

LIFT-OUT
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ART

Ronald Millar

A quick pick: ten shows

THE most urgent and expressive big picture I've seen this week was painted 22 years ago by Kevin Connor, at a time when nobody wished to know about fervent expressionism.

It's a sprawling view of Melbourne, and you can see it upstairs at the Charles Nodrum Gallery.

Leaving that aside, today's problem is how to squeeze into these columns even the briefest words of approval concerning 10 worthwhile new shows.

Solution: list in order of preference, and restrict the comment to immediate impressions.

● Philip Hunter's paintings of Tower Hill (Arden St.) make an outstanding solo exhibition. Fluent and satisfying work; a version that combines landscape fact and a strong physical presence with romantic fancy.

Variations on a floating-hill island, seen with different moods and in noble space. Windscreens, wiper arcs anchor image and suggest sun, moon and aurora effects. Hunter is obviously one of the few genuine new talents.

● Janenne Eaton (Pinacotheca) has paintings more complex and morbid than Hunter's, but just as interesting.

Vortex movements hover around an orifice, mouths for kissing, sword-swallowing, singing. Liquid eruptions, spouts and splashes from leaking boats and whirlpools.



A section of a Philip Hunter painting in his Tower Hill series showing at the Arden St. Gallery.

Eaton uses concentric echoes to suggest sounds, terror, disturbance. Some fine and thoughtful paintings, and an artist to watch.

Don't miss her seaside tower made of grey planks.

● Bashir Baraki (same gallery) shows black-and-white photographs. The best are broodingly sensual nudes, sober portraits, and mysteriously shrouded figures. No gimmicks here; serious

artistry and passion, an effect of haunting intimacy.

● Robin Wallace-Crabbe (Powell St.). Cool and modest studio interiors with witty support from casual colored wood sculpture that reappears in the paintings. Inside-outside dialogues in European tradition, with asides about French art, the domestic nude, the art-process itself, and a refreshing delight in good painting.

● At Australian Galleries, John Coburn's sumptuous tapestries dominate the space, and the smaller designs for these show transitions from first sign to finished emblem. First-rate work from a decorative master.

Also here, Geoff Jones rings the changes on single blooms edged with black line in vases of sharply contrasting color. Elegant work, not as sentimental as it seems.

● Nodrum Gallery, keen to remain in touch with earlier modern painting, has not only Connor's dashing panorama but a very beautiful Gilliland, one of the best Don Laycock's and a 1960 Balson as fresh as yesterday.

● At 200 Gertrude St., two shows: by Lewis Miller and Roisin O'Dwyer. Miller's gift for portrait painting is strong but conventional.

He has crisp skill, gets a reliable likeness, uses space well, has obvious sinner-rapport with art-person mates. The drawings are Hockney-ish and sensitive. In a climate of general ineptitude, this has much to recommend it.

Roisin O'Dwyer's small works are calm table-top mini-dramas between simple toys and objects; they are about time, space, the real and the imagined. Larger world implied by and compressed into innocent and stiff smaller worlds. Relationships muted and subtle.

● Young Printmakers (RMIT Storey Hall) is varied in style and lively. Monica Schmid makes delicate signs embossed and inscribed on bone-like surface; refined and mature.

Kate Reeves goes for exotic Eastern color, rich surface and turbulent forms; concentrated and potent. One good work each from Annette Edwards and Rosalind Atkins; also good — No. 2 by Gray and Bondi Bus by Pieper. Some others hopelessly overscaled for their content.

● Rimona Kedem (Niagara Gallery) has an uneven show: best is No. 22 where watery effect with swimmers is well made; then a Chagallian No. 9. Others a mixture of folksy figuration, texture for its own sake, and a nicely managed No. 27.