

Science meets art when a printmaker focuses on flowers

Chris Denton: The Dahlia suite

Beaver Galleries, Deakin. Until November 5.

Reviewer: **Sasha Grishin**

Chris Denton is Australia's philosopher printmaker, one who is preoccupied with the nature of things and their distillation through art.

English-born, he arrived in Australia as a 29-year-old scientist with an interest in art and came under the spell of Jörg Schmeisser and the intricate multi-plate colour etching technique. He quickly mastered this method and worked as a contract printer and technical assistant at Studio One and for about 15 years printed for Schmeisser. Not surprisingly, some of his earlier work was cloned by the Schmeisser vision and technique.

Denton views science as a new philosophy, or even as a mythology, through which one can make sense of the world which surrounds us. I find his practice bordering on the metaphysical. It involves a meditation on space, matter and light and on the ways in which these may be revealed through etching. In terms of his thinking, it is a process of constantly distilling the individual elements and then layering them to build up an illusion of reality. He writes of his own practice: "My works are intended to achieve a mood or atmosphere that conveys some qualities of a tangible reality (though not necessarily 'realism'). Beneath this lies an abiding interest

in numbers, mathematics and the natural order, and the philosophy of science as a belief system for our understanding of the world."

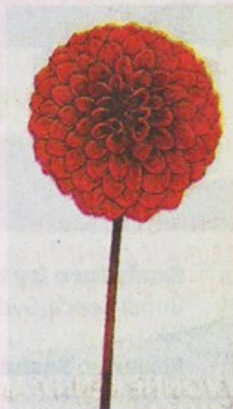
It is a painstaking method of work, where a certain repetition is brought to bear on the elements before him. The most accomplished piece in this exhibition is *The Philosopher's Box 23, 2012*, which seems to grow out of the Chinese bowls with which he was playing in his solo exhibition at the Beaver Galleries last year. Minutely worked in drypoint (basically a technique of scratching the design onto the metal plates) and then realised through a dusting of aquatint, the double

image of the three apples sets up a certain tension between the two panels of the diptych, one appearing as large white, the other black. It is in the conceptual gap between the two images that a seam exists which we are invited to enter and explore.

The new theme in this exhibition of the dahlia flower, with prints dating from 2013, signals a direction in which he intends to take his art, rather than a finite position at which he has arrived. The drypoints on display are more

of an exploration of the structure of the bloom and an expression of fascination with the dahlia's characteristic octoploids (having eight sets of homologous chromosomes, rather than the more customary two).

These etchings are an indication of what we can expect in the future: a new and fascinating development.



INTRICATE: Chris Denton is under the spell of the technique of printmaking, above, *The Philosophers Spaces 1-I*. Left, his *Dahlia 1-II*.