

REVIEWS / VISUAL ART

Out of the darkness

26 November 2020

In what has been a bleak, dark year for our artists, Mossenson Galleries' joint exhibition, 'SIX : 2020', is a truly bright spot, Craig McKeough says.



'SIX : 2020' ·
Mossenson Galleries, Subiaco ·

"SIX : 2020" offers a satisfying mix of the thought-provoking and the quirky, some jarring clashes of colour and material, and artworks of sheer aesthetic delight.

It brings together six WA artists at varying stages of their careers in a welcome initiative by Mossenson Galleries and the associated Mossenson Foundation: a response to the covid-19 downturn and a year most artists would prefer to forget.

There is no obvious artistic connection between the six – who were supported through the exhibition after a competitive application process – but astute selection and curation

have produced a coherent show that allows the viewer to move easily between each artist's contributions while enabling each individual to shine.

Penny Bovell's acrylic on canvas works are a pleasing exploration of colour and form based on her response to the environment around Herdsman Lake in Perth's northern suburbs. Some display bold contrasts of colour and shape, evoking tree trunks, while perhaps the most successful paintings, such as *Branch and Between*, display a softer, layered effect with colours and forms blurring into a mysterious depth.

George Howlett also works in acrylic on canvas, but his offering is of a more forthright nature, with strong geometric forms and sharp edges. He also literally plays with light: neon tubes installed across some of the canvases radically alter their otherwise flat expanses of colour.



Penny Bovell: 'Asphalt series' and Matthew McAlpine: 'Beneath the radiant Southern Cross' and 'In Strains'.
Photo by Matthew McAlpine.

His playfulness peaks on *That's what you get for getting out of bed in the morning*, a hastily daubed and misspelt list of things to do today, including some entirely reasonable suggestions, such as "eat yesterday's lasagna", as well as the more alarming "whipper sniper some tall poppies".

Matthew McAlpine takes a political stance in his *Beneath the Radiant Southern Cross* series. These well-realised mixed-media works explore issues of colonialism. He combines acrylic paint with sand, fluorescent pigment and found materials to create rough, gritty, almost ugly surfaces, but with hints of the bright fluorescence peeping

through, perhaps hinting at the possibilities for our nation if we can just deal with this invasion thing!

Desmond Mah also addresses cultural marginalisation, using heavily textured and luridly coloured panels to portray the menacing landscape that lurks within our ordinary neighbourhoods. He combines a sweep of found objects – some of it actual rubbish – as well as LED lighting and mechanical elements that jolt the senses but also ask some pertinent questions.

Bella Scharfenstein's delicately rendered mixed-media works have a quiet beauty that could have been overwhelmed by their proximity to Mah's outlandish display. But these large canvases hold their own because of their subtle colours and strikingly intricate webs of fine lines that appear to have been painstakingly drawn. However, Scharfenstein has cleverly combined digital prints on maps and overlaid them with coloured gauze to deliver some highly polished and appealing work.

Similarly, Lia McKnight takes a deliberative approach to her art with an intriguing collection of drawings in ink, pencil, graphite and pen. They are based on botanic specimens but altered just enough to jar the viewer into questioning precisely what they are looking at – some seem to imply forms of human anatomy. And the addition of jaunty stitches of gold thread to some of them moves the series further still from the realm of botanical illustration.

McKnight is also responsible for one of the standouts of the exhibition, her stunning sculptural work, *In darkness, the eternal light*, in which she combines ceramics, fibre, fabric and found objects to remarkable effect. This large-as-life figure casts an imposing presence in the room with its expressionless face a glazed ceramic impression of a banksia cone. With its skeletal wings and drapes of heavy fabric, it creates a compelling if unsettling vision. It's hard to take your eyes off it. Is it a harbinger of something unpleasant or just another odd turn? We're surely getting used to those in 2020.

Mossenson Galleries deserves credit for the "SIX : 2020" initiative, providing opportunities for local visual artists and producing a bright spot in a year with far too much darkness.

["SIX : 2020" continues until 5 December.](#)

Pictured top: Lia McKnight's stunning sculptural work 'In darkness, the eternal light'. Photo by Matthew McAlpine

<https://www.seesawmag.com.au/2020/11/out-of-the-darkness>