

**H**OW sweet it is to move among artists who feel no compulsion to blow their own trumpets, though Robert Motherwell, one of the glorious brickmakers of the Abstract Expressionist era now at the Australian National Gallery, agrees with Orphan Annie – in the preface to the collection of her comic strips – that “if you don’t blow your own trumpet around here you are likely to be run over”.

Once again the Bloomfield Galleries is paying an extended tribute to aspects of Frank Hinder, that modest exemplar of dedication and aesthetic probity who, born in 1906, has made his way to general respect without drums or trumpets. What has never been trumpeted are his mild cartoons and amused observations in more than 100 works mainly in pen gathered under the heading of *Social Comment 1931-1987*.

There is none of that savage distortion that now seems essential to the satirical caricaturist. His subjects have been let off very lightly indeed for Hinder was never one to sit in severe judgment and partly for that reason they serve also as historical guides: Manning Clark was celebrated in 1972, Barry Jones (*Changing Society*) in 1973 and Russ Hinze (*Castrate the Bastards*) in 1973, Edmund Capon (*The Arts*) had to wait until 1986 the year that Hinder drew *Self In A Dither*.

His comments on life in the '40s were in the international style of crisp clarity, firm tense lines and the use of space as a principal force. It was a style not given to denigration but by enlarging foibles to evoke smiles rather than guffaws. The good-tempered wit can be summed up in captions like “Brian! You shouldn’t speak to your expectant fiancée that way!” It is good-tempered, for Hinder is even-handed and in *Socialite* a smartly dressed and smartly minded young lady (they did not go out with even-handedness) asks an artist, “Yes! But if you don’t paint what you

## Art

Sydney Galleries:  
Frank Hinder  
Bloomfield Galleries;  
Euan Macleod, Vivienne  
Binns, Watters Gallery;  
Joe Felber, Garry Anderson  
Gallery

Canberra Gallery:  
The Spontaneous Gesture  
Australian National Gallery

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see, why do you paint like that if that’s the way you see it?”

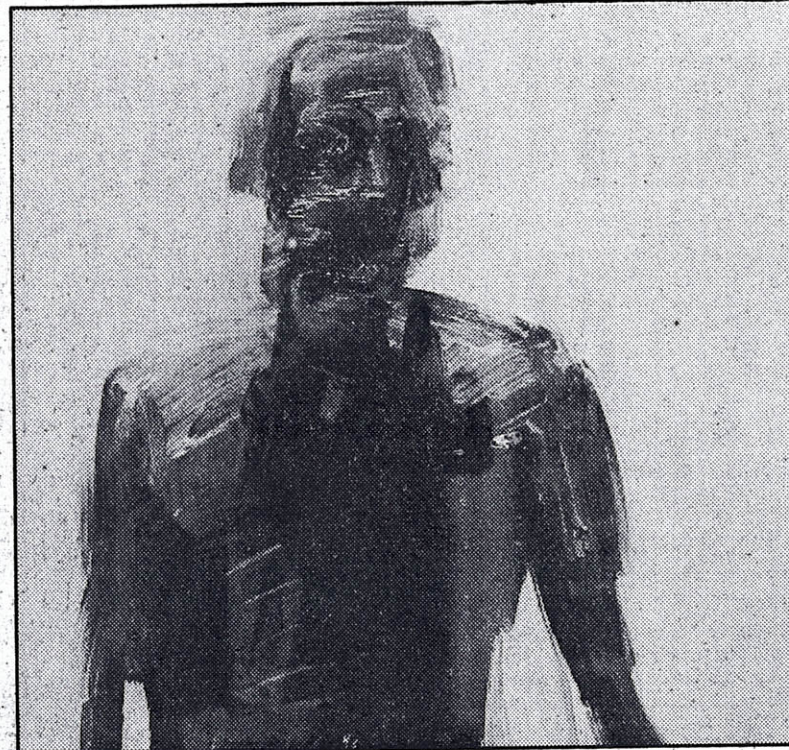
The spatial inventiveness is varied and unforced; in *Lunchtime Martin Place, 1946* you see the scurrying crowd from the tram driver’s throne and in *Art Seen* the art lovers are isolated in front of paintings with an old connoisseur at the back, a superior couple resisting enthusiasm, another cautious couple comparing notes and one with a slip of paper that must be a critique, because people used to take them to art shows in those unhappy days when criticism was taken as holy writ.

There is much more to be discovered and how sweet it is to know that history is not synonymous with the last few weeks.

Vivienne Binns at Watters Gallery does have a sweet innocence that deliberately shuns the smart sophistication that could be here, for she inclines to delight in what some would call trivia-like cards about mothers’ memories, domestic portraits of women in enamels and participation in an evening of song. *See That My Grave’s Kept Green* at Watters Gallery back in 1972.

She was concerned with *Deeper Issues* in 1967 when she showed, among other things, a deluge of books at the old Watters Gallery in Liverpool Street. I praised it; in print, too.

Like Frank Hinder, Vivienne Binns has long been a detached observer with mild, dedicated appreciation of



Euan Macleod's *Self Portrait* in black and purple on slashed grey

comments that are the antitheses of tirades. At present she has 58 tiny abstractions in thick oils and acrylics so light and small they do not stretch the wires on which they hang. To show that she can be ironic and realistic she has a 59th painting quite convincingly lyrical and realistic called *The Onion Everyone Speaks Of*.

Downstairs at Watters, Euan Macleod paints as if life was too demanding for detachment or parody. These portraits and marching men are too haunted, gaunt and introspective to imagine as living in the same world as Jackie Gleason, who has just left us with a memory of his savouring whiskey with the immortal words, “How sweet it is”.

Anonymous, distraught, isolated and energetically despairing portraits are painted with dash and verve as though they were caught in a flashing glance. Except for the more monumental *Tammy*, faces, bodies and backgrounds are swept with the same bravura that despite its reckless ease is never extravagant. Some portraits like that of *Hostage* are impenetrable as is *Self Portrait* in black and purple on slashed grey.

Joe Felber, at the Garry Anderson Gallery, has dozens of small Abstractions on rough hessian which is at times as evident as the harsh, dour and unenticing pigments he uses. Paint churns or gropes its blotchy way across the surfaces that are not arenas for spontaneous gestures as they were with the 44-odd artists at the Australian National Gallery.

In fact, slightly imprecise geometrical forms struggle for their existence resolutely but without assured success. They are therefore not icons or definite signs. They have a kinship with a revival of geometrical abstraction as a quest rather than a set of signposts in the work of Helmut Federle, the German artist of whom Felber is not yet aware.

For the traveller to Canberra: The *Spontaneous Gesture* collection of books and prints by such as Frankenthaler, Pollock, Motherwell, Kline, Tapes, Gottlieb, Lee Krasner and the mighty Schumaker is not to be missed by those who want to know that the exuberant and impulsive gesture of Tachism or action painting still entrances artists and connoisseurs. It is on until September 13.

# A good-tempered wit