

Art review Sasha Grishin

Art with attitude

Judy Horacek: *Far and Near*: works on paper and small objects. Beaver Galleries, 81 Denison Street, Deakin. Until November 29.

Judy Horacek is almost everybody's favourite satirist and cartoonist. For almost two decades we have followed her work at the Helen Maxwell Gallery and now we greet her reincarnation with a first solo show at the Beaver Galleries. The woman with altitude, as she is known from one of her most popular publications, combines verbal puns, simple lucid illustrations and a healthy dose of feminism to create humorous one-liners that tend to go beyond the topical and ephemeral. It is a quality of Horacek's humour that it engages with popular culture and manages to comment on broader social concerns. It is the sort of humour that has a bit of a sting in its tail.

I am uncertain who is responsible for the popular cartographic revival in Australian art, but I suspect it may come more from Bruce Petty and Michael Leunig than Guan Wei. Judy Horacek joins in the fray with her populated map-like watercolour paintings and etchings, where stranded women appear in the sea in small toy-like boats as in *Not Quite a Map*, *Journey*, *Ghost Ships*, *Wish You Were Here Boat* or *Heart Lands*. In her catalogue note she observes, "I love old maps, travel, boats and flying. I wanted to make work that tried to capture the beauty, spirit and idiosyncrasies of these things."

She is an artist who enjoys the absurd with a dose of black humour. One of my favourites from the show is a small watercolour painting, *The Failed Mermaid*, where a forlorn naked female figure is seated on a jutting rock in the middle of a stormy ocean and a sphere of light, like a spotlight, illuminates her predicament with her mermaid's tail senselessly attached to her head as a crown, rather than to her feet to enable her to swim. It is very simple and accessible, but also perfect in its own right with the touch of a tragi-farce about the situation that has been presented.

In this exhibition there are two departures for Horacek. The first is a series of delightful circular photopolymer relief prints, also known as solarplates, in which



Judy Horacek, *The Failed Mermaid*.



Judy Horacek, *Heart Lands*.

she presents very simple emblematic characters who announce "near" or "far" or "flying" or "journey". They are direct, simple, but also quite subtle in their execution. The other is a number of pottery blobs that achieve very little, other than proving that Horacek is not a ceramicist, at least, not yet.

As always with Judy Horacek, we are greeted with a show that has humour, attitude and a generous dose of humanity. While not completely sold out, Canberra audiences have welcomed back one of their favourite pictorial satirists.



Judy Horacek, *Ghost Ships*.