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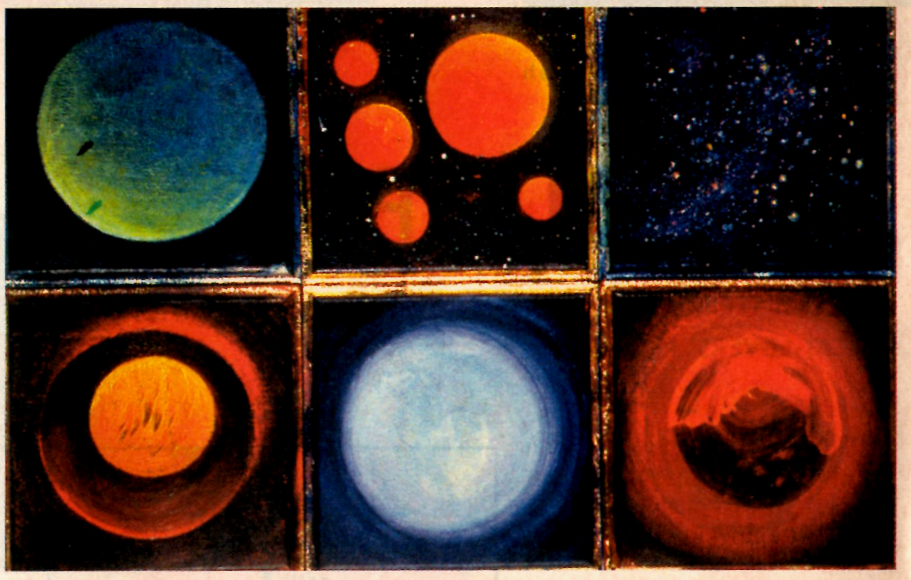
with phil brown

GLORY BE

YOU DON'T HAVE TO BE A HERO TO EXPERIENCE GLORY



Out of this world: A section of Darren Jones' suite of 55 works entitled *Universe*

A RECENT contemporary art exhibition at the Queensland Art Gallery was entitled Fortitude. It seemed a slightly grandiose, even pompous title.

But the folk at Gallery 482 in Fortitude Valley have topped that with the moniker of their latest exhibition. It's called — drum roll and choir please — Glory.

Curated by Brisbane artist Darren Jones, with a little help from an Arts Queensland grant, it features eight emerging and established artists all of whom are, according to the publicity blurb, "celebrating human spirituality, sexuality and diversity" based on the theme of Glory.

"In breaking the traditional thought that the word glory can only be associated with saintly or heroic virtues, of reward and recognition for unusual deeds such as winning gold at the Olympics, the eight artists band together to restore some dimension of glory to contemporary life," Darren says.

"They show us that glory stripped of its usual association with the heroic is still attainable in a much more modest and personal way for those who are willing to make a difference in spite of the cynicism of contemporary life."

Hmmm. Sounds a bit deep to me.

But basically, as Darren explains, the emphasis is on the positive. Bored with contemporary art, which was too cynical and "cool", Darren says he wanted to organise a show that had optimism and vitality.

"Art is supposed to uplift and transport us, after all."

A pity more of his contemporaries don't agree with him.

But some do, and he has gathered them together, in all their glory, for this exhibition of like-mindedness. Not that the artists' works are similar in any way. But at least they all exude a vitality that is sometimes lacking.

To sum up what's on offer: Darren has a suite of small paintings that explore the glory of creation; former Hong Kong resident Catherine Chui demonstrates in her prints the creative interaction of East and West; Sebastian Di Mauro explores the physical and the metaphysical with paintings and sculptures; Thomas Justice samples biblical themes; Fiona Fraser has fun with colourful wall assemblages; David Sawtell looks at issues of furtive sexuality; Richard Stevens presents documentary images of street life; and Maree Cunnington's photos invoke ritual, magic and divination. That should supply enough food for thought for your average art lover.

It's the variety that makes it interesting, and humour helps. Fiona Fraser's colourful wall blots — amoebic shapes decorated with colourful sequins, tickled by a rotating fan nearby, is a fun offering, entitled *Making A Splash*.

Nearby is Darren's suite of 55 works — a pretty extensive suite at that. These are quite cosmic little pieces — square paintings on wood with gold-dusted edges. The edges hint at references to Orthodox Christian iconography. The works themselves, grouped under the ambitious title *Universe*, feature planets and galaxies and human forms in a checkerboard of cosmic colours.

"The geometric shapes and patterns embrace both the micro-structure of sub-atomic chemistry and the macrocosm of the planets in their orbit," says contemporary arts writer Dr Tom Elich in a catalogue essay on the show.

"The circular movements suggest the cycles of days and years, of energy and evolution. The bright circles form halos around the soft natural shapes of flowers, forming a collection of mystic mandalas which call the viewer to contemplation." Oh, by the way, they are nice to look at too.

Sebastian Di Mauro offers some smaller paintings, but also some rather wonderful sculptural pieces in his *Trunk Series*. Shaped like elephant's trunks, those most useful, amusing and idiosyncratic appendages, his sculptures are made of those scourers one cleans one's saucepans with — a whimsical homage to pachyderms everywhere. And they are glorious creatures (elephants that is), which I suppose ties in loosely with the Glory theme.

It takes more imagination to relate some of the other works to the theme, but themes are like that. They take a bit of work. But you don't have to approach the show thematically, because all the artists offer interesting, individual artworks, which all inhabit the space in a relatively friendly and symbiotic way.

▷ *Glory, until 18 April, at Gallery 482, 482 Brunswick Street, Fortitude Valley. Open 10am to 5pm Tuesday to Saturday. Phone 3254 0933.*