



Coast is clear: Ken Smith's unpeopled *The Road to the Sea*.

» Catching the coast

Ken Smith: The Road to the Sea – Recent Paintings

Where: Flinders Lane Gallery, 137

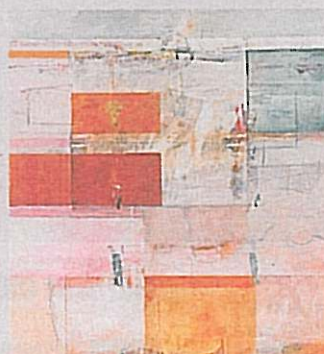
Flinders Lane, city

Until: September 27

This exhibition is a pensive plein-air exploration of the coastline around the Mornington Peninsula. It's very much a ship-to-shore, shore-to-ship set of small compositions. A hushed close-tonal look, similar to ozone mist that often veils the sea, here veils Ken Smith's coastals. The horizontality and scale of Smith's views recalls the similarly-tiered beach scenes of Eugene Boudin, who taught Claude Monet. Boudin had a much more gesticular technique than Smith and his beaches were peopled, whereas Smith's paintings hint at urban population yet are strangely unpeopled. It is this latter quality that begins to nudge these works from the specific/local, into the metaphysical/universal.



JEFF MAKIN



Put on the map: Carole Wilson in front of *Contained Worlds* (top) and *North Composite 4* by John Waller (above).

and urn shapes. Among them, a road map of Alice Springs is cut into the profile shape of an urn, collaged on to a contour map of Mt Everest. Many of these maps are precisely drawn, bringing with them the pictorial culture of the cartographer. The urns and vases used in cut-out profile are associated with the Victorian era. Other levels of meaning are also layered into these very readable works: a patch-working speaks of the tradition of quilting. The overall effect is one of cut-short journeys, ancient artefacts and nostalgic recycling.

John Waller: New Landscapes

Where: Mossgreen, 310 Toorak Rd, South Yarra

Until: September 26

Most of these "New Landscapes" follow the compositional geometry of a cruciform cross within a square format. Rectilinear building blocks move abstractly up the centre of the picture plane and climax more or less where the horizontal bar of the cross should be. This "bar" also doubles as a horizon. Within each block colour and form runs, scumbles, glazes or is brushed in an athletic muscular manner. It's a play-off between the architectural and the organic, recalling the works of first-generation American abstract expressionists Hans Hoffman and Robert Rauschenberg.

Carole Wilson: Contained Worlds

Where: Diane Tanzer Gallery, 108-110 Gertrude St, Fitzroy

Until: October 11

Carole Wilson has searched out old maps, then cut, collaged and re-conceptualised them into vase

The complete package for all to unravel

Media coverage in The Age, Thursday 18 September 2008

VISUAL ARTS

DANIEL DORALL, *SHAFT*, and
CAROLE WILSON, *CONTAINED
WORLDS*

Dianne Tanzer Gallery, 108-110 Gertrude
Street, Fitzroy, until October 11
www.diannetanzergallery.net.au

ELIZABETH GOWER

Sutton Project Space, 230 Young Street,
Fitzroy, until September 27
www.suttongallery.com.au

Robert Nelson Reviewer



Banner (2008), by Daniel Dorall, compartmentalises the divisions of life.

PACKAGING has three functions: insulation, modularisation and marketing. Packaging applies not just to pens, pins and iPods but almost every aspect of our lives.

Daniel Dorall has built sculptures that introduce packaging to domestic environments, social interaction, church and soup. Supported by laminated cardboard plinths, his exhibition is of cases with thin fibre membranes within. A wadding of foam separates each division. The combination of thin walls and filler maximises strength while minimising weight.

Aesthetically, the works resemble a box in which compartments are designed to accommodate electronic components. The sound-killing properties of the foam fitted between veneer induces a mute quality on the spaces that they encase, strangely claustrophobic, as if all vibrations will be deadened and a scream

from within would be useless.

Dorall then adds an equally perverse set of images. The vertical works are populated by tiny figurines in bizarre narratives; but the horizontal works strike me as the more profound in their sardonic, command of imagery. The cruciform ground plan of a Gothic church, a Campbell's soup can and acres of garden.

Though severe, monumental and iconic, the church also provides a kind of packaging, with the three functions of packaging served in holy ways. Interpreting the foundations of the sacred edifice by his miniature mode of construction, Dorall reveals that the cathedral also insulates, modularises and adds market prestige: it buffers you from the material world; it encourages conformity by means of communal prayer; and it confers up-market values on lavish weddings and expensive private schools.

Most frighteningly, Dorall takes us to the very set-up of domestic life, where we package our existence in suburban blocks with wasteful volumes of wadding around the living spaces; the circuitry of paths and borders, beds and lawns, all obsessively demarcating private spaces.

Dorall's little figures sit conversing in vast expanses of artificially enclosed greens, all alienated from the organic pulse of the city, insulated, modularised and upmarket.

In the next room, Carole Wilson also contemplates the packaging of land, as she wraps containers with maps, sometimes arranged as patchwork. Victorian ornamental vases are seen in silhouette, filled in or surrounded by maps. The incongruity of the two visual languages is heightened when the maps take on a quilted look, as of textile.

Wilson's uncomfortable mix

of images parallels the shifting co-ordinates used to conceive round things. The globe, for instance, is made up of little imaginary squares at the equator — longitudes and latitudes — but they become exaggeratedly elongated and conical as we get to the poles.

Land and planet are not so easy to package.

Making paradoxical new shapes out of old shapes is also pursued in beautiful work by Elizabeth Gower at Sutton Project Space. Like Wilson, Gower tackles ornament in an inverted way. Taking pieces of paper from advertising, she cut up shapes that belong to the sinuous repetitious patterns of decorative design. Some of Gower's pieces are nothing but a dark sheet of printed paper with everything cut away except for a trace of ornament. Just enough of the original typography remains to identify the sources: the posh globalised fashion houses whose business is all about packaging, with standard products, in a desperate bid to distinguish one another by artificial means.

Poetically, Gower rewraps their rubbish in a visual language of fragile old kitsch. The advertising normally ends up in the bin and now it is restored to value as a decorative tomb to corporate packaging.

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