

This whimsical fantasy world has a touch of the absurd

Art review

Sasha Grishin

JUDY Horacek: *Instances*: watercolours, prints and ceramics. Beaver Galleries, 81 Denison Street, Deakin. Until May 19.

Judy Horacek is a multi-faceted, creative individual whose work as a cartoonist, and through books including *Woman with altitude* and *I am woman, hear me draw*, has grabbed the national limelight. She has also held more than 40 group and solo exhibitions with work in various techniques and mediums.

In her art, Horacek enjoys creating a fantasy world, one steeped in some sort of a historical mythology, and then populating it with little quizzical individuals who seem slightly bemused by their situation. Over the years, she has developed her own peculiar imagery, which is recognisably her own and not to be confused with the figures of Bruce Petty or Michael Leunig.

In this exhibition, inspiration stems from ancient Mycenaean and Cycladic figurines that in Horacek's work

have been reimagined within peculiar situations or what she prefers to call 'instances'. She explains that she arrived at this terminology from a museum text dealing with Mycenaean ceramics, where it was stated that, "according to the skills of the makers, these figurines can be arranged in endless instances".

Horacek observes: "I am

fascinated by the fact that often we don't know what these figures were, they were often buried for centuries before being rediscovered. Did they represent humans or gods, were they used for ceremonies or children's games?"

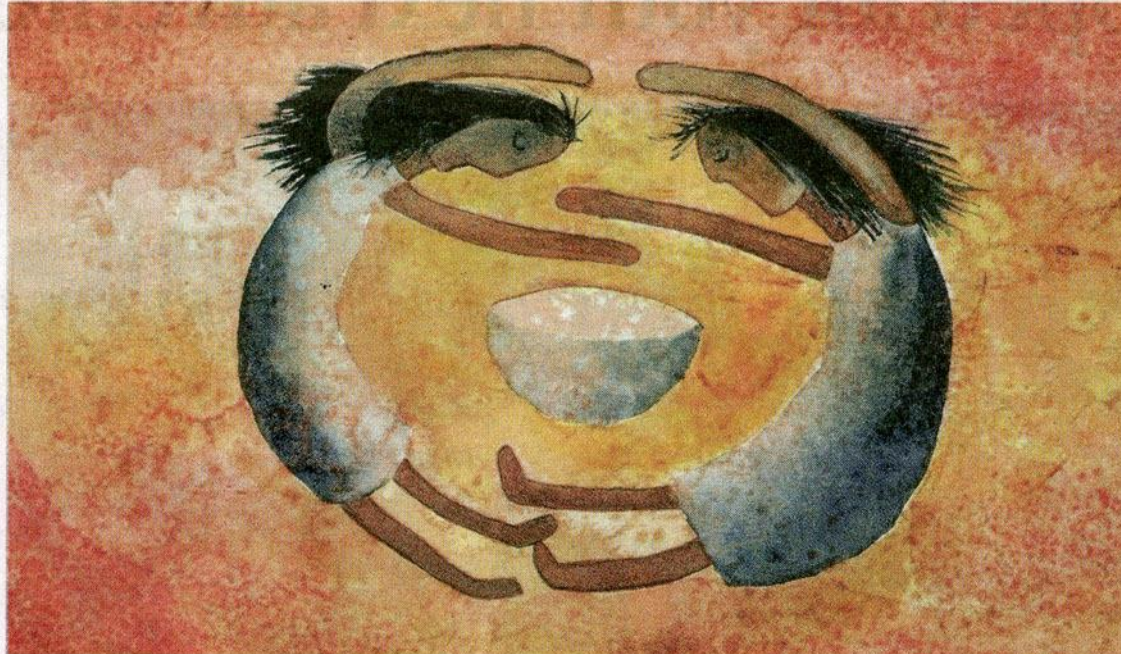
These reflections have given her imagination free rein and Horacek figurines in-

habit various slightly absurd situations. Some are realised as photopolymer intaglio prints (beautifully printed by Dianne Longley at her Agave Studio in Trentham, Victoria), etchings (printed by Basil Hall in Canberra) and watercolour drawings and small porcelain figures fabricated by the artist herself.

Horacek in her art enjoys

the challenge to create a slightly whimsical situation in which her figures find themselves with a touch of the absurd and the ridiculous.

In a wonderful watercolour drawing, *Sleeping*, Horacek depicts two of her female figures suspended around what I take to be a bubbling cauldron. The



Judy Horacek, *Sleeping* in *Instances* at Beaver Galleries.

background is like a melting sunset caught in watercolour washes. Are the figures enacting a dream or caught in some sort of trance? There are few clues provided through which to decipher this enigmatic little gem.

In another watercolour, *Hello birds*, Horacek employs her favourite stamps, which I first encountered in her work many years ago after she returned from a residency in Switzerland. A little repetitive uniformed figure, with arms raised, is stamped into the composition and appears to encounter two dark shapes, possibly birds, or some sort of winged harbingers against a dissolving blue background.

My favourite piece in the show, *Sticks and Stone Age*, possibly painted in homage to Paul Klee, I find a bit menacing with a fallen sepulchral figure, possibly never to rise again.

The artist creates her contemplative "instances" that the viewer is invited to interpret. As with Mycenaean art, the original intent and context are lost and we are challenged by Horacek's lyrical inventions.