Formidable artist shows strength

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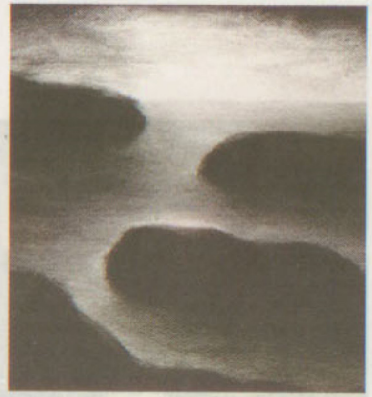
Kirrily Hammond: From this distance

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

A Novocastrian by birth, a Canberran in art training and a Melbournian by residence and employment, Kirrily Hammond celebrates in her art a landscape which exists neither on Earth nor in purely in the imagination, but somewhere in a zone in between.



From left: *Gippsland twilight 2*, oil on linen, 30 x 30cm; *Archipelago*, charcoal on Fabriano paper, 70.8 x 88.8cm; and *Gippsland twilight 6*, oil on linen, 30 x 30cm.

She evokes a romantic sensibility with awe-inspiring coastal settings shown at dusk or at night with celestial dramas of sublime majesty being played out in the heavens above. If in her earlier work she turned to surrealism and its strategies, here she seems to explore the world of English Romanticism. It appears as if she is trying in her work to marry the sense of the sublime drama encountered in the art of someone like John Martin and the mystical intimacy found in the graphic work of Samuel Palmer. In Hammond's depiction of the sublime we do not experience the quality of terror and awe, but a sense of glowing inner radiance.

Hammond is primarily an etcher and her intaglio prints, including *Doubtful Sound*, *Floating island*, *Night islands* and *Storm brewing*, all of them drypoints and many of them with lovely passages of aquatint, form the highlight of this exhibition. She manages beautifully the silences which etching permits, so that we can be drawn into the composition and be swept up by its dramatic dynamism and yet discover the pockets of tranquillity.

As inspirational source material, she has been looking at the Fiordlands of New Zealand – *Milford Sound*, *Doubtful Sound* and *Lake Manapouri* – as well as the Gippsland landscapes of Victoria.

In contrast with the etchings, in her large charcoal drawings, including *Lake Manapouri* and *Floating*, she seems more of a prisoner to the specificity of local topography, with the total resolution of the composition in part rescued through the virtuosity of her technique.

The oil paintings are the most ambitious and perhaps the least satisfactory of the works on display, where difficulties with technique do not permit her the freedom and versatility encountered in her etchings. The small paper and wire whimsical constructions, brimming with potential, in their present state add little to the show.

This is certainly the strongest of Hammond's three solo exhibitions at the Beaver Galleries to date and she emerges as a formidable artist who has been cultivating the sense of romantic otherness which now she has made into her own and distinctive artistic language.