

Hot Afternoons Inside, Outside and Beyond

GLEN O'MALLEY, HOT AFTERNOONS
DENNIS MAGEE, INSIDE, OUTSIDE AND
BEYOND

By Louise Martin-Chew

Glen O'Malley's exhibition of photographs at Savode Gallery coincides, appropriately enough, with the return of the taste of summer to Brisbane. Entitled "Hot Afternoons", this cohesive exhibition evokes a sense of clammy, oppressive, and at times, claustrophobic heat and an all-pervasive ennui.

Tropical outdoor environments and run-down, shabby interiors become the settings for disconnected figures - the sense of social isolation of individuals no less compelling when they appear in groups. A strange, muted light pervades the images, giving a real sense of the humidity and oppressive summer weather of north Queensland. The photographs take on a strange surreal quality, underlined but also undermined by the everyday nature of the scenes.

The photographs were selected from a body of work covering a 10-year period. They reflect O'Malley's consistent fascination with life in Queensland. However, the images are by no means casually observed social documents. O'Malley has the ability to recontextualise images with surprising results. Some works - portraying a figure in a swimming pool, photographed in Brisbane - are superb formal compositions, with a twist of characteristic O'Malley perversity.

Sexuality is objectified and drained (romance banished). Figures are torpid, bereft of energy

and spontaneity. Tacky, depressed interiors - out of date, out of this world - bespeak small Queensland towns. Images of backyards, barbecue scenes, tin sheds become compositional elements in a psychological landscape. Technical virtuosity is obvious but not overemphasised.

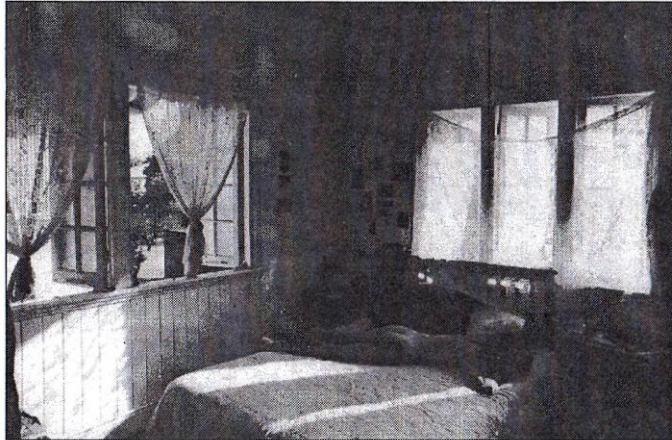
O'Malley has mastered the medium long ago, and is deftly able to convey exactly what he chooses.

O'Malley represents an interesting psychological bridge between the Molvig years and the current generation of Queensland artists. A committed regionalist, his exhibition portrays scenes with which most "locals" will identify. However, a cold drink may be the perfect chaser to these scenes -

they are powerful enough to conjure up, in the viewer, a clammy sweat and the taste of mildew.

Also at Savode Gallery is an installation by Dennis Magee, another Queensland artist. Magee has a strong commitment to the integration of art in public spaces and public life. This installation, entitled "Inside, Outside and Beyond" moves on from a sculpture he completed for the redevelopment of a park in front of the new Council library in Brisbane's Stones Corner.

It is composed of two floor elements - a series of organic, stump-like shapes, variously blackened and painted with primary colours, encircling industrial/ technological shapes which confront



Glen O'Malley's evocative "Hot Afternoon"

and reflect each other - together with a powerful series of large paintings of a brick wall, progressively breaking down, and studies of the central technology-influenced shape. This intriguing and enigmatic installation exposes and juxtaposes the opposing dynamics of the natural and technological worlds.

The organic forms encircle and act in opposition to the technological/industrial shapes - conveying science, technology, masculinity and rationality. They are surrounded by the opposing qualities of the organic 'stumps' - evoking nature, landscape, emotion and creativity. A sense is given of the artist reconciling a personal conflict, while also creating a link between the urban and organic using themes of natural regeneration.

Within the organic forms, the application of primary colours (inside the 'stumps' in one element and outside on the other) in opposition to a black, charred-looking surface, touches on the artificial invading the natural, and also evokes the mystery and irrationality of nature. They become a microcosm of the oppositional forces which pervade each part of the installation.

The *Breaking down the wall* painting (in five parts) portrays a progressively disintegrating organism. The bricks are painted against a gold backdrop prefiguring the artificial/industrial/technological environment which witnesses their decay.

The studies of the technological shape ritualistically use the primary colours of the organic forms, creating another internal dialogue within the work. "Inside, Outside and Beyond" was completed while Magee was artist-in-residence at the Umbrella Studio in Townsville.