

Crispin Akerman: Paintings and works on paper

Beaver Galleries, 81 Denison Street, Deakin. Tuesday to Friday 10am-5pm, Saturday and Sunday 9am-5pm. Closes February 26.

Reviewer: **Sasha Grishin**

The Katoomba-based artist, Crispin Akerman, has, in the past couple of decades, established quite a Canberra following. This is his tenth solo exhibition with Beaver Galleries.

After some time in the music industry, most notably as a founding member and guitarist with the indie pop band Eurogliders, in 1989, at about the same time as Grace Knight left the band and they disbanded, Akerman turned seriously to art. He studied at the Julian Ashton Art School in Sydney and at the School of Art in Canberra, where he also worked as an assistant to Mandy Martin and Bob Boynes, and arrived at his signature style.

His genre is the still life composition, with vases, ginger pots, bed sheets, flowers, fruit and foliage, all beautifully observed and painted with a considerable amount of mimetic exactitude.

This detailed representational style is contrasted with a loosely worked background rich with dribbles of paint. The contrast between the exactitude in the depiction of the objects and the looseness in the handling of the surrounding masses can be interpreted as a comment on the passage of time and the ephemeral nature of life.

Balance a fine line



Crispin Akerman's *Ficifolia and ginger jar*.

It is a theme handled by numerous artists throughout the centuries, in Australia most notably by Thornton Walker, one of whose works is displayed in the neighbouring room of this gallery.

In Walker's work there is a toughness in the formal means of realisation and certain experimental awkwardness in the mark-making. In contrast, Akerman's paintings have a more facile treatment with forms growing increasingly formulaic.

Some of the care and exactitude that we found in Akerman's earlier work has vanished – for example, if you examine his *Ficifolia and ginger jar*, the flowering *Corymbia ficifolia* is handled with considerable skill, but the jug in which the flowers are contained is unconvincing and it is difficult to relate the handle to the rest of the vessel. If you look more closely at the bigger canvas, *River gum*, the relationship between the leaves and their background, leave whole messy unresolved areas.

As an artist in his early 50s, Crispin Akerman has established a recognisable signature style with an audience eager for his work.

Sadly, a signature style can quickly cross over into becoming a template style, where the earlier questioning and excitement fades and the art audience will eventually seek out earlier work where the sense of challenge is still evident.