

CHARLES NODRUM GALLERY

267 CHURCH STREET RICHMOND MELBOURNE VICTORIA 3121 AUSTRALIA

www.charlesnodrumgallery.com.au
gallery@charlesnodrumgallery.com.au

ABN 22 007 380 136

TEL (61 3) 9427 0140

FAX (61 3) 9428 7350

Hours: Tues – Sat 11 – 6

Uncertain Times

You have to look. The eye slips across the skidding paint, held for a moment by a lip of colour, teeth, tongue, then falls into a crevasse of yawning darkness. The brightest cold light or the warmth of glutinous flesh enshroud the moments of biological recognition. This is the creative genesis of image building aligned with a convulsive genesis of life forms. There may not be much comfort here, but looking is compulsive and there are richer rewards than comfort in these pictures.

This is grand painting, concerned with ideas and values which are embedded in the broad dialogue of Western art and thought. The painting method is deeply informed and superbly executed. The vision is original. The artist's history underwrites the gestative process which yields up these complex images.

Gleeson is Australia's surrealist extraordinaire and one of it's most skilled and sophisticated painters. Surrealism's argument between the conscious and unconscious mind – the hysterical heightening of perception unsupported by intellectual understanding, is a lightly explored realm in Australian art. Certainly we have had artists engaged in surrealism, but none of Gleeson's intelligence or ability or commitment. For Gleeson invents in a way that others have not. Where others have constructed theatre sets for effects (or played it safe – going so far, no further) Gleeson builds entire lands - a whole geography of possible worlds.

Gleeson's paintings are a continuum. They never stop. The kind of realm which they depict is all feeling, all spontaneous action. They are not of any particular time of night or day – the time is primordial. The relationship between the elements of air and water, solid and not solid, and heat and cold is not always clear. The light has a peculiar (almost sulphurous?) quality and doesn't follow our understanding of natural light. Gravity is confounded – seemingly heavy elements float and light ones sink. There is no place that we recognise, no procedure of events that we are familiar with, yet always enough hints and clues to keep in contact with the visual world we do know.

Similarly, the scale of the depicted image is elusive: we cannot tell if the subject is microscopic or diabolically massive. They are big pictures, grandly painted, so reminiscent, at one level, of the grand tradition of Romantic landscapes or carefully delineated colonial records, yet, at another glance, they can read as images of the cellular world.

There is a great deal of uncertainty in interpreting these works, and unavoidable stimulation. What you see can't be understood, and where you know, or think you know, the stimulative references, you can't properly relate them. Everything is revealed but nothing explained.

The paintings are overtly sensual – hence deeply curious and mildly repelling simultaneously. There is no argument with the biological content and its meaning as a base for life forms, but we sense that there is still some further, unavoidable truth being recounted. Yet if, like the reluctant child, we occasionally say "yes, but this is too much..... must I see it?" the answer can really only be "no, you don't have to it all depends on how much you love the truth". Like the apple in Eden, these paintings are tempting: they draw us in to their world. If Genesis is right this could prove a problem, but by the same token, since the expulsion, a return to primal innocence has not been an option.

Uncertain times.

Simon Klose
Director
Benalla Art Gallery