

Art review Sasha Grishin

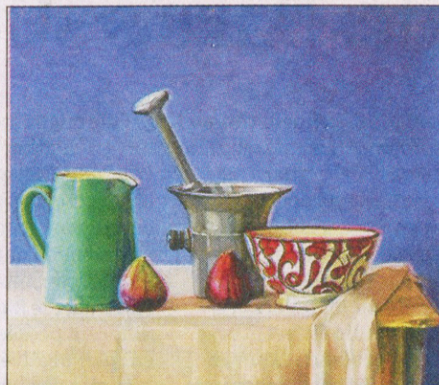
Hitting high note with jewel-like precision

Paintings by Crispin Akerman.
Beaver Galleries, 81 Denison
Street, Deakin. Until September 11.

After eight solo shows at the Beaver Galleries, Crispin Akerman has become somewhat of a local in the Canberra art scene. Recently he has moved his studio to coastal Western Australia, which frequently is the kiss of death for artists trying to keep a profile alive on the east coast. I hope Akerman will manage to maintain his standing on both sides of the continent.

About three years ago, when I last reviewed Akerman's exhibition, I made some disparaging comments about a certain sloppiness creeping into his technique. This could be interpreted as signs of haste or simply treading water as he constantly revisited his established evergreen favourite signature motif of closely observed still life compositions, generally viewed against plain colour or cloth backgrounds.

In this exhibition both of these criticisms have been answered. The technique is back to its jewel-like precision, especially in such pieces as *Lilies and shiraz rug* and *Temple jar, table and carpet*, while, in what seems to be a new departure for the artist, there is a series of quite heavily worked watercolour draw-



Crispin Akerman, *Still life with figs* in *Paintings* at Beaver Galleries.

ings on paper of scrubland with a galah. *The Galah and forest* drawing is the finest of this emerging series.

After a successful musical career as a founding member of Eurogliders, Akerman retired and turned to painting when aged in his late 20s. Now, after exhibiting professionally for more than two decades, there is room for an assessment of his development to date. Akerman, as an artist, has moved from simple arrangements of enamel pots or fruit shown against a billowing white sheet to more sophisticated compositional arrange-

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ments that have extended his repertoire of elements. There is also a greater range of "moods" in his art, so that the still life becomes a carrier of different philosophies concerning the passing of time, the transience of life and questions of the animate and inanimate in nature. It is a question of taking a subject and giving it a reality that is greater than simply a report on the physical appearance of the object.

The great Henri Matisse, when discussing a still life, observed that the "object is an actor: a good actor can play a different role in ten plays, as an object can do in ten different pictures... The object must act powerfully on the imagination, and the artist's feeling, expressing itself through the object, must render it worthy of interest. It only says what one makes it say."

Akerman has mastered a technique, a form of pictorial expression, and fostered an audience with another almost sold-out exhibition. The challenge now will be to push the art further to see if the objects can convey a whole philosophy of being.