

Art review Sasha Grishin



Oil on canvas 40 x 40cm *Neighbourhood II*, oil on canvas, 40 x 40cm.

The comforts of Home

Madeleine Winch: *Home*. Beaver Galleries, 81 Denison Street, Deakin. Until September 1.

Madeleine Winch is a well-known and established artist who, in an exhibiting career which has stretched for more than 35 years, has established an artistic language which is uniquely her own.

She employs simplified forms, a high degree of colour saturation and motionless frontally posed figures which betray only limited emotion. Her preference is to strip down her compositions to a few variables and then move them around in the picture space seeking out a distilled and meditative purity. There is a haunting intensity in her art practice.

This exhibition is unified around the theme of "the home", as a place of sanctuary, the safe abode and as a unit within a broader society. The home can also be conceived as a symbol of human identity and a personal space as well as a woman's body. Few of the homes in this exhibition have windows, most simply have a small door emblematically tucked into the middle of the facade. As in the art of a whole range of artists, including Louise Bourgeois and Sally Smart, in Madeleine Winch's art the home is quite a fluid metaphor for a raft of emotional and spiritual associations.

The exhibition deals with a constructed environment with most of the dwellings uninhabited and clustered together for companionship. They are as if available for occupation by the eye of the beholder. In the major painting in the exhibition, *Home*



Sanctuary (Study), oil on canvas, 30 x 30cm.

(number 16), there is a cluster of homes which forms a suburban background with a woman and infant posed in the foreground. It is a contemporary Madonna and Child image, one where the mother is a protective presence whose generous forms envelop the child, while the child clings to her mother for safety and support. It is a tender and gentle image, where the mother offers protection in the same way the home offers protection to its inhabitants.

What I admire about this exhibition is its quiet charm, the touch of melancholy and its strong meditative quality.

Winch is an artist who progressively grows stronger with age and although there have been no abrupt changes in her art in the couple of decades in which I have followed her work, she consistently refines her images, perfects her surfaces, at times enlivened with slivers of gold leaf, and creates strong and slightly otherworldly images with a hypnotic power. This is her strongest exhibition to date.