

Art review Sasha Grishin

Beautiful serenity hides dark message

Coming Storm by Helen Geier.
Beaver Galleries, 81 Denison
Street, Deakin. Until October 2.

Helen Geier has always been a socially aware artist who, through her practice, comments on the various states of order and disorder in the world. Some of her earliest work, made about 40 years ago, could be interpreted as a comment on containment and entrapment, both in a personal sense and in terms of an urban environment.

Later, she became preoccupied with the application of different systems of visualisation and how this could capture, convey and distort the outside world. Systems of perspective served as a tool for the interrogation of the world, its structures and conventions. Quite frequently in her art practice she will set herself a conceptual problem that she addresses in different ways through a series of images. The impact of her art frequently resides more in the power of collective images, rather than in the single work.

In this exhibition, the weather becomes a metaphor through which Helen Geier investigates the state of the world. The weather can refer to global consequences, such as climate change, as well as somewhat ephemeral changes noticeable on a day-to-day basis.



Helen Geier's
Red Tears in
Coming Storm at
Beaver
Galleries

About 35 years ago Geier, with her husband, settled on a rural property about 20 kilometres outside of Braidwood and this formerly city-based artist, who had previously lived in Sydney, London and Melbourne, started to explore the vastness of the Australian landscape on the Monaro plateau.

In this exhibition Geier examines the surrounding landscapes with their sprawling housing estates, extreme climatic conditions and threatening bushfires to suggest that the world is now increasingly out of joint and the weather forecasts are predicting a coming storm, which may have global implications. Geier has never been a literal

or illustrative artist, but she does employ figurative imagery. The viewer is provided with a range of visual clues that affect us more on an intuitive, emotive and spiritual level, rather than a literal level – in her art we feel the work as opposed to reading it.

In Geier's watercolour and gouache painting, *Red Tears*, the surface layer is a dark and charred pattern, like the aftermath of a bushfire, and this is perforated to reveal red longitudinal gashes, be they tears or leaves, tumbling from the heavens to earth. There is something slightly foreboding or menacing about the piece, like a promise of a massacre in the landscape. Geier's training has been that of a printmaker and throughout the exhibition there is a constant sense of layering of imagery.

Another memorable watercolour and gouache painting is *Coming Storm II*, where landscape and metaphysical elements have been cast into dynamic action and where a strange mystical vortex seems to be sucking up the energy of the scene. Geier is a master of arranging surface tensions so that equilibrium is achieved, but with the realisation that at any moment things may fall apart and be swept away. Geier's *Coming Storm* exhibition has, on the surface, a beautiful serenity, but speaks of an approaching cataclysm – the threat of a new apocalypse.