

ARTS

Art Sasha Grishin

Impressive showing of humanity's endless expression

Robert Boynes: *Traffic*. Beaver Galleries, 81 Denison Street, Deakin. Tuesday to Friday 10am-5pm, Saturday and Sunday 9am-5pm. Closes May 27.

Robert Boynes is a veteran in the Australian art scene who, despite his numerous stylistic changes and the wide repertoire of imagery, has remained true to his main concerns as a humanist artist.

When he first emerged as an artist in Adelaide, it was at the height of the political poster collective movement, when young artists grew progressively disillusioned in art schools and their preoccupation with formalist stylistic languages and conceptual and minimalist concerns. Against the

background of growing militarism and official government genuflection before American values, Boynes' early imagery actively attacked the icons of US Imperialism.

The visionary founder of the Canberra School of Art, Udo Sellbach, attracted Boynes to Canberra, where for many years he was the head of the painting workshop and had a strong impact on several generations of Canberra artists. What has remained constant in his practice has been the primacy he has given the human condition and his desire to employ the definite and the specific image or urban situation, but through it make a comment which has a broad and universal significance.

Ambiguity is a hallmark of his art, where meaning is never fixed but is constantly involved in a process of slippage and the human form is eroded by its environment.

The specific catalyst for this body of work may have been seeing a series of dots on a wall in Fremantle but this information does not particularly assist us in getting a handle on this series of acrylic paintings. In his works we see and "hear" the human form and its echoes in CCTV monitors, the soundscape of the city and reflections and refractions in the urban environment.

His process of work has frequently more affinities with screenprinting than traditional easel painting with superimposed layers of images applied and then gradually worked back to expose ghost-

like traces of earlier existence. It is almost as if white noise invades the picture space.

In his painting *2617*, there are juxtaposed suspended hands and displaced feet, while in *Heatwave*, the word "HOON" appears floating in space. Bikini-clad bathers, hikers, shoppers, children and street walkers inhabit a difficult to define space, where the beach and urban graffiti are caught in an uneasy truce. The strength of the work lies precisely in this lack of specificity, where each viewer brings to the work their own range of experiences.

This is a strong exhibition by an artist who has not lost his fascination for what makes us human plus the desire to explore how our humanity finds an endless expression in an urban environment.