

Exploring space and time

The Philosopher's Cup: Chris Denton

Beaver Galleries, 81 Denison Street, Deakin
Closes June 12, Tuesday-Friday 10am-5pm,
Saturday-Sunday 9am-5pm

Reviewer: **Sasha Grishin**

Chris Denton is a classic "slow burn" artist who first came to prominence when he graduated under Jorg Schmeisser at what was then the Canberra School of Art and worked in the intricate multi-plate colour etching technique of his master.

Subsequently, he gradually extended his vision, slowly pushing the boundaries of his inquiry. A serious interest in science has been a characteristic of these inquiries, particularly of physics, the shape of time and of mathematics. I have never quite understood some of his scientific concerns and even in the present show I am not quite certain what it means when I am told that his work "takes inspiration from Einstein and others on the concept of space, particularly empty space and its relationship to the material object".

This exhibition of drawings and etchings deals with the arrangement of bowls, particularly oriental bowls as in the work of Thornton Walker, in cupboards, cabinets and on shelves. In a way, it is a play with the bowl in space and as observed within different perspectival systems.

The highlight of the show, undoubtedly, is a series of five drypoint etchings called *The Philosopher's Cabinet 18*, which is taken through five states and finally an impression of the cancelled plate. Etching can be a very confessional, diaristic and intimate medium, especially when using drypoint, where basically the design is scratched into the metal plate. You get dramatic, rich velvety line with a delicious burr.

In the first state, we have a skeleton of the three bowls suspended within the cabinet. In the second state, all of the main ingredients have been rethought and a completely different image emerges. In the third state, in other words the third reworking of the same plate, the dynamics of

the composition have been altered and a new sense of drama has entered the fray.

In the fourth state, the background has been rethought and dark aquatint added and the whole image has the melancholy impact of a nocturne. In the fifth and final state, one with a light aquatint background, there is a new sense of resurrection and rebirth of the image with a powerful, yet enigmatic quality. Denton takes the viewer on a journey of discovery through the single plate, one imbued with considerable power. As a finale, the artist has, with violent strokes, cancelled the plate, designating that this tiny edition of five original prints is now complete, and has printed the cancelled plate which, perhaps unexpectedly, creates quite a powerful expressionist image. The end of a journey.

Denton is a wonderful intaglio printmaker and it is his prints, rather than the immaculately worked drawings, which shine through.



The Philosopher's Cup.