

Serene dreams

Still waters run deep in this solo show



LOOKING GLASS ... Heidi Yardley reflects on history, landscapes and the psyche in *Severance*, *Antipodean Dream*, *We are Water* and *Departure*.

It's no surprise to learn that one of artist Heidi Yardley's favourite films is *Picnic at Hanging Rock*. This 1967 book by Joan Lindsay was made into a classic Australian film by Peter Weir in 1975.

The story relates to the disappearance of several schoolgirls and their teachers during a visit to Hanging Rock on St Valentine's Day in 1900 and the incident's impact on the local community.

The film highlighted the spookiness of the Australian bush and the same sense of quiet, gothic horror is in some of the paintings in Heidi Yardley's latest Brisbane exhibition, *Glass Psyche*.

Her exquisitely refined landscapes have dreamy figurative elements. The painting *Inheritance* shows a woman's arm rather strangely emblazoned on to a landscape.

In *Severance* a woman's head seems to float, dream-like, above a glassy river. In *Antipodean Dream* another head – and a serene, rather beautiful one at that – also hovers in the landscape. There's a lake in the foreground and water has a strong symbolic presence in these works.

These paintings verge on the surreal. Heidi, a Melbourne-based painter who was a finalist in this year's Archibald Prize, confesses that founding surrealists such as Max Ernst and Rene

Magritte have been mentioned in relation to her work. This is not to say she is directly referencing them, but their works seem to reside in her artistic psyche.

Her vision has an otherness that suggests a world either within or beyond ours. The landscape in *As above, so below* is depicted in the shape of a crystal and the title reflects a saying from hermetic philosophy. Heidi says she has an interest in the metaphysical, but more as someone with natural curiosity rather than as a practitioner of any occult art – beyond painting, that is.

She also has an interest in Australian history and her landscapes are a way of connecting with the spirit of the land and our colonial past. Her attraction to films such as *Picnic at Hanging Rock* shows her interest in the landscape's mysteries.

Heidi's depiction of landscape may be gothic at times but it is feminine gothic. Some of her paintings feature images she has sourced, then cut and pasted into her canvases and this creates a sense of displacement between the figure and the landscape.

Another work, *We are Water*, shows a naked woman by the water's edge and it's a positively pagan image, suggesting communion with nature. Heidi has an interest in the history of witchcraft and how past societies interpreted women close

to nature (often healers and herbalists) as outsiders engaging in unholy pursuits. Heidi's paintings suggest that it's our disconnection with nature that makes it seem spooky at times. *Picnic at Hanging Rock* could be seen as a metaphor for the sort of alienation that Europeans experienced in Australia.

These works can also be read as dreamscapes and there is something very Jungian about them – the images suggest archetypes that have floated into the painter's consciousness from the deep well of the collective unconscious.

It's this otherworldliness, interpreted with a keen aesthetic eye and brush, that makes Heidi's haunting portraits so fascinating. The clue to their psychological depths can be found in the title work, *Glass Psyche*, which features a seated figure in what looks like a nightdress (a hint at the dreaminess of it all) with cascading native flora where the head should be. This painting is old-school surrealism of the highest order. It is quite beautiful too and it has hidden depths that make it all the more attractive.

HEIDI YARDLEY - GLASS PSYCHE, until Oct 26, Tue-Sat, 10am-5pm,
Jan Murphy Gallery, 486 Brunswick St, Fortitude Valley, ph: 3254 1855.
janmurphygallery.com.au