



## Graeme Drendel

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**GRAEME DRENDEL** can spend hours or days alone in the studio with the same characters in various reincarnations. I spoke with the artist before *Outsiders* opened at Beaver Galleries for some insight into his preoccupation with relationships and how the “vagueries of the human condition” affect his practice.

In contemporary art composition is not always centre stage, but for Drendel it underscores one important thing. “I paint connections and disconnection between characters and often disconnection can have as much or more meaning. We are conscious of ourselves, our gesture, our stance, but it’s also something other people notice. I see it on the tram, in first encounters.” With cinematic flair two cropped paintings of the faces of the male and female characters in another painting, *The Thin Air of Desire*, oil on canvas, offer insight into the inner worlds of his “cast”. Drendel explains: “I am trying to get into their heads... to get behind their eyes. I’m curious, what are they thinking about... or seeing?”

Drendel’s actors hold feathers, walk a pair of ferrets, carry buckets, hover in space, nurse farm animals, shotguns or tug at long Soviet-era braided hair. However, symbols, in short, are our own creation. “We all have events, glances, ideas that keep recurring throughout life, you catch these same feelings or moments,” poses Drendel. Do we notice these things because of something within us or just because it happens? Drendel tempts reality and fiction against the backdrop of Ouyen, country Victoria, where he was raised. Like in a still life it can be a relief not to have to think about the background Drendel explains, mainly because he thinks of his characters “as alone in this group setting anyhow, you know the feeling – you’re always locked within your own thoughts, even in a crowd.”

Early in his 20s Drendel visited galleries, read art books and developed a palette for art. He admired the Renaissance artists for their fidelity to the figure and ability to spin a narrative. Later he noticed that a lot of contemporary art he’d observed years before had faded out of fashion, so “I resolved in my early 30s that I would only paint what I wanted.” Balthus galvanised him, famed for his resistance of the tyranny of labels, histories, or biographies.

Morandi also inspired Drendel. Painting the same things sometimes can be frustrating but it presents a challenge to stay satisfied. You work harder, refine the ideas. Drendel says the most excruciating moment is calling something finished. “When I think I have finished a painting I come back into the room and I stand in front of it and I look each character in the eye.”

*Outsiders* runs from Thursday-Tuesday March 1-20 at Beaver Galleries, 81 Denison Street in Deakin. The gallery’s opening hours are 10am-5pm Tuesday-Friday and 9am-5pm on Saturday and Sunday.

<http://www.bmamag.com/articles/exhibitionist/20120227-graeme-drendel/>