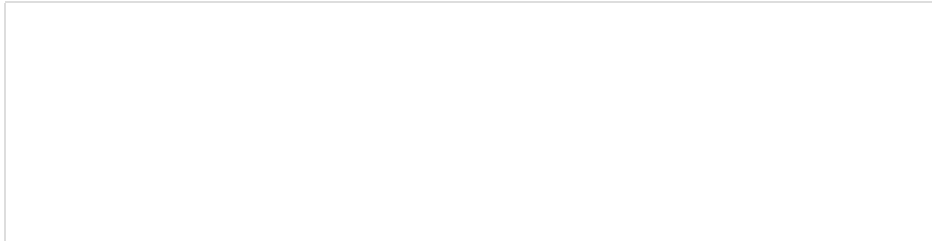


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June 3 2016 - 1:20PM

Art review: Obnoxious Ladies in the Landscape by various artists at Canberra Contemporary Art Space, Braddon

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Peter Haynes

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Various artists. Obnoxious Ladies in the Landscape. Various artists. Canberra Contemporary Art Space. Gorman Arts Centre, Braddon. Until June 18.

Reviewer: Peter Haynes.




 Jacqueline Bradley, *Dredging Jacket in Obnoxious Ladies in the Landscape*. Canberra Contemporary Art Space, Braddon. Photo: supplied

The curator Sabrina Baker has selected six very different artists whose marked individuality is the most striking feature of the exhibition. The spatial openness of the gallery spaces is a very effective and arguably necessary device where such strong statements are not only aesthetically played off against one another but are also ostensibly in dynamic thematic dialogues.

Alex Pye shows a video (*Cummock: The Musical! Part One and Two*) and an untitled installation. The video's protagonist (the artist) sits in a living room watching commercial television and smoking a bong. The scene changes to her seated on a quad bike (?) riding in circles around a quarry, ultimately going nowhere. In the first scene she wears underwear, in the second brief shorts and a shirt knotted under her breasts, a costume beloved of 1940s and 1950s pin-ups. Finally she is shown sitting on a porch smoking cigarettes and drinking red wine. The different mises-en-scène are interspersed with each evoking feelings of futility, of a purposeless existence broken and simultaneously underscored by drugs, alcohol and reckless behaviour. The video, the untitled installation and the wall piece *Thanks for Nothing* state Pye's view of a life endured rather than lived.



 Down on her luck by Lucy Forsberg, part of the installation Yeah I'm pluggin' on? But I'm afraid we're not as tough as what we've been told we were in Obnoxious Ladies in the Landscape at Canberra Contemporary Art Space, Braddon. Photo: supplied

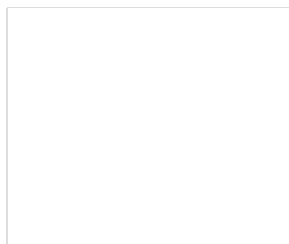
Emma Beer is a painter in the very best sense of that word. Her four works, each with very personalised autobiographical titles, are beautiful. This is an artist with astute control of the layered subtleties of spatial delineation and understanding of the risky aesthetic efficacy of blurring the boundaries between figuration and abstraction. The surface is divided into spaces that could be read as windows through which we begin the dialogue as established by Beer. She uses a limited palette through the four works displayed – essentially a range of tonal blues and whites. Equally limited is the morphological variety – squares, rectangles, singular or grouped lines. These limitations do not any way inhibit the works' expressive possibilities and her insinuating use of spatial and pictorial ambiguities is seductively impressive. For me, her work is concerned with personal history and placing that history within a language of painting that is evocative, articulate and aesthetically resolved.

Jacqueline Bradley has a number of works both floor and wall-based. She uses found and made objects in combination and to great effect. This is especially true of *Autumn Jacket* and *Dredging Jacket*. Her references to the undeniably rural landscape as seen in both these works impart a sense that the objects are simultaneously a part of and apart from the land they sit on/in. There is a discomforting ambiguity in the surreality of jackets that are at once defence and attack. This is reinforced by the attached wire "enclosures". The wonderful push-pull effect of these possibilities is cleverly presented here and again in *Escape Rope* (two hemispheres). In the latter the rope elements are finished with sticks whose fragility is overtly apparent. The "escape" offered by the rope is futile and if followed leads nowhere.

Camille Serisier presents a fairytale world of pastel and insubstantial absurdities, peopled by equally absurd protagonists. The artifice of her world is reinforced by its being made from paper and by the set-like simplicity of the designs used for the arenas in which the "action" as promulgated by her costumed "heroines" (and one "hero") takes place. Artifice and simplicity (barely) conceal something more sinister but it is something that remains intimated rather than stated in Serisier's pastel plays.

Lucy Forsberg's installation *Yeah I'm pluggin' on... But I'm afraid we're not as tough as what we've been told we were* consists of a number of elements that confront a range of issues in the guise of subverted road signs. Forsberg's signs see her collaged onto, for example, Howard Arkley's suburban sprawl, backyard barbecues, outback races, and Holden utes, in a language that it is easily accessed on a surface level.

 Emma Beer, *She's my mate and my darl* in Obnoxious Ladies in the Landscape at Canberra Contemporary Art Space, Braddon. Photo: supplied



Anna Davern uses biscuit tins, fake pearls and dog chains to create once again, clever and witty objects that provide simultaneous charm and subversion. She calls the works breast plates and the familial association with the King plates given to Aboriginal men by the white authorities in the 19th and early 20th centuries has particular resonance. In *I'm not Racist but...* she uses the patterns associated with blue-and-white English pottery to symbolise colonial power but wittily subverts this by the addition of the plastic pearl necklace effectively mocking the original source. In *Queenie* the outline of Dame Edna Everage made of LED lights sits on a biscuit tin lid covered with an aerial view of Melbourne. The addition of immensely over-sized fake pearls is both visually "over the top" and conceptually incisive and funny.

Obnoxious Ladies in the Landscape does not live up to its title. I don't know any of the "ladies" but what is presented in the exhibition in no way even verges on the obnoxious. It is rather a gathering of strong, resolved works that are sometimes clever, sometimes subversive and sometimes beautiful. It is a selective celebration of the diversity of female voices in contemporary visual arts practice.

RECOMMENDED