

# Biggest works are the best

**Graham Fransella: Paintings, prints and sculptures**

Beaver Galleries, 81 Denison Street, Deakin. Until May 24, Tuesday-Friday 10am-5pm Saturday-Sunday 9am - 5pm.

Reviewer: **Sasha Grishin**

**G**raham Fransella is an artist who describes his paintings as studies for his prints.

The paintings themselves are serious studies, immaculate and beautifully structured, but they are studies nevertheless. Fransella is primarily a printmaker and one who until recently dealt almost exclusively with the human figure. This year he was awarded the Trustees' Watercolour Prize at the Wynne exhibition at the Art Gallery of New South Wales for a superb watercolour painting simply titled *Tree*.

In this exhibition, one of the two highlights is a large eight-panel etching titled *Tree*, which in some ways can be seen as a culmination of many of his tree paintings. There is a beautiful awkwardness and toughness in Fransella's articulation of form. The irregular-shaped plates are caught in a struggle to stress their own existence with scratchy, tight forms which are built up layer upon layer. I always find it fascinating to peer into Fransella's surfaces which have a beautiful sense of tightness.

The other major highlight at this exhibition is a spectacular huge horizontal four-panel etching, *Shoreline*, which stretches over almost 4m. It is a brilliant piece with complex built-up surfaces and a palimpsest of marks suggesting the constant passing of the tide, signs of wear and the tread of passing generations. Fransella has that rare ability to assert complete control through hard-won strategies yet the final result has a breathing ease, where the image appears almost effortlessly and miraculously. One of his major achievements is to play on that tension between the sense of effortless ease and a deliberate toughness.

Fransella as an artist is unusual in the Australian context as he is one who needs scale to achieve maximum effectiveness in his art whereas many Australian artists use scale simply to be noticed. They have small ideas which they hope can be improved when blown up in size. The best pieces in this exhibition are also the largest. Of the oil paintings in the show, *Landscape* (number 5) is probably the most successful, with a very tactile, bold surface.

Graham Fransella is a significant Australian printmaker who is working at the height of his powers and in this exhibition has made the Australian landscape one of his central themes.



Fransella's *Long Figure*.