

Review of Kirrily Hammond: Suburbia, with menace in the air

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Sasha Grishin



Street Signs, Brunswick East

Kirrily Hammond: *Suburbia*

Beaver Galleries, 81 Denison Street, Deakin

Closes November 25, Tues-Fri 10am-5pm, Sat-Sun 9am-5pm

Although most Australians live in the suburbs, Australian artists have generally been a little shy of this subject. There have been notable exceptions, for example, the early works of John Brack and the art of Howard Arkley, but these hardly constitute a major tradition in Australian art, as do the landscape, the outback or still life compositions.

Kirrily Hammond, now a Melbourne-based artist but until about a decade ago living in Canberra, is fundamentally a printmaker with a romantic predisposition. Her images are moody, frequently set at dusk, and often touched by the sense of awe and embracing the sublime in nature. She has now brought this sensibility to the streetscapes of her adopted city of Melbourne and its tightly packed inner northern suburbs.

In terms of their sense of presence, her work brings to mind those melting tonal visions of Clarice Beckett and her watery images of dawn and dusk in her particular patch of Melbourne, the suburb of Beaumaris. Except I find something slightly menacing about Hammond's vision of Melbourne suburbia, particularly the suburb of Brunswick, from which come virtually all of the small oil paintings and charcoal drawings in this exhibition.

The paintings *Laneway, Brunswick East, Bladen Ave, Brunswick East, Canberra St, Brunswick* and the drawing *Street signs, Brunswick East*, all imply an exactitude of location through their titles, yet appear to be devoid of human inhabitants. There is an anonymity in this suburbia, where danger is not depicted, but seems to lurk somewhere behind the facades of suburban houses. It was in Brunswick that the 29-year-old Jill Meagher was brutally raped and murdered in 2012, an incident which deeply scarred the whole Brunswick community.

There is nothing in Hammond's quiet observations of suburbia at dusk that would link them to these horrific events, but it is a slightly menacing and foreboding atmosphere that pervades in many of the scenes. For me the most successful work at this exhibition is the monochrome drawing *Street Signs, Brunswick East*. The signs themselves are left deliberately illegible, the facade of the house is thickly veiled in shadows, while the framing foreground space is dominated by a number of fleeting reflections. Although there is a simplicity in the general compositional structure, the notion of ambiguity gives that slightly unnerving note to the drawing. As far as the viewer knows, nothing bad has ever happened here, but the note of foreboding suggests invisible evil forces at play in the air.

As with most of Hammond's exhibitions, this one is quite small, only a dozen pieces, tightly united thematically, but possessing the quality of "otherness".

This story was found at: <http://www.canberratimes.com.au/act-news/canberra-life/review-of-kirrily-hammond-suburbia-with-menace-in-the-air-20141114-11m8ho.html>