

We Gotta Get Out of This Place Alexander Seton

Jan Murphy Gallery 29th July - 13th August 2005

This exhibition features a fantasyland of big (and small) boys' toys. Alexander Seton's sculptures make palpable the dream of owning our own personal Tardis. Ben Quilty's paintings include a mean-looking XB Falcon of Mad Max fame. Humorously reflecting on young male passions, these works also speak poignantly about the passing of time – and those objects of desire that shape us in important ways.

Like previous series, Ben Quilty's works are portraits: not only of vehicles but embodied by these, the people he observed driving them. We are what we drive? Sometimes unexpectedly so – it was a 70-year-old lady (Rita) who drove the XB Falcon in Hill End Landscape No. 1. Perhaps the sitters for portraits are like the buyers of cars, projecting an image of ourselves we hope others will affirm. Quilty's portraits see through this though, with an insight that is never unaffectionate. These motors are painted with all of the lively quirks and imperfections of breathing subjects.

Some of Quilty's portraits are made from work produced at Hill End, regional NSW, renowned for its historic associations with a flourishing arts community. The landscapes of this gold-mining town inspired, for example, the desolate streetscape in Russell Drysdale's *The Cricketers*. Working knowingly out of this context, and from a solid lineage of Australian landscape painting, Quilty depicts what are now pertinent portraits of our 'great brown land' – populated by cars. These don't seem like sermons on environmental protection however; rather they acknowledge the landscape as an entity that, like humans, will change over time.

In Alex Seton's works, there is a poignant sense of lost time. Seton uses marble, which, with its cold, almost deathly recollection of history evokes absence and longing (so what might happen if cherished memories could be set in stone?). There is a personal longing about some of these works: the coveted model Matchbox car of End Safety Zone for example, which was destroyed after a sibling roasted it on the barbeque.

Traditionally marble is associated with luxury and fetish; here it depicts some of those toys that remain priceless in memory. Seton also uses Caesar Stone, a manufactured material available in a rainbow of colours and used for contemporary kitchen tops. Modelling the Tardis or even a Dolce & Gabbana bag in this cruder medium, there is ironically also a sense of loss – a grown-up's reassessment – of what was once fantastic.

Building a giant tower out of Lego bricks, visiting the moon in a cardboard box; Seton's work recalls that creative curiosity whose departure many of us mourn, the ability to imagine the extraordinary in the most unlikely places. Pushing the constructive potential of his materials to surprising reaches, Seton's works maintain this sense of curiosity, of wonder, and of play. It's ironic then that this exhibition is titled *We gotta get out of this place* because, for all our youthful impatience, we mostly wish we had it back.

Holly Arden