



Helen Geier's *Ying & Yang* (collage, acrylic, oil stick on canvas 200x150cm).

## Works rich in ambiguity



**SASHA GRISHIN**

**Helen Geier: Strange Plants**  
Beaver Galleries, 81 Denison Street,  
Deakin. Tues-Fri 10am - 5pm, Sat-Sun,  
9am-5pm. Closes September 23.

**H**elen Geier is one of our region's best-known artists, having held about 50 solo exhibitions throughout Australia as well as in Europe and Asia.

Much of her art is built around the idea of seamlessly uniting opposites.

She attempts to reconcile the cerebral and the sensuous. She employs Western European spatial constructions built through linear perspective and those of Asian art, where space is perceived more as an intuitive form of aerial perspective.

She also attempts to unite that which is a product of an abstract intellectual construct, an artificial visual code, with that which is observed through primary natural observation.

Her exhibition *Strange Plants*, consisting of eight mixed-media paintings and four drawings, brings many of these preoccupations together.

They are deliberately fantastic creations where we are initially seduced by the surface qualities of the image and then are drawn into the labyrinth complexity of their possible meanings.

Geier's art thrives on its sense of ambiguity and the rich mosaic which she creates of possible cross-cultural references.

*Temple tree, Ying and yang, Silver wreath, Torn tree and Transported* are all images which engage with this idea of disjunction.

However, this disjunction is realised not only on a conceptual level, but also in the process of her art making.

She frequently combines painting in acrylics with drawing with oil stick, with collage of printed elements as well as wax crayon.

Technically this is certainly a very difficult balancing act to sustain, like walking on a razor's edge, and I don't feel that she has been uniformly successful throughout the exhibition.

A number of pieces look more attractive and resolved from a considerable viewing distance and seem to fall apart on closer inspection, where haste in execution does not quite equate to virtuosity.

As a general observation, there is a cerebral toughness which characterises her exhibition – the ability to focus on a particular idea and to strip it down to its essence – but this is always linked with the need to make aesthetically pleasing objects.

It is this combination of intellectual rigour and a sense of beauty that gives Geier's art its special quality of magic.