

# Prints create dystopian world of pain

## ART REVIEW

### SLOW BOAT

By David Frazer

Beaver Galleries, 81 Denison Street, Deakin.  
Tuesday to Friday, 10am to 5pm, Saturday and  
Sunday, 9am to 5pm. Until March 4.

REVIEWED BY Sasha Grishin

David Frazer is primarily a graphic artist, a printmaker, who in his work creates a little microcosm, or a convincing parallel universe, where all of the dreams, aspirations and futile endeavours of humankind are brought together.

In each of his exhibitions we are provided with a few more clues concerning this created reality, whether it be caravan parks, suburban houses (sometimes with figures on the roof) or grand but depressing drought-stricken landscapes. It is a world of existential angst, tragic despair, frustration, heightened passions and profound melancholy.

The main metaphor in this created world is that of the "Slow boat".

In an act of complete futility, a small rowboat is shown stranded among the bushes and the trees. Time has taken its toll and the boat is not only functionless, it also completely lacks a purpose, stranded a long way from any water. Yet the boat is observed in loving detail as is the landscape setting that surrounds it.

In this exhibition, Frazer includes his monumental linocut, *Slow boat*, which measures 120 centimetres by 180 centimetres and is his largest print to date. The fashion for huge, detailed relief prints, for a number of decades has been the domain of Indigenous and Torres Strait Islander artists, including Dennis Nona, Billy Missi and Alick Tipoti, where some of their largest linocuts have been more than eight metres long.

At just under two metres, Frazer follows in their footsteps to produce a "grand narrative" print where the detail is mesmerising, but unlike the Torres Strait Islander works where a whole cosmography is revealed, here we see in the foreground



the disintegrating rowboat with a grand landscape vista behind it.

There is almost a tapestry-like effect where, in complete stillness and within even illumination, all detail is precisely picked out so that the pattern on the bark of trees, the stones on the ground and the clouds in the sky have a similar sense of solidity and materiality. It is a virtuoso technical performance, but one without an obvious purpose for this virtuosity. It is a statement concerning futility that is expressed through the imagery, scale and technique.

In contrast with this landscape of grandeur, a number of other prints are

realised as small exquisite wood-engravings and appear like snapshots in this comic-tragic existence, where little figures appear trapped within their environment sheltering from the storm in a stranded boat in the bush or standing by the side of a broken car.

Frazer provides us with a glimpse into the collective social lives of his rural folk, such as the *Happy Hour* images realised both as linocuts and wood-engravings, where these bogans of the bush are crowded together in compositions and shown drinking, vomiting and crawling along the floor. Each figure, despite the crowded appearance of the composition, is stranded, alone and caught in



Left, David Frazer, *Passing storm*, edition of 60, in *Slow Boat* at Beaver Galleries; and above a second work by Frazer, *Wounded Wood II*.

*Frazer provides us with a glimpse into the collective social lives of his rural folk.*

his private hell. We are given no details as to the location of this private Eden, although possibly it is not too far from the artist's home near Castlemaine in rural Victoria.

It is one where frustration boils over into violence and where these alienated little figures struggle to establish their identities.

All of nature carries the scars of this existence, including the wounded wood where the anthropomorphic trees seem to writhe in pain and nature weeps in view of this unfolding tragedy.

David Frazer has produced another powerful exhibition where a rural dystopia prevails and the tranquillity of the bush masks a world of pain and loneliness.