

Review / Ghostly images in 'Modern Times'

Arts / "Modern Times", Robert Boynes, ANU Drill Hall Gallery. 22 June – 13 August.
Reviewed by ROB KENNEDY.

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"The Red Sea", by Robert Boynes. Photo provided by Beaver Galleries and May Space.

THE artworks of Robert Boynes in his exhibition, "Modern Times", lean strongly towards the graphic. They are filled with ghostly images of humans in what could be a post-apocalyptic world.

These screen-printed paintings offer a feeling of people who might be surviving through a nuclear winter or a great disaster. Though the artworks have nothing to do with that, there is a profound sense of quiet desperation and disbelief going on in many images.

Several of the human and nonhuman-like forms in these pictures seem to be wandering through a desolate urban landscape, or a built environment. Some people are huddled together hanging on to one another and looking for guidance.

The poetic titles of each artwork speak of another voice, a voice that is trying to add additional depth to the ideas and ghostly images standing on the canvas. The names of his artworks add an extended dimension to his paintings.



"Heatwave," by Robert Boynes. Photo provided by Beaver Galleries and May Space.

These contemporary-looking paintings could have been created by one of today's digital artists seeking to represent their world through the most immediate format of Photoshop. But, they have been imaginatively created by an artist whose legacy goes back many decades, and the experience and depth show in fine detail.

While this exhibition could be a study of the human form, there is a blend of abstract imagery, intricate patterns, and an awareness of a divided world showing through. This impression can be particularly seen in the many diptychs and triptychs throughout this exhibition. All these artworks cover a later phase of his career, from around the last ten years.

At the artist's talk held on Friday, June 23, at Drill Hall Gallery, Boynes spoke about some of his ideas and design processes. He said that the canvas is an active part of his practice. He folds and crushes some canvases to produce textures and patterns, then lays them out and prints over them again. As Boynes says: "It's a process of editing, but elegance comes first."

Films influence Boynes's art practice, and it shows in the way human movement is represented in most of these artworks. This influence is clear, as several paintings look like scenes from a movie, and some could pass as a still from a film. Boynes says that a painting could be seen as the shortest movie one can make.