

Danger that lies beneath



ON THE MOVE: The Great Escape. Yardley transforms innocuous subjects into ominous portents.



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Review

Darklands: Heidi Yardley
Stephanie Burns Fine Art, Shop 2, 25 Bentham
Street, Yarralumla. Until May 26.

MELBOURNE-BASED artist Heidi Yardley's first solo show at Stephanie Burns Fine Art is a combination of small paintings and drawings concerned with the contrast between settlement and wilderness, enclosure and escape, in Australian consciousness. Dingoes prowl, storm-clouds gather, dining tables sit unpeopled in pristine dining rooms.

Using pastel and charcoal to build up rich, dark surfaces, Yardley's drawings are ethereal and atmospheric, her subjects emerging as points of light from the darkness of the ground.

Drawing is obviously Yardley's strength. The small scale and sketch-like style of her paintings result in somewhat incoherent images. They also lack the precision and intensity of the drawings, which are inviting and intriguing, their ominous mood and hint of unexposed meanings combining

effectively with the artist's assured and sensitive technique.

Smoke gazes up at a cloud-filled sky; ominous storm-clouds are accented with brilliant edges of silver light. A dream within a dream transports us to an obscure, otherworldly landscape; a monolithic form rises in the centre of the image, which evokes a sense of mystery through its interplays of dark and light, solidity and empty space.

What I thought I saw brings us alongside the seemingly innocent form of a dingo, which stands prone and looks out of frame to the left. The form of the dingo is rendered with sympathy, emphasising the dog-like qualities and belying the overtones of risk and danger communicated in the title. Yardley is tapping into the commonly held association between dingoes and disappearance, her rather lovable subject lent a necessary wariness as a result.

Two portraits of a young woman drawn in profile from behind, *Observer I & II*, again have an air of uncertainty and dread. It is as if the viewer has crept up with the artist to catch this girl unaware. What is she observing? Or are we the observers? What are we about to witness as this vulnerable figure is presented to our gaze?

Emptiness, darkness, spaciousness, disappearance – these ideas are turned over and contemplated through Yardley's works, the brownish-blackish hues of her images transforming her otherwise innocuous subjects into uncomfortable and ominous portents, danger lurking below the surface of each animal, each home, and each vast open space.