

Harsh light inspires dark themes



In her exhibition, Yardley finds dark undertones in Australian icons; a dingo hints at the Azaria Chamberlain case.

Heidi Yardley's *Darklands* explores what it means to grow up in Australia with an English heritage, writes **HELEN MUSA**.

THE contrasts between Australia's harsh landscape and the rather more 'refined' sensibilities of English culture is the unusual theme woven into the drawings and paintings in *Darklands*, an exhibition of works by Heidi Yardley opening on Tuesday at Stephanie Burns Fine Art.

Darklands is artist Heidi Yardley's first solo exhibition at the gallery in Yarralumla shops. Exploring what it means to grow up in Australia with an English heritage, the artist says she is not aiming for a literal interpretation but rather "a series of fragments and associations frozen in time".

The exhibition illustrates how humans are trapped in confinements of their own making. Bushfires, native animals, the desert and Aboriginal culture all exist in parallel outside of the suburban bubble with its houses and swimming pools.

The British sense of decoration – overly ornate furniture and interiors – could be viewed as out of place in Australian surrounds but there was a time when it offered safety compared to the rough terrain of the outback.

Yardley finds dark undertones in Australian icons. A dingo, for instance, may remind us of the Azaria Chamberlain case; the kangaroo looks more like an icon than a live marsupial; and an ominous rock forma-



tion holds suggestions of the schoolgirls who mysteriously disappeared in Joan Lindsay's *Picnic at Hanging Rock*. Yardley says her images deliberately look back to the 1960s and 70s and look a bit like photographs that jar our memories.

Drawn using a technique of building layers of pastel and charcoal on primed paper, the images work into the dark background. The effect, the artist hopes, enhances the sensation of memory and loss, as if the drawings were disappearing before they ever began.

Edgar Allan Poe's lines used by Lindsay in *Picnic at Hanging Rock* could apply equally to *Darklands*, Yardley says:

*All that we see and all that we seem/
Is but a dream/
A dream within a dream.*

This is Yardley's first solo exhibition with Stephanie Burns Fine Art. She lives in Melbourne and completed a Bachelor of Fine Art in painting at Monash University and Honours in drawing at RMIT University. She has been a finalist three times in the Brett Whiteley Travelling Art Scholarship, held many solo exhibitions since 1998 and also participated in many group exhibitions since 1996.

Her work is held in the BHP Billiton Collection, the Methodist Ladies College Collection and the by Australia Felix Foundation among others.

Darklands by Heidi Yardley runs at Stephanie Burns Fine Art, Shop 2, 25 Bentham Street, Yarralumla Shops (through the Post Office or via the back lane) Tues-Sat 11am-5pm from May 1-26.

The artist's images deliberately look back to the 1960s and 70s to jar the viewer's memories.



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