

Arts

Boynes still pushing boundaries

ART REVIEW

ROBERT BOYNES - SMALL REFLECTIONS: PUBLIC AND PRIVATE

Beaver Galleries, 81 Denison Street, Deakin. Until November 25.

BY Sasha Grishin

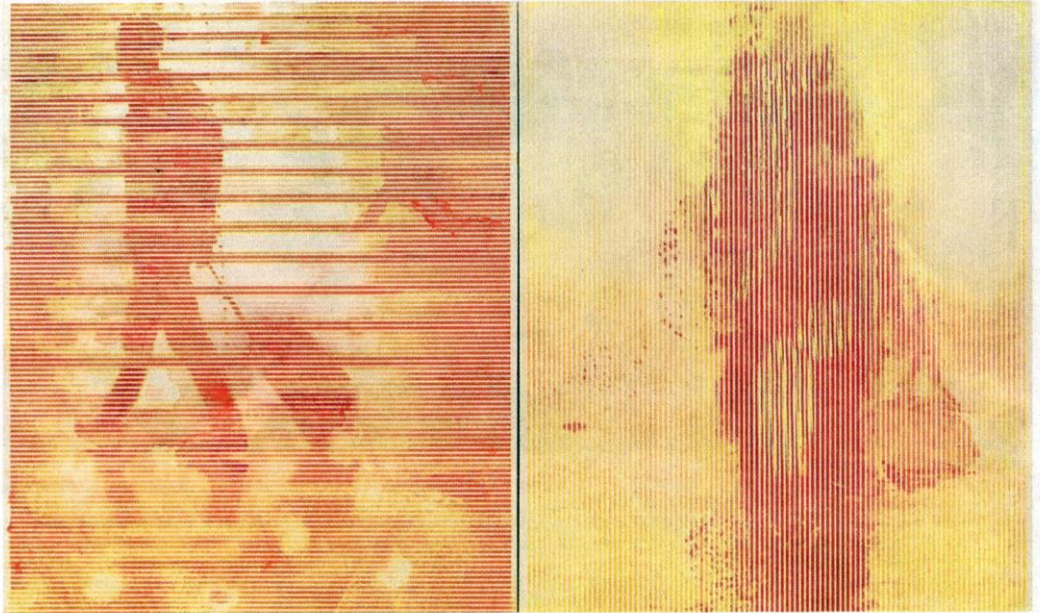
Robert Boynes' paintings over the past couple of decades have not demonstrated any radical transformations in style, technique or in the choice of imagery, but his art has not stagnated or become repetitive.

Boynes' main concerns are with the human condition, the existentialist drama and ideas of urban alienation. Frequently, there is something of a paradox in his work; where the artist tries to hide behind the immaculate facade created on the surface of his paintings, and the sense of clenched fist protest, which dates back to the radicalism of the political screen-printed posters that he made back in his Adelaide years during the 1960s.

If anything, in his most recent work there is a growing sense of urgency with the realisation that the world is out of joint and that time is running out. While the role of the artist may not be to preach or dictate a narrative, it is to witness – and in many of the paintings there appears a silhouetted head in the foreground in the form of a self-portrait to make the point that this is what the artist saw, and that he was there.

This series of paintings, we are told, stems from the artist's recent travel in Italy, where he witnessed the huge displacement of refugees and their passage through Italy as a staging point into the rest of Europe. The spaces that Boynes observed are both intimate private spaces and open public spaces, where through the intervention of mass media and CCTV, the boundaries are blurred and the private becomes part of the public realm.

Boynes' technique of employing a photo-screen printed onto canvas that undergoes numerous processes of manipulation and transformation does bear testimony to the idea that we are witnessing something like



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actual footage – a photographic reality – that lies at the foundation of the artist's observations. The acrylic surfaces are largely depersonalised, fragmented, pixelated or striped as if on a monitor screen and lack the clear imprint of the artist's hand.

Key paintings in this exhibition, including *Dazzle*, *Grit* and *Two Strangers*, sum up the range of emotions in the work, where despite the claims of objectivity and keeping of distance, a degree of angst is evident. In Australia, where refugees are treated as criminals rather than as victims, scenes of



Two Strangers, top, and *Grit* from Robert Boynes' exhibition *Small reflections: public and private* at Beaver Galleries.

European compassion in the face of the flood of suffering humanity comes as a timely contrast.

Over the years, Boynes has refused to age gracefully and remains intent on revealing uncomfortable truths.