

The Best Game in Town.

Idris Murphy

Idris Murphy, showing new paintings at the King Street Gallery on Burton, has thrown in his lot with Steiner and God, by titling his exhibition 'Real Presence'. Although the works may look like gestural abstractions, they are unmistakable landscapes, with very strong suggestions of trees, lakes and river. In his palette, Murphy favours acidic reds and greens, pushed up against purple- pink and a dark murky blue. They capture the feeling of looking into a landscape at dusk or dawn or perhaps as a storm is brewing.

The atmosphere would be oppressive except for the rough, spontaneous nature of Murphy's brushwork, which animates even the gloomiest sense. He uses acrylic paint that gives a less sensuous surface than oils but dries quickly, allowing him to work one colour over another.

His work suggests a passionate attachment to the Australian Bush but a strange introspective vision. There is no bright sunlight in his work, there are no picturesque, gnarled gum trees, no native fauna and flora. Heavy smears of red are overlaid with emaciated strokes of green; sharp edges are provided by pieces of paper collaged onto the surface.

One thinks briefly of the British painter Howard Hodgkin, but Murphy's colour is not so delicate and Jewel-like; he is not trying to concoct exquisite decorations but to find a painterly equivalent for the emotions that rises up within him, while standing in the landscape. At times this seems close to the melancholy that colonial writers such as Marcus Clark saw as the dominant feature of the bush.

Although his idiom is largely abstract, Murphy's work might be seen as a form of Romantic Landscape painting. Like the Romantics looking at the natural world also becomes a looking within the self, or the search for a relationship with the creator of both self and world. One could adopt a more formal, secular perspective, but the brooding nature of his imagery suggests a deeper source of motivation.

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