THE CANBERRA TIMES Saturday, March 9, 2013
canberratimes.com.au

STYLISH: Bruce Latimer's *Fluorescence I* is a stunning example of his work.

A thoughtful environment

Bruce Latimer: Etchings
Beaver Galleries, Deakin
Closes March 19
Reviewer: Sasha Grishin

The inventive genius of Bruce Latimer lies in part in his ability to reveal something important about the local environment through subversive humour and in part to achieve this in the context of a strikingly attractive art object.

The 24 etchings in this exhibition have more than a touch of the surreal about them, where scenes from a local recognisable reality are viewed with fresh eyes. His favourite working strategy is to examine a particular scene, often obsessively and in meticulous detail, and then juxtapose it with an element of his own invention. Through this intervention a new dimension is revealed in the imagery which may totally subvert the original bucolic view or that observed by the innocent eye.

In an etching such as *Fig, Firewheel and Fridge*, he juxtaposes the textured bark of the Moreton Bay Fig tree with the almost unnatural fluorescent explosion of colour of the Firewheel blossom and the encounter with a dumped refrigerator despoiling the environment. It is this note of incongruity that makes us cringe and in this new beauty find a new reality.

Sometimes humour is more of the one-liner variety, where in the print *Hold Up*, an armoured security van appears suspended from a crane over a setting of lush vegetation. Once the pun has been revealed, we are invited to consider the impact of human activity on the natural environment.

Although Latimer initially established a national reputation with his screenprints, for the past 20 years he has worked almost exclusively as an etcher. He is a process artist who will on occasion take over 20 proofs while resolving an image to achieve a striking colour saturation and lucidity in the design.

Many profound ideas in art are embarrassingly simple. A basic philosophy in Latimer's etchings is that the natural world is a beautiful place and in its interaction with humans needs to be protected. Perhaps a simple idea, but one which needs to be constantly stated, but not didactically, or in a literary manner. Many of his observations are drawn from a very localised environment, such as Callan Park near where he lives in Sydney and walks his dog every day, but they trigger associations with global implications. His etchings employ the element of human intervention to make the necessary comment about a fragile and threatened environment. In his technique, Latimer still thinks in terms of collage with overlapping forms as he did in his early screenprints, and conceptually the work may still comment on art, as in his *The Rest (after Cézanne)* and the gorgeous *Florescence* triptych, but now all is saturated with vibrant colour built up through aquatint with an almost infinite tonality.

> **'We are invited to consider the impact of human activity on the natural environment.'**

Although Latimer provides us with a profound commentary on our environment and on our place in this environment, he manages to achieve this without preaching. He creates poignant and memorable images, rather than ideological manifestos which are better read than seen.