

Lyrical prints with the strange quality of dreams

ART REVIEW

MELODIC MONOLOGUES: WORKS ON PAPER

By Christina Cordero. Beaver Galleries, 81 Denison Street, Deakin. Until May 20.

REVIEWED BY Sasha Grishin

Many years ago, when I was compiling a book on the state of contemporary printmaking in Australia, I approached more than 100 artists, including Christina Cordero.

Cordero was the one who was the most reticent in providing biographical details – even her date of birth.

Now, almost 20 years later and having met and spoken to her on numerous occasions, my knowledge of her biography has scarcely improved.

I know that she was born in Chile; lived for prolonged periods of time in China and in France in the 1960s, and fled Chile from the murderous Pinochet military junta to seek refuge in Australia in 1973, where she has remained.

In Chile she was teaching at the university, while in Australia, she reinvented herself as an artist and created her own peculiar dream-like, escapist imagery inspired by Jungian theories, her own experiences and by her travels in the realms of literature and music.

She writes that her art practice is based, "on thoughts, feelings and dreams that emerge from the experience of living for over 40 years 'in between' cultures.

It has been a 'floating' world ... enriching,



Right, Christina Cordero, *Melody* in *Melodic monologues* at Beaver Galleries; Christina Cordero, *Passing by*, in *Melodic monologues* at Beaver Galleries.

liberating and sometimes lonely, driving me to connect with intensity to my work, the images and the stories."

This strange, obsessive dream-like quality has become a hallmark of her art as it has developed over the past few decades.

Her etching *Melody* is fairly characteristic of her art of recent years.

It is intimate in scale, about 10 by 10 centimetres, and creates what could be termed an illuminated tableau that you are invited to enter and explore.

Small ideographs are shown suspended on 10 strange stalks – they include a moon, a bird, an eye, a fish, a flower and musical notes – which appear to sway in some mysterious breeze. In the background there are faint tracings of letters (shown in reverse) and musical notation.

The stalks seem to grow from a terrestrial



level but reach into some celestial sphere.

The clues appear enigmatic, suggesting that there exists a code that can be deciphered, but we are never provided with sufficient information to enable us to do this.

It is as if we are witnessing somebody else's dream or trespassing in a foreign land, observing a magical ritual in an unknown language, whose significance will never be fully revealed.

In another piece at the exhibition, *Passing by*, Cordero explores her obsessive leitmotif of life as a journey by boat which, as the psychoanalyst Carl Jung once explained, belongs to a time of, "the primordial era when the unconscious was predominant and the conscious weak".

The archetype of the boat is central to human history and thought as one travels between worlds, passing by safe havens but

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never finding a place to anchor.

Cordero does not illustrate her journeys or encounters, but evokes them, so that each viewer will bring to the work their own narrative, feelings and dreams.

Over the years, her lyrical vision has deepened in its lucidity and profundity as we are invited to contemplate these distilled little meditative icons.