings 'abstract' hardly seems to do them justice. His new works at Liverpool Street were like the remnants of the secret rituals of a cult, faded and scarred, encoded in thousands of dashes, scratches and marks. Music was somewhere in the mix, and so were the historical works of art that Mitelman has lying around his studio in the form of postcards, but each painting has its own rhythm and sense of momentum, with one mark leading inexorably – albeit randomly – to the next. With the possible exception of Robert Hunter, no Australian artist's works are less amenable to photography. A painting that looks as busy as a beehive from up close, becomes a monochrome in reproduction.



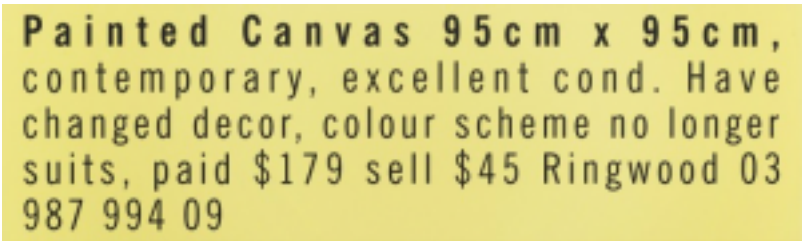
Allan Mitelman, Untitled

Peter Booth's exhibitions used to be mini horror shows, populated by grotesque, lumpen figures from the artist's nightmares. At a certain point, Booth began to cheer up – but not too much. Now he alternates the grotesques with lyrical landscapes, all painted in his trademark style of thick paint applied with a palette knife. This time Booth has grown more fastidious, building up the surface with an unusual number of small dabs and strokes. Like many viewers, I'm still drawn to the ugly brutes rather than the landscapes, with the stand-out this time being a particularly sinister character in a purple jumper.



Peter Booth, Painting (man in purple jumper)

Michael Lindeman is a young artist with an exceptionally sharp mind. When so much would-be Conceptual Art seems to have no idea whatsoever, Lindeman's conceptually-based paintings are incisive and genuinely witty. Based on classified advertisements for works of art, they are as well observed as any landscape painting. The wording, at once banal but revealing, provides a timely reminder of the way the vast majority of the population approach the subject of art. They'd be depressing if they weren't so funny.



Painted Canvas 95cm x 95cm,
contemporary, excellent cond. Have
changed decor, colour scheme no longer
suits, paid \$179 sell \$45 Ringwood 03
987 994 09

Michael Lindeman, Painted Canvas

With Angus Nivison's new work the elemental themes remain intact: earth, sky, clouds and mists, forests, craggy peaks, but now they are concealed beneath veils of white. This is a significant departure from Nivison's earlier works that had gone from tones of orange and purple-grey, to an all-encompassing blackness. The catalyst, so I'm told, was a visit to the [Setouchi Inland Sea Festival](#) last year, where the artist was struck by the clouds of mist rolling across the water, during the sticky, humid Japanese summer. The new paintings are brave, almost too minimal, as if Nivison has pushed the veiling effect as far as it can go without descending into monochrome.



Angus Nivison

These are quick responses, not considered reviews, but I hope it's some small compensation for the impossibility of writing about these shows in the newspaper column. I'll try and do this from time to time, when my conscience is piqued.