



**SASHA GRISHIN**

**Peter Boggs: Paintings**

Beaver Galleries, 81 Denison Street, Deakin. Closes April 13.

**P**eter Boggs has been exhibiting his small, intimate tonal paintings in Canberra for about 12 years.

There is nothing demonstrative or attention grabbing about his work – but his paintings, once examined closely, command an enormous sense of presence and effectively evoke an enigmatic atmosphere.

Nothing is what it at first seems, mystery seems to lurk around each corner and that which is shown implies the existence of a presence which is more powerful, but to us invisible.

Although location is of critical importance to Boggs and his art is haunted by obsessive themes, such as the Boboli Gardens behind the Pitti Palace in Florence or the deserted towns of outback Australia, the locations have increasingly become mindscapes devoid of any literalness.

They are haunting, remembered settings which possess the quality of a waking dream.

I am tempted to associate them with the concept of the uncanny, the concept frequently related to Sigmund Freud, where something appears simultaneously familiar, yet foreign, it is the quality of something which is uncomfortably strange.

If one glances at the three main canvases at this exhibition – *Boboli XX/2*, *In the garden of dreams 2 (Boboli)* and *In the garden of dreams 3 (Boboli)*, the quality of the uncanny dreamscape is complete.



Clockwise from main: details of Peter Boggs's *Boboli XX*, *Western sun* and *In the garden of dreams 3 (Boboli)*.

Boggs employs two deliberate surrealist devices: the complete depopulation of his landscapes, gardens and towns and the use of wonderful mysterious shadows.

However, his main conceptual strategy is the manipulation of the

formal structure of his tonal masses to create a jarring and disturbing note which characterises much of his art.

There is something which is bleak, lonely and disturbing in his paintings, where in terms of narrative nothing much happens, but the sense of anticipation is immense.

If in the earlier works there was a conscious use of drawings as a form of aide memoire, now they have become almost completely

memory paintings, where the familiarity and identification with the object has grown so complete that Boggs evokes in his work an almost metaphysical experience of the place.

The other quality which struck me about the recent work is its diaristic intimacy.

As you move from canvas to canvas, very much as is the case with Giorgio Morandi's work, there is a quality of a self-portrait as the artist constantly reveals



more of his feelings and more of his spiritual and intellectual life. In this sense they are very daring, yet quite intimate paintings.

With every exhibition – and I think that Peter Boggs has had about five solo exhibitions in Canberra to date – there is a mounting intensity and propensity for risk taking.

These are exquisite paintings and in time I suspect they will be recognised as significant works in Australian art.