



Mysterious moments: Anne Wallace's *Springtime* puts the onus of interpretation, meaning and resolution on the viewer

# Obscured as much as revealed

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PERHAPS the increasingly intimate revelations with which we live, from the fly-on-the-wall television popularised by *Sylvania Waters* to daily front-page debates about the sexual orientation of conceiving couples, explains the attraction of paintings that obscure as much as they reveal.

A glamorous figure, worthy of Hollywood, is cropped above the shoulders. She is clad in a satin shift and matching stilettos, and perches on the sloping edge of a building surrounded by soaring high-rise city buildings in an unreal daylight.

The title, *Springtime* (1999), explains nothing, diverting, if anything, the viewer's attention from any possible narrative. *Still air* (1999) depicts an ornate candelabra on a shiny mantelpiece. It is reflected in the gold-framed mirror behind it, and the reflection is repeated, a mirroring of image within image. A human presence is strongly implied.

*Curtain* (1997) shows two red-haired girls, arms around each

other, backs to the viewer, in front of a red velvet curtain. *Damage* (1996) shows the thigh-down view of a mini-skirted woman, blood coursing inexplicably down around the entire circumference of both legs.

Anne Wallace revels in the mysterious moment, horror on the hover just out of sight. The exhibition, *Private Rooms: Anne Wallace, 10 years of painting*, curated by Simon Elliott at Brisbane City Gallery, is a body of work in which the onus of interpretation, meaning and resolution is on the viewer. Wallace is both open and articulate about her motivations as a realist painter, and the inspiration behind particular works, but on the specifics of their meaning she is silent.

Wallace, art-school trained and the recipient of distinguished prizes which began hot on the heels of her 1990 graduation — ranging from the Hobday and Hingston Bursary awarded by the Queensland Art Gallery (1990) to the Samstag International Visual Arts Scholarship (1993), then the Melville Nettleship Award given

by the Slade School of Fine Art in London (1995).

Proving that these early wins were no fluke, her public success has continued with the Sulman Prize and a six-month residency at the Cité Internationale des Arts in Paris, awarded by the University of Sydney, both last year.

Despite these successes and her Brisbane base, Wallace's work is possibly less known in Brisbane than Sydney, where she shows commercially. Brisbane City Gallery's decision to curate an exhibition of 10 years' work at this fairly early stage indicates the interest her work commands.

Wallace's paintings, from a remarkably early stage, have a presence and show a talent rising to the challenge of a strong artistic imagination. The next 10 years will be crucial, but Wallace's skills are undergoing visible refinement and idea-driven extension.

Another exhibition of realist painting, again 10 years' work, by Wallace's fellow generation X-er Lisa Adams, is being shown concurrently at the Institute of Modern Art. However, the differences

between these two exhibitions are much more marked than their similarities, despite the age and realist mode of these two young female artists.

Adams's images are also inexplicable, but in a more prescriptive way. It is necessarily a smaller exhibition of fewer works, as Adams's hyper-real mode of working sees her produce only some three works a year. These works are closer to both their sources and classic psychoanalytic symbolism — an image of *Heaven and hell* (1992-93), with angels and devils, skulls and bones below and angelic gardens above, references Hieronymus Bosch's imagery.

The works exhibit an extraordinary technical ability — Adams taught herself to paint — but as art works they risk being mired more in ability than the progression of ideas — stuck, like Adams's twinned *Self-portrait* (1997), rowing against the tide and each other.

Anne Wallace, Brisbane City Gallery until September 10. Lisa Adams, Institute of Modern Art, Brisbane, until September 2.