

Australia

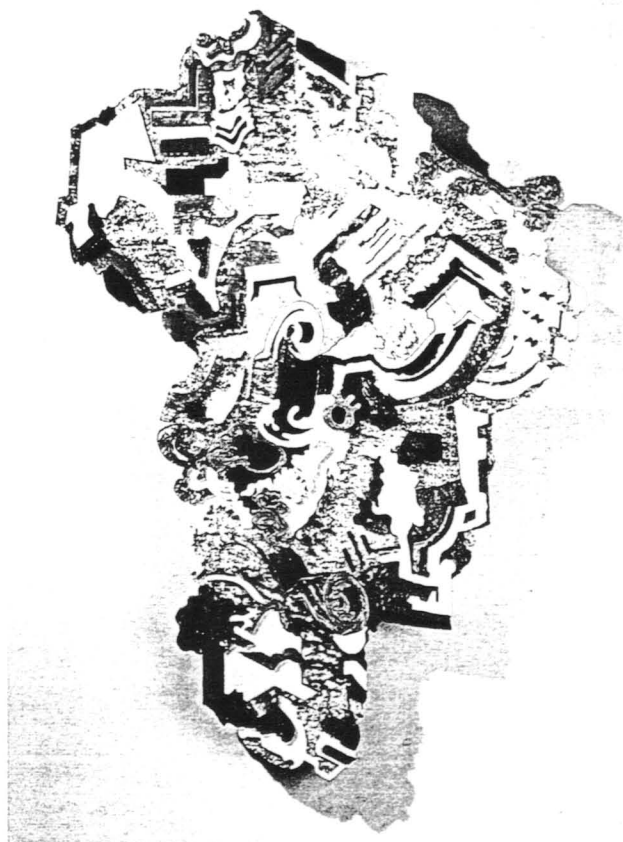
Hobart

Group show at Dick Bett Gallery

When Aboriginal art is exhibited alongside artworks from other cultures, particularly those which evolve from the Western tradition, it usually so dominates its surroundings that all else pales into insignificance. The viewer's visual field becomes immersed in a pattern of dots and, like a deer caught in car headlights, his vision is transfixed and blind to all else.

This is not the case in *Beyond the Surface*, an exhibition which brings together Aboriginal paintings - from the Utopia and Delmore Downs communities - with Paul Zika's neo-baroque constructions and Howard Arkley's minimal figuration. Why do they work so well together? The answer, in part, is to be found in the exhibition's title. All of these works have a depth to them. Particularly in the work of Paul Zika and the Aboriginal painters, the decorative surfaces serve as a map to the underlying territory. Zika's kaleidoscopic shards and the Aboriginal dotting technique act like a cartographer's grid references on a map.

As an artist working within the academic structure of a university, Paul Zika's main research activity revolves around the study of baroque architecture and decoration. His findings are translated into wall-based artworks which have now totally abandoned the traditional rectangle of canvas and stretchers. Rather, these



Paul Zika, *Post Italy 9*, 1993, acrylic on wood, 127 x 88 x 11 cm.

works, which have been meticulously cut from plywood, have the outline of continents and the colors and tonality of the barrier reef. They have a substance which runs from the grossly material to the spiritual-made-whole.

If "complexity" has become the intellectual leitmotif of the 1990s, then these artworks are very much of their time. Their internationality comes from their synthesis of the universal rules of perception and cognition. Within this framework Zika tests a variety of hypotheses relating to architectural space and the possibilities of multiple viewpoints. Equivalents become heightened by the presence of Howard Arkley's economical black and white images depicting what Sean Kelly, the catalogue's essayist, astutely describes as "the

seed-bed of suburban white dreaming."

If Kathleen Petyarre and Long Jack Phillipus Jakamarra decode the myths and realities of the red center of the Australian continent, then Howard Arkley holds up a mirror, in the cheapest of plastic frames, to its densely populated coastal fringes. Here, life in suburbia's sprawling quarter-acre blocks is viewed through a television set and time is marked by the interminable passing of soap operas and advertising breaks. Arkley's Christ-like head dominates the far wall. It does not appear to judge, rather it suffers alongside the slow crucifixion of life in the suburbs.

Peter Hill

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Hong Kong

Yue Minjun and Yang Shaobin at Schoeni

The avant-garde in China seems to remain a thriving subculture in Chinese art. The artists, mostly in their 20s to early 40s, exercise diverse means and techniques, but often share similar sensibilities. Yue Minjun and Yang Shaobin, both from Beijing, recently came to Hong Kong for the show. *Faces Behind the Bamboo Curtain*.

The irreverent and lively oil paintings of Yue and Yang are full of laughing faces - some tender, some ferocious, and some just hilariously funny. In Yue's paintings, faces and buildings have an unnaturally smooth surface, gleaming with plastic highlights. Men and women are dressed in casual clothing and grin wildly from ear to ear. One of his favorite subjects is himself, usually depicted in multiples. In *Gweong-Gweong*, a multitude of horizontals, Yue Minjuns drop like bombs from fighter jets over a celebratory scene in Tiananmen Square. In *City No. 2*, three of his crazy laughing heads stick out of an equal number of manholes.

There is, of course, sly politics slipped into many of these depictions. In *On the Rostrum of Tiananmen*, four irreverent youths stand on the spot where Mao Zedong made some of his famous speeches to the captive nation. They are posing for a snapshot, laughing into the camera, smoking cigarettes. All that is left of the once-sacred Chairman Mao is the lower half of his body, partly