

Dreamscapes deliver many rewards

ART REVIEW

LUX

By Peter Boggs, Beaver Galleries, 81 Denison Street, Deakin. Until March 25.

REVIEWED BY: Sasha Grishin.

Peter Boggs is a strange sort of artist to be attracting national acclaim. His paintings are on a relatively small scale, but not miniatures, his palette is restrained, tonal, but not monochromatic, and the subject matter consists of landscapes (mainly parks and bridges in this exhibition) or room interiors set in Australia and Europe, but not immediately recognisable or internationally famous landmarks.

However, in recent years, his art has attracted serious attention with sell-out shows in Sydney and Brisbane. Born in New Zealand, where he trained under Colin McCahon, Boggs arrived in Australia 30 years ago and for most of the time has been living and painting quietly in the Blue Mountains. Although focused and consistent with a Giorgio Morandi-like obsession for distilled tonal perfection and cleverly calculated geometric structures, in Boggs's art over the past couple of decades there have been quite radical changes and developments. He has moved from rather deliberate and closely observed still life compositions to depopulated townscape and parklands and somewhat eerie, empty room interiors.

If you'll pardon the expression, Boggs' paintings have grown increasingly "weird" over time. The artist no longer seems to have complete conscious control over the composition or the growth of the painting, but operates on autopilot and the 40 years of painting experience instinctively lead to the adoption of the golden section in the structure of the picture space and the tones suggest themselves in the process of work. They are memory paintings, where there is nothing out of place, each detail is perfectly resolved and one painting leads to the next in a logical and organic manner.

It is quite an exciting experience to follow through the sequence of studies in a Boggs exhibition, such as the series of interiors or bridge scenes, where each one is pushing the next a little further, the risk-taking is heightened and the final outcome may be as



The Lux exhibition of works by Peter Boggs includes (anti-clockwise from above) *Study for Giardino dei Sogni iii*, *View of the Seine, late autumn* and *Interior ix (VT, Le)*.

much a surprise to the artist as it is to his audience.

A major painting, such as *Interior ix (V.T., Le)*, is quite austere, almost Italian Renaissance-like in its tiled floors and windows that bring together the interior and exterior spaces. Part of its magic lies in its complex geometry and perspectival structure, and the fascinating play with light sources, shadows and reflections. There is more than a touch of the uncanny, where we seem to be visiting an enigmatic space that is charged with meaning and that strange element of *deja vu*. The restrained colours seduce and entice the eye as we seem to partake of some mystery, with possibly the

touch of something slightly sinister, an unspoken secret that this interior holds.

The large tondi paintings, especially *Giardino dei Sogni i*, revive the Renaissance format of a circular artwork, where Boggs' favourite subject matter of the ordered Italian landscaped garden is revisited. The format adds to the challenge of the geometric complexity of the composition and the play of solids and voids that engage the eye. I love these paintings where the eye is invited to enter and take a walk in the picture space and encounter all sorts of unexpected visual delights. The mood is quiet and sombre in these dreamscapes, where, if you allow the magic to envelop you,

you embark on a deeply meditative experience.

Viewing Boggs' paintings is like catching elements of a narrative or a floating conversation, which is intriguing, engaging, but ultimately never completely knowable. Part of the viewing process is the attempt on behalf of the viewer to complete and own the mystery of the work.

Now aged in his 60s, Boggs is establishing the reputation of one of Australia's finest tonal painters and while his works do not possess an enormous immediate "wow" factor, they are a form of slow art, which will continue to constantly reward the viewer over a period of many years.

