

# Chris Denton: Delicate prints with otherworldly beauty at Beaver Galleries

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Chris Denton, 'mists 11'

**Chris Denton: Mists, Beaver Galleries, 81 Denison Street, Deakin. Closes October 29, Tuesday - Saturday 10am-5pm. [beavergalleries.com.au](http://beavergalleries.com.au).**

Chris Denton is one of Canberra's most cerebral printmakers. He possesses a brilliant analytical mind and is frequently grappling with big questions involved in pure mathematics, Descartes's theory of Cartesian dualism and ideas of empty space. Simultaneously, Denton has a romantic temperament, a refined emotional and even spiritual response to nature and an interest in the otherworldliness of things.

His new exhibition at the Beaver Galleries is preoccupied with a somewhat ethereal concept of trees shrouded in mists and how this is perceived by viewers. Denton writes about the works in this exhibition, "In this age of falsehood, conspiracy, lies and denial, a number of themes are intertwined in this work: the reality of a tree silhouetted against the mists of this confusion; the presence of some simple numerical and geometric symbols as an appeal to rational thought; and the use of the colour red as a warning."



Chris Denton, 'fractured 3 - the struggle'

As an artist, Denton is distinguished by a meticulousness of technique, whether this be drawing with pencils and ink or employing his beloved printmaking technique of drypoint - one of the most exacting and least forgiving methods of mark making. Drypoints are generally made by drawing directly on the metal plate with a sharp, pointed needle-like instrument creating a delicate rough edge or burr that collects the ink before printing through a press to create a lush velvety look.

The delicacy of the technique means that very few quality impressions can be printed from the matrix - in the case of Denton, who is a master printer, he manages between six to 10 impressions from the plate.

The drawings and prints in this exhibition are immediately arresting in their sense of presence and startling beauty. "Mists 11" is a relatively large pencil and ink drawing on paper (45 by 22.5cm) where the abstracted dark green limbs of the tree are cast against a pale misty sky. However, the compositional element that galvanises your attention is a red square, like one of Kazimir Malevich's Suprematist elements, positioned near the centre of the sheet, three-quarters of the way down the composition.

This red element is completely out of character with the general romantic tonalism of the piece and through its colour and placement captures our attention. Denton tells us that he employs the red square like a traffic light to warn us of the potential danger of being seduced by this lovely lyrical misty illusion. However, conceptually the red square is also employed to break our perception of landscape as an idyllic retreat into wilderness. It forces us to question assumptions about our existing realities.

Another device employed by the artist to make us question our realities is the gridding of the surface to disrupt the harmony of the scene. "Fractured 3 - the struggle" is a strong drypoint print of similar dimensions as the drawing mentioned above. It is best viewed as part of a series of fractured images - the real, the negative, the mists and endgame - where the tree shape is silhouetted against a bloodred bushfire sky and it is dislocated through a superimposed grid. This fracturing of the surface through a dislocating grid effectively forces us to question the nature of the image that we are examining.

Denton is a rare artist in his ability to make us question the aesthetic experience and the underlying assumptions. Beneath the beauty of the facade lies a whirlpool of dark mysteries and that, which initially seduces the eye, should not serve as a barrier for the mind to question the different levels of reality.