

An exhibition to seduce the eye and engage the mind

REVIEW

Sasha Grishin

ERASURE and Shape, by Derek O'Connor. Nancy Sever Gallery [City Walk Gallery, level 1], 131 City Walk, Civic. Closes April 3. Open Wednesday to Saturday, from 11am to 5pm.

Many artists today embrace new technologies with the main idea that to be relevant one must employ contemporary means.

Obviously, there is some validity in this mode of thought with the dazzle of the new intoxicating to the innocent eye.

If this is all that is desired in an artwork then the goal is easily achieved, however, should you wish to engage with something on a more cerebral level, then content may need to be considered.

Derek O'Connor is a champion of analogue art as opposed to digital art, a slow art where he paints in oils and engages with a constant process of applying paint then erasing it with subsequent layers so that meaning will gradually emerge in the body of the painting.

This process of painting also requires a slow viewing process to appreciate the work.

Although in the initial impact there may be a considerable wow factor at the moment of seeing the work, time is required to unravel

the shapes and forms within the painting as you proceed to enter the piece.

O'Connor enjoys a reputation as a painter's painter where his work attracts more attention from fellow artists than from the arty socialites.

It is serious, without being pompous, difficult but not veiled with arcane knowledge, and defiantly conscious of its aesthetic qualities.

In other words, he makes beautiful paintings that attract the eye and engage the intellect.

They are also paintings that reveal the process of their creation.

Unlike some artists who wish to conceal the battles fought in a work and where the final result seems to be effortlessly breathed onto the surface, O'Connor's paintings appear like a battlefield.

We see the marks of the individual conflicts, scars of skirmishes and the hard-fought victories.

In a small painting, *Oblomov* (2021-22), the process of layering of paint and the constant erasures have left a strange and defiant shape that resembles a head.

The title, *Oblomov*, is the name of a Russian literary figure created by Ivan Goncharov, of a superfluous man who withdraws from public



Derek O'Connor, *Green Space*. 2021-202. Oil on canvas. 198cm x 167.5cm. **Picture: Supplied**

life into a very private realm.

Once we are guided by the title, we promptly see the head shape with closed eyes and sense the feeling of introspection and confinement.

I am reminded that in the novel, *Oblomov* rarely leaves his room and in the process of the day slowly migrates from the bed to his

favourite chair.

One can validly object that I am building a narrative based on the title of essentially a non-figurative painting.

For me, however, this is a quality of O'Connor's art that it triggers a process associative contemplation.

The bigger paintings at the exhibition, including *Green Space* (2021-22) and *Weather Report* (2021-22), each measuring almost two metres in height, involve a far more complex process of viewing.

Painterly masses are suspended in space and appear to ambiguously float one over the other with occasional deep pockets that one is drawn to explore.

In *Green Space* the shapes are dynamic and draw in the eye as you encounter floating clouds and islands of colour.

In *Weather Report* the gathering shapes appear more menacing, dramatic, mysterious and with passages of threatening complexity in the colour combinations.

In some ways O'Connor's art can be described as mood paintings, something that was once a term of derogatory abuse in art schools.

O'Connor's paintings first seduce the eye and then engage the mind in a slow journey of contemplation and meditation.