

# METROARTS & CULTURE

## Air of trepidation in world of contrast

### VISUAL ARTS PETER DAVERINGTON

Arc One Gallery, 45 Flinders Lane, until November 8  
arc1gallery.com

### JEFFREY MAKIN

Landmarks, James Makin Gallery, 716 High St, Armadale, until November 8  
jamesmakingallery.com

### LOUISE HEARMAN

Hello Darkness: the Art of Louise Hearman, Glen Eira City Council Gallery, until November 2  
www.gleneira.vic.gov.au  
Robert Nelson Reviewer

**P**OPULAR opinion suggests that abstract painters — whacking down anything they like — are less concerned with tonal continuities than figurative painters. But abstract painters such as Jennifer Goodman at John Buckley or Magda Cebokli at Dianne Tanzer are scrupulous in balancing their lights and darks, creating systematic contrasts with great subtlety.

Figurative painters, on the other hand, are more likely to use fierce contrasts of tone or colour, for reasons that defy perception. Each has his or her own reasons for exaggerating contrast. Stephen Bush at Sutton Gallery (254 Brunswick Street) begins his paintings with a chaotic field of spills and smears, then builds his alpine imagery into the peaks and crevasses of tone and colour. The mountains and huts tussle

with the wild will of the medium itself.

Peter Daverington also handles alpine peaks with runny paint, dashing from snow to eerie notional night at Arc One Gallery. But whereas Bush sees his imagery arising out of the primeval sludge — from lime to magenta — Daverington overlays the chilly summits with a cerebral matrix of girders. Nature slinks behind the universal geometry of the built environment.

Even when figurative painters do straight pictures, the continuities of landscapes do not always yield lyrically mellow tonal contrasts. Quite the contrary, especially if you look at an artist like Jeffrey Makin. His *Landmarks* at James Makin Gallery is quite fierce in tonal contrasts, as the painter juxtaposes golden foliage with inky cypress (*Yarra Valley Pastoral*)

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or dark cliffs with surf brighter than the sky that illuminates it (*Mt Olympus, Lake St Clair, Tasmania*).

In some pictures, Makin seeks a unifying keynote by means of a warm ground, as in *Hawkesbury River Morning*. The best picture, for me, has a more

consistent luminosity: the radiant *Clunes*, with its high-key yellows throughout affording a series of shimmering planes to describe the hillside town.

The most dramatically contrasty painter is Louise Hearman. A large, thorough survey of her moody, enigmatic pictures can be seen in *Hello Darkness* at Glen Eira Gallery.

Hearman exploits harsh contrast for different reasons again. Unlike a baroque painter, her chiaroscuro isn't about how a form is embedded in the surrounding atmosphere. It's a celebration of the flash, the freakish glance or glare that rips the darkness with a sudden anomalous beam.

Hearman's light — with its love of double luminaries and staged backlighting — reveals a photographic sensibility, that search for the exceptional glow that clinches a pregnant moment. It matches the repertoire of bizarre types — the sinister cat, the super-sized dog's head, the freakish teeth — all painted very confidently in a mercurial tonal manner with lots of glint and highlight.

Hearman's pictures are about rupture rather than rapture. Nearly all her pictures have the air of the broken jug, as if the light cannot really bear the murky corruption it encounters. Often the light is blinding, itself unwholesome and punishing to the eye, as in the headlights poking down a tunnel of trees.

The European tradition of pictures in low light tends to rel-



ish the gentleness of contours, registering how light spills or caresses the surfaces. Hearman understands these venerable idioms but her interest isn't sensual in a rhapsodic vein.

For Hearman, the air is foggy with lens-glare and trepidation: her protagonists are startled and odd, from a pregnant dog to a transfigured child. Aeronautical parts are left abandoned and the trim on suburban houses seems

luridly marked out as points of entry by the street-lamp.

Hearman's pictures are all *Untitled*, almost as if intuitions of their meaning are consciously consigned to amnesia; so the stories that go with the phantoms and sultry children are curiously suppressed. We keep wondering about what happened, who owned the madness, what grimness or suffocated hope muffled the mind.

There are no answers, only indefinite questions. And here's the rub: each contrasty untitled picture is set up for a further horrid emptiness, a combination of gloom and glare, urgency and deferral, scariness and obscurity. These contrasts pile upon one another, finally amounting to a signature style of ambiguous rhetoric.

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Louise Hearman's *Untitled 727* (1999, oil on composition board) is at Glen Eira Gallery as part of a major survey of her work.