

Disturbing work with some hope

Review

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ALEXANDER Boynes: *Still time: paintings*. Beaver Galleries, 81 Denison Street, Deakin. Until November 19, 2022. beaver-galleries.com.au.

Alexander Boynes was born into Canberra art royalty. His father, Robert Boynes, is a high-profile painter and was, for many years, head of the painting workshop at the Canberra School of Art. His mother was Mandy Martin, a well-known feminist artist and politically motivated painter and printmaker, responsible for a huge commissioned painting at the new Parliament House in Canberra and who also taught at the School of Art for 25 years. She left this life in July 2021.

For Alexander Boynes, this artistic pedigree has been a two-edged sword. It has opened many doors and, through collaborations with his mother, he has been exhibited within several art institutions including the Canberra Museum and Gallery, Penrith Regional Gallery, Geelong Art Gallery and Orange Regional Gallery. It has also imposed a number of restrictions and unfavourable comparisons with the work of his parents. His concern with the landscape, climate change and the Aboriginal heritage all follow in the footsteps of his mother, while questions of the individual within an urban environment and the general stylistic morphology that he employs within his paintings find parallels in the work of his father.

Since graduating in 2004 from the school of art in which his parents taught, Alexander Boynes has launched himself into the art world as a curator, arts administrator and exhibiting artist with about nine solo exhibitions and he has participated in more than 40 group and curated touring exhibitions. One could say he suffers from overexposure.

His latest solo exhibition at Beaver Galleries, his third at this gallery, is a bold, large show of 19 paintings built around the theme of the Canberra bushfires of 2019-20.



Alexander Boynes, *Overhead*. Picture supplied

His technique is consistent throughout the series where an abstracted, slightly dissolving largely figurative image is created with inks and enamel on an aluminium composite panel.

The layer of paint is very thin and somewhat washy (a strategy frequently employed by his father) creating a slightly blurred image with which the viewer is encouraged to engage and complete within their imagination. The emotional tone is apocalyptic - as humankind appears to be engaged in a battle with the elements where the prospect of victory looks remote and the odds are stacked against survival. The artist writes concerning this series of work, "Though

living in the Anthropocene and coping with the effects of climate change might seem like an impossible task, we must nurture hope. There is still time."

It is a huge challenge for the socially committed artist when making work about something as significant and globally threatening as climate change not to adopt a purely illustrative narrative approach or to simply create work with a hysterical pitch, but to create art that will seduce the audience and inspire it into action. The Irish artist Richard Mosse, in an exhibition presently showing at the National Gallery of Victoria, achieves this in his powerful lament concerning the destruction of the Amazon through his huge

immersive installation that took him several years to create while living in the Amazon.

Boynes, in some of his most successful paintings including *Burn out* and *Overhead*, captures something of the drama and struggle with catastrophic fires where the ash cloud engulfs the human participants. The most successful work is the long panel *Scattered ashes*, where there are no human participants and there is a bleak, almost monotone apocalyptic landscape.

Still time is a disturbing exhibition suggesting that time is standing still as we plunge towards self-imposed destruction, but that there may still be time to avert this, if we all act now.