



EYE-CATCHING: *Landscape with three echidnas*, oil on linen, by painter, print-maker and sculptor Dean Bowen.

Simply vibrant

Dean Bowen: Paintings, prints and bronzes, Beaver Galleries, 81 Denison St, Deakin. Closes Monday. Open daily, 10am-5pm.

DEAN Bowen has become a regular exhibitor at the Beaver Galleries and, on this occasion, both gallery spaces have been given over to his paintings, prints and sculptures, all celebrating, in his highly simplified manner and vibrant colours, the joy, frustration and farce of being.

In the exhibition, two bold works hang side-by-side, *Cat*, 2006 (No 27) and *Giant bird*, 2006 (No 28). The first is a colour etching with a rich and wonderful surface combining scratchy drypoint, tonal aquatint and colour etching. It is like an image of the mind of a cat, but one seen from a child's perspective.

The cat's head dominates the space, in fact it occupies virtually all of the picture plane and we just catch a glimpse of the surrounding background void receding into the distance.

It is a portrait of a ginger cat, with simplified eyes, whiskers and a pronounced nose, simple, yet very sophisticated, and accomplished in its technique.

It brings to mind the cats of Paul Klee with the strange tension between the inner and outer space.

Giant bird is in some ways similar, but is painted in oils in a technique referring to the traditions of naive art.

The surfaces are competent, but not particularly interesting and while the imagery has all the hallmarks of Dean Bowen's art, it lacks something of the magic of the etchings. It is in the bigger urbscape paintings, including *East link* (No 17),



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Review

Diverging road (No 5) and especially *Crossed highways* (No2), where the geometry of the design is effectively married with the technique. Again, a parallel with the thematically related lithograph, *Wild ride* (No14), stresses the artist's ease and sophistication as a printmaker in contrast to his efforts as a painter.

It is not that he is a bad painter, but he is simply a brilliant printmaker.

The bronzes, which play a relatively minor role in this exhibition, curiously seem to organically grow out of the prints, almost like matrices which have been given a new lease on life as three-dimension forms.

Particularly effective is the self-referential tongue-in-cheek *Boy with house and tree* (No 30).

Graham Fransella once observed that he regarded his paintings as studies for his etchings. While Dean Bowen works in three mediums, I wonder if he secretly shares Fransella's views. In this exhibition, it is the prints, particularly the etchings, which are the strongest part of the work.