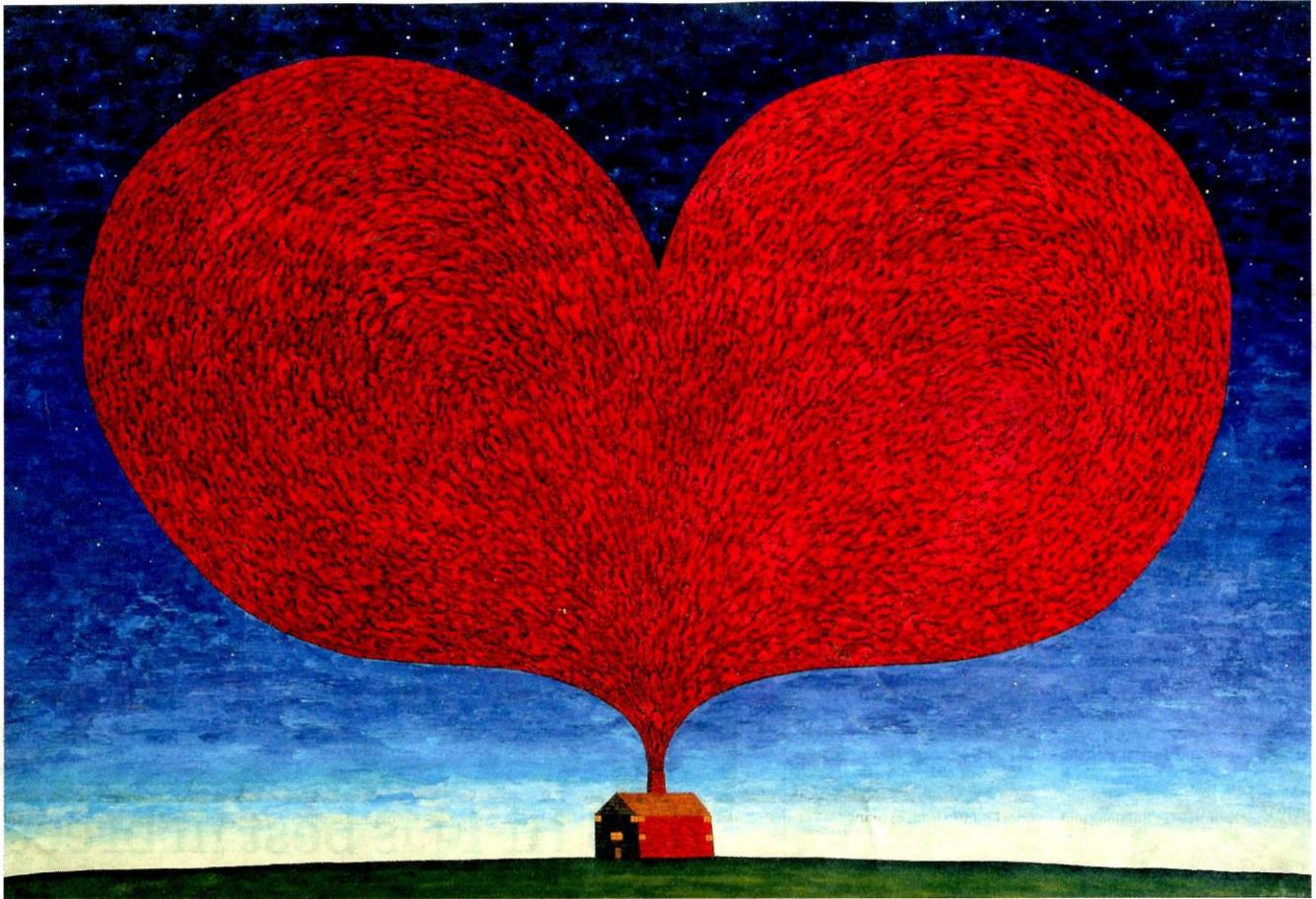


Arts



Works by Dean Bowen, clockwise from above, *The House of Love (Nocturnal)*, *Flightless bird* and *Echidna with Ant*, are all in *New paintings, prints and sculptures* at Beaver Galleries.

Playful charm and innocence

ART REVIEW

Dean Bowen: New paintings, prints and sculptures.

Beaver Galleries, 81 Denison Street, Deakin, Until February 24.

BY Sasha Grishin

A Dean Bowen show at the Beaver Galleries has become a regular fixture in the Canberra art calendar.

Bowen is an artist who arrived at a particular style and imagery several decades ago and over time has proceeded to cultivate and refine his repertoire of forms with a growing sophistication of technical means.

Aged in his early 60s, Bowen, in recent exhibitions, has been increasingly reminiscent about his childhood experiences of growing up in rural Victoria, north of Ballarat, with frequent visits to his grandmother who owned a menagerie.

Bowen writes about these memories, "At night looking up at the stars, sprinkles of light here and there, I remember my country dog, running fast, jet black. The great adventures through the bush, discovering echidnas, ants, rabbits and birds. Lizards under a log. Angry magpies swooping country kids, maybe a peck on the head. Fat dog wanting to chase a ball.

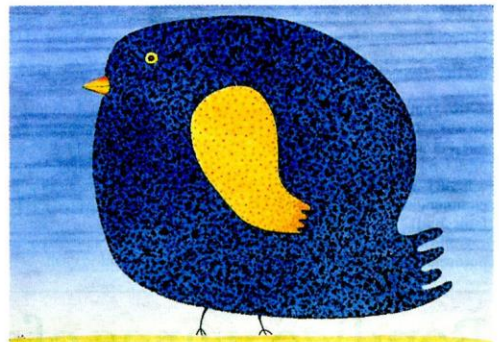
"Even way back then, I remember, covered in freckles, thinking about all the characters. Red hair, curly, odd-shaped teeth, the lucky ones and others not so lucky. Pets nearby. Faces shaped, telling stories



about the sort of person anyone might be."

Images of birds, echidnas, sheep, ants, ladybirds and welcoming houses in the countryside under vast spreading skies make up much of this exhibition of immaculately realised paintings, lithographs and bronzes. It is a faux naive style of work cultivated by this artist who initially trained at the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology and then completed a master's degree and a PhD at Monash University, where he has also taught for a number of years.

For all of their apparent simplicity, these paintings are very sophisticated in their execution and realisation with wonderfully worked surfaces, carefully calculated colour gradations and balanced compositions. The simplicity of imagery is realised through a



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sophistication of means in the textured spreading ornamental surfaces. In a Bowen work, nothing is left to chance and the innocence of the eye is balanced by the sophistication of the hand.

There is a charm and a sense of nostalgia that permeates his imagery with simplified linear articulation, a heightened colour

palette and densely worked surfaces. There is a childish innocence in his sense of humour, where a giant echidna can meet an ant in a non-confrontational setting or a parade of ladybirds can run between the feet of another spiky echidna.

Giant anthropomorphic flightless birds strut on tiny and somewhat unconvincing feet and houses, out on the prairie, embrace a night sky with falling stars, comets and a crescent moon. In one instance, a huge red heart-shaped thought bubble rises from a house in a painting titled *The house of love (nocturnal)*.

A playful charm and innocence are evoked in this exhibition, a feel-good factor, which speaks of tranquillity and belongs to a world of daydreams and gentle reminiscing on something that may have never existed but is sentimentally recalled as a childhood memory.