

Utopia from the abstract

PAUL Zika is dedicated to pure abstraction. In the nine constructions being exhibited at the Roz MacAllan Gallery, he reaches beyond representation to search for the shape of utopian ideals.

Through abstraction, Zika seeks to transcend the shackles of representational art.

By divesting himself of description, and of the baggage of associations and limitations that go with it, he becomes free to pursue pure thought.

His constructions owe much to his early interest in architecture, an interest he did not pursue as a career because he realised that commerce would place intolerable restrictions on his creativity.

Zika's constructions feature irregular, geometric planes tooled from wood.

Hard edged and frequently jagged, these planes meet, overlap and shadow each other with discreet style. They are painted with opulent color, including the most delectable purples, greens, reds and yellow.

The paint often rises into a thickly textured surface like icing on a rich cake; at other times, it is smooth and glossy, or endowed with metallic sheen through the impregnation of tiny glass beads.

These pieces, *Entrance to Xanadu*, developed out of Zika's previous *Place of Contemplation*, an architectural construction built in the bush at Mount Nelson, near Hobart.

But Zika does not intend specific references and his overall effect is of decoration. It might appear at first to be excessively decadent, but on closer inspection it is not. Zika's decoration is constrained by rigid discipline and subverted by his jagged forms.

His colors clash with an almost sexual ecstasy that gives the eye pleasure and pain in equal parts.

Something is not well in utopia, and Zika's *Entrances to Xanadu* become symbols of paradise flawed. The exhibition runs until April 22.

Galleries

Paul Zika; Sebastian Di Mauro
Roz MacAllan Gallery
Dale Frank, Milburn + Arte
By MICHAEL RICHARDS

ALSO at the Roz MacAllan Gallery until April 22 is Sebastian Di Mauro's *Recent Works on Paper*.

In paintings and drawings, he continues his investigation of humanity in relation to nature.

Through reduction to essential forms, he explores what we are doing to nature and what nature is doing to us.

He is concerned with humankind as a creator of systems and sees the need to create systems as both an affirmation and a denial of life: We create systems in order to live, but in doing so we destroy.

Di Mauro's basic form is a grid, reduced in each case to a few bars and the spaces between.

Used or developed in various ways throughout the exhibition, they suggest prison bars, windows, silicon chips, a city plan, a crucifix.

His color is often deep and reverberative, as he submerges it beneath heavily applied tone. He occasionally lets it spring forth, as in *Passage Number 22*. Here, light and movement become one and leap to freedom. IN contrast to Zika, who merely plays with the notion of decadence, Dale Frank, at Milburn + Arte, presents art which is decadent and verging on nihilistic.

Sensuous and attractive surfaces clash with mundane objects, such as cake tins, vehicle wheel trims and ash trays.

Frank is serious about his art. That shows in the depth and thorough working of his surfaces.

His career indicates that he understands contemporary art through; unfortunately, his work does not reflect that understanding consistently.

The exhibition runs until April 15.