

## **Beyond the Surface, Dick Bett Gallery**

**W**ORKS by Howard Arkley, Paul Zika and Aboriginal artists of the Utopia and Delmore Downs area are gathered to demonstrate a point, namely that decorative art has more to offer than the usual perception that it concerns itself with shallow patterns performing on a two-dimensional surface.

Well, as far as the Aboriginal art is concerned, there are few non-Aboriginal Tasmanian viewers privy to the knowledge about the messages these paintings contain. I shall take the catalogue at its word, and believe that the paintings are harbouring stories about spirituality, secular activities and a code of rhythmic structure.

It is sad, indeed remiss, not to be given the key to these narratives, as all we can do is admire the interplay of these fascinating and alluring patterns, however interesting the stories behind these intricate works may be.

Howard Arkley's paintings are what appear to be large air-brush drawings. In spirit with the exhibition's theme, these works offer a multiplicity of plays within the image, from sheer physical interaction between the paint and texture, to the form conveying contents and hinting at the underlying story.

Paul Zika's paintings are far less subtle if viewed in the context of the theme. Surface here is quite obvious, in fact the work is sculptural, and offers the other extreme of the surface idea.

Zika's predilection for things baroque comes through in very obvious tones, and the artist uses it to underpin the point he is making about his concerns in the construction of surface elements.

There is something very seductive in Zika's faintly familiar paintings-cum-sculptures, their organic imagery recalling half-formed images from past experiences, the surface treatment like the gilding evoking glimpses of merry-go-rounds and barrel organs.