

# Capturing the power of the prints

**J**ohn Pratt is a well established and highly respected Canberra-based artist printmaker who has been exhibiting for almost three decades.

A major theme which has preoccupied his art has been the human figure and its surrounding environment or more particularly, the interaction between the figure and the environment. We have witnessed in his prints trees morphed into humanoid-like shapes and anthropomorphic landscapes. He argues that we seem to become part of our surroundings and our surroundings become part of us.

His new body of work in this exhibition consists of 18 woodcuts and stems from drawings he made at the local suburban swimming pool. He notes about this series "The woodcut seemed an unlikely medium for this exploration – its physicality and resistance is a far cry from the fluidity and transient states of both the figure and the water itself. However, the decision to cut the blocks up and reconfigure the elements has



**John Pratt: *The pool***

Beaver Galleries, 81 Denison Street, Deakin. Closes September 1.

enabled a greater flexibility with the materials and a more lyrical range of interpretations."

Many of the pieces consist of the human figure shown as if dynamically suspended in space against a tumbling background of fluid masses. The physical cutting up of the wooden block, with the separate inking in different colours of the individual areas, allows for the appearance of separate islands of form with halo-like outlines. In an earlier exhibition, Pratt had introduced brilliant colours into his compositions in the form of intrusions by individual geometric

masses. Here, this artistic strategy has been implemented throughout the show with a plethora of red dots and bars of red employed to enliven and break up the surfaces. On a technical level, it is a very beautiful and effective exhibition, where something of the brutality of the German Expressionist heritage of the woodcut has been combined with a refined and lyrical sensibility of colour. The two traditions are allowed to clash and the seams remain exposed.

The most effective pieces in the exhibition, including *Passage I*, *Diver III* and *Held II* are those

where the literalness of the imagery has given way to quite an abstract formal invention. His experiments with cut-out forms in the assembling of surfaces, as in *Pool – Constellation* and *Pool – Constellation II* are interesting and engaging, even if not totally convincing.

As one has grown to expect with Pratt's exhibitions (this is his fourth at the Beaver Galleries), the prints are exquisite in their execution, challenging in their technical resolution and rewarding in their conceptual content.



Features from John Pratt's exhibition include, *Wake*, colour woodcut, edition of 10, 37 x 53cm, top; and, *Horizon*, colour woodcut, edition of 10, 49.5 x 79cm, above.