

Challenging path flows in rewards

Thornton Walker has been exhibiting his paintings, watercolours and etchings for more than three decades and has built up a loyal following among museum curators and the general art public.

Walker's paintings are visually attractive, even seductive, but unlike artists, including Tim Sorrier, Jason Benjamin and Tim Maguire, where generally what you see is what you get and there is a certain predictable inevitability about the outcome, Walker embraces the challenge of chance and explores the sense of the enigma. Although at first glance at one of Walker's paintings one is impressed by the virtuosity in the paint application, but this almost appears as an intuitive response to a meditative exploration of the imagery, where the final result is as much of a surprise to the artist as it is to the viewer.

Walker is an artist who seeks to explore the creative potential of dreams and in this exhibition there is a strong sense of a dream-like quality. His use of mirror writing for most of the inscriptions in this exhibition may in part stem from an amazement with his daughter who seems just as happy to write in reverse as the correct way round. The inscriptions themselves he jotted down when waking from dreams, but by employing the mirror script, they also act as a metaphor for the dream itself, which is not immedi-



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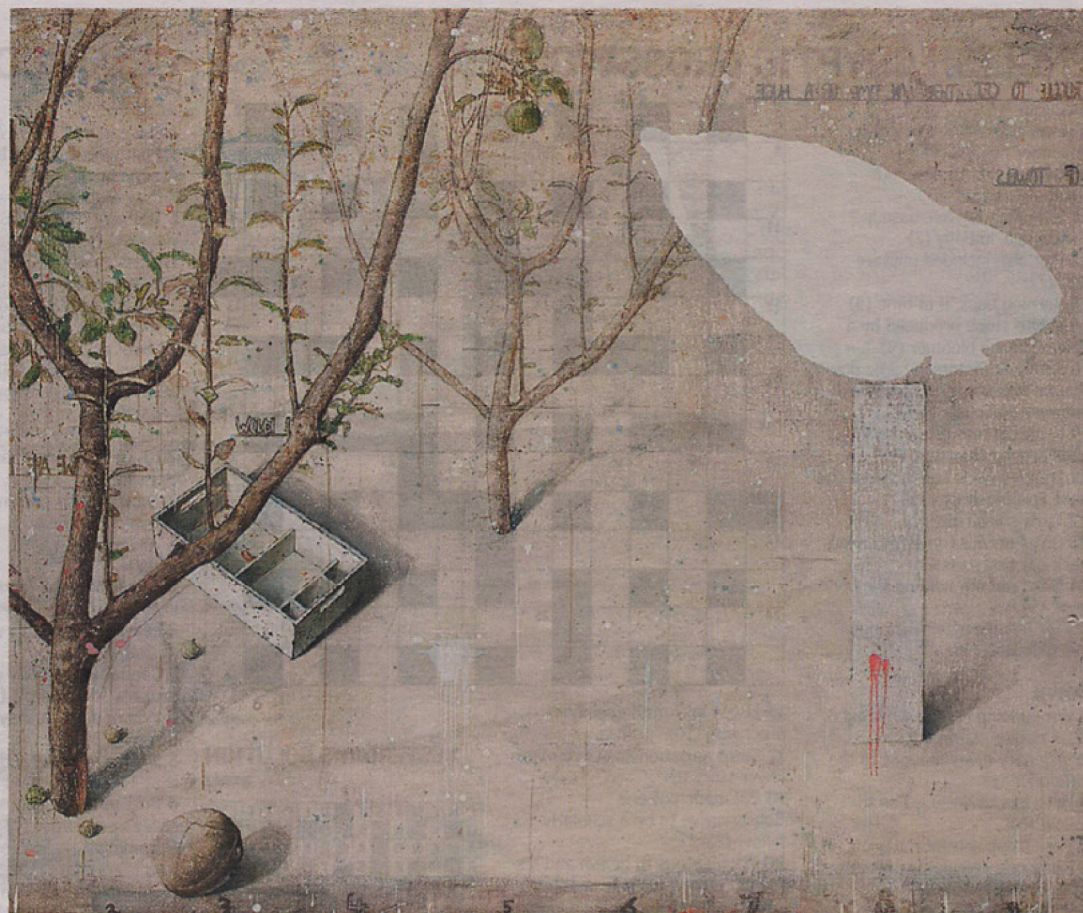
Thornton Walker: Paintings and works on paper.

Beaver Galleries, 81 Denison Street, Deakin.
Open Tuesday to Friday, 10am-5pm, and weekends, 9am-5pm. Ends May 26.

ately self-evident or accessible. While the immediate catalyst for some of the paintings may have been a private dream in which he saw an usher who showed him a map, objects for contemplation are drawn from the real world, such as the apple tree in his backyard, an old toolbox, an old children's model farm barn or a skull borrowed from a doctor friend.

There is a strong sense of implied narrative, particularly in the finest work in the show, *The Usher II*, but it is not one which has a literal decipherment. As in much of his previous work there is the quality of a Zen-like meditation or that of a waking dream, one where one has slept little, but seen much.

A positive development in the new body of work is the abandonment of acrylics and the use of oils



with their wonderful tactile surfaces. On one hand they are visually seductive paintings, but on the other, they are quite tough, challenging and perplexing.

The objects are selected as triggers for contemplation and then through a process of layering of surfaces, washes, drips and stains, they are allowed to embrace that quality of otherness. They appear as real and tangible, but always refer to a different and more spiritual reality.

This is a very rewarding exhibition by an artist who has rejected the safety of a formulaic approach and continues to challenge himself and his audiences.

Details from one of Thornton Walker's works: *The Usher II* (200x250cm, oil and collage).