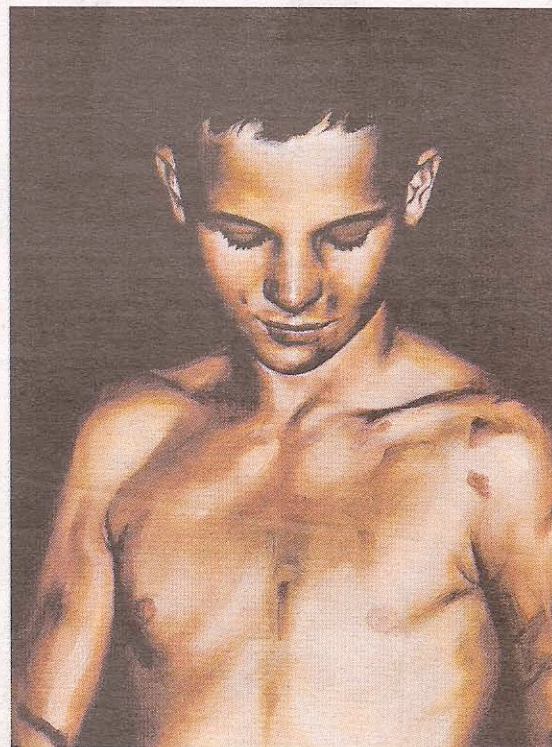
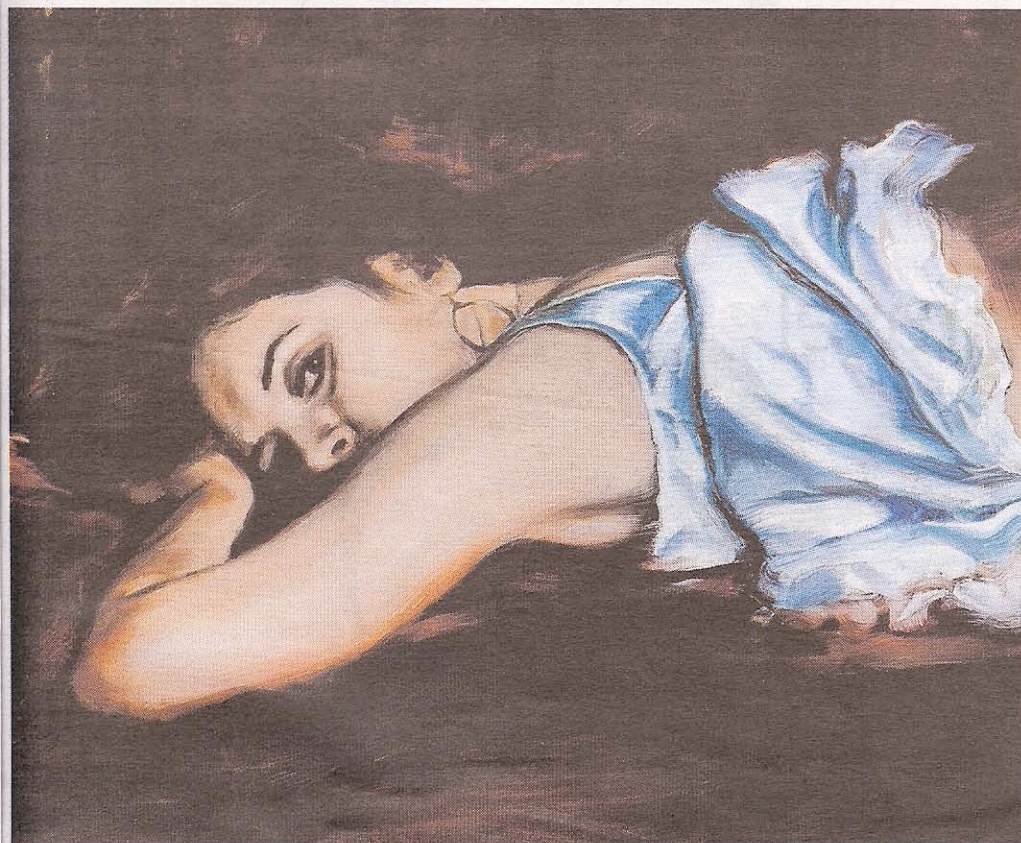


In the frame Alison Kubler



EVOCATIVE: Heidi Yardley's works on show at the Jan Murphy Gallery include *Into the Wild* (left) and *Gift of the Darkness*.

Little whispers in the dark

"THIS we do for pleasure, so that we may shortly be at the mercy of venomous snakes and poisonous ants. How foolish can human creatures be," says Miss McCraw about the ill-fated school picnic in Peter Weir's 1975 iconic film adaptation of Joan Lindsay's *Picnic at Hanging Rock*.

I am not sure whether the book or the film is still taught in schools. If not, it is a shame, for both captured a historically primeval fear of the Australian bush, the strange otherness beneath the harsh glaring sun.

In their Edwardian frocks, Weir's schoolgirls appeared awkwardly at odds with the untamed wilderness of the bush that ultimately claimed them. The cry "Miranda!" resonates today.

Heidi Yardley's paintings for the *Gift for the Darkness* exhibition, inspired by a visit to Hanging Rock, emulate Weir's Australian gothic sensibility in their depiction of people and the bush as a site of primal rituals, a place for outsiders.

Gift for the Darkness presents a boy smeared in what may be ritual mark-

ings or scarred by the bush. He glances down, either shyly or knowingly – a brief smile plays about his lips.

The young boy in *Inward Urge* – an indigenous child perhaps? – faces the viewer with an attitude almost akin to defiance.

Yardley evokes the early colonial studies of the Australian landscape and its peoples, characterised as they were by a European sensibility that ultimately failed to describe the indigenous light and flora. She uses it to good effect to create tension and

suggests darkness that is far from gloomy but rather cinematic, establishing a palpable mood.

Rendered mostly on a small scale the paintings encourage an intimate engagement. They "speak" in hushed tones like little whispers. Standing in the gallery I almost felt the hair on the back of my neck stand up, as though something was behind me.

Gift for the Darkness closes today, at Jan Murphy Gallery, 486 Brunswick St, New Farm, phone: 3254 1855, www.janmurphygallery.com.au