

Alan Pearson

Recent Australian Paintings

The Arthouse, 292 Montreal Street, Christchurch
3 to 22 May 2005

The purity of nature and the carnality of the human condition are two themes at the heart of Alan Pearson's new body of work. Based on his acute observations of the 'dance of life' on the beach at Noosa and in the isolated bush where he lives, these magnificent paintings, dating from 2001 to 2004 are here shown for the first time in New Zealand and reveal a renewed vitality in this artist's life.

Pearson left these shores for the Sunshine Coast in 2000 and in doing so he has clearly discarded the dark angst that haunted some of his later New Zealand paintings. In *Saving the Classical Spirit at Noosa* a figure, tenuously poised, protects the classical tradition from disappearing into a primal sea; a metaphor perhaps in which a homogeneous society tends to obliterate individuality and nobility of character and here, it is on the edge of disappearing altogether. Despite living in a world bent on obfuscating such beauty found in the classical nature, Pearson defies this threat. This painting commands that the viewer acknowledge the danger of such a loss while the abstract figurative relationships emphatically assert a painterly lyricism.

Other works centring on the beach at Noosa such as *Rampant Intruder* offer a salty commentary on human behaviour. An imposing central figure makes their presence known and all those around awaken from sun-soaked languor like little animals in the wild when territorial boundaries are crossed. An inter-play of body language and the psychological is imbued in this work through a great orchestration of colour, shadow and texture. Another work, *Noosa Beach*, is reminiscent compositionally of some of Pearson's West Coast New Zealand paintings of the late 1990s. Yet here the horizon of a seascape is conveyed by bright Australian colours of yellow and red flags, blue sky and sea and the foamy whites and greys of breaking waves.

Pearson is particularly adept at translating pure sensation into colour, form and movement, thus clouds, waves, yachts, swimmers and surfers are painted with an immediacy that captures a single moment of human interaction with nature and is transformed into an enduring and complete visual and psychic experience. *On the Beach (ballet)* with orange / red figures dancing in the water, represents both a physical and a tactile connection with the surf, and with each other.

The abstract figurative qualities that define Pearson as one of the most important of contemporary artists working today is further evidenced in his bush landscapes on paper and canvas. After moving into the Maroochy region, a bush area close to the sea, Pearson began to paint the continuity of movement found

in this unique landscape. As the artist states, he 'forces the vegetation to move' and one can ascertain insects, snakes and spirits summoned to dance in the heat of the day. Indeed, in *View from the Creek*, turquoise, reds, yellows, greys and blues combine in expressionistic applications to evoke the shimmering of light as the bush is reflected in the nearby creek. Spirit-like figures in the foreground suggest a higher form of interconnectivity with the surrounding vegetation.

In *Bush Symphony 1, 2, 3*, three abstract landscapes on paper, continual regeneration of the land is evoked. The movement of wind through the bush, sentinel eucalyptus trees and the musical rhythms prevalent in both nature and in Pearson's own psyche are encapsulated in a forest theatre.

Alan Pearson's enduring ability to paint the apex of a moment in his indomitable way reveals further issues concerning the precarious nature of life. He addresses in his art questions of how one can give reason to existence and how to transcend the ordinary and this is enabled visually by his rare gift of synaesthesia. The completeness of these joyful compositions and overall freshness of design allows as he says 'the future to come through' and I cannot recommend highly enough for visitors to witness this conviction for themselves.

copyright Jennifer Hay – May 2005 & The Arthouse, Christchurch, 2005, reproduced with the permission of the author and the gallery.