

Exhibition to test our hospitality

It has often been observed that the provincial outlook most fully reveals itself in its eagerness to be conversant with the latest international or metropolitan fashions.

If the current exhibition programme of the Australian Centre for Contemporary Art is any guide, there are many forces in our culture which are dedicated to preserving our chronic provincialism.

ACCA's current exhibition by Rodney Alan Greenblat, a 25-year-old artist from New York's East Village, follows hard on the heels of a joint exhibition by Mark Kostabi and Keith Haring, two equally youthful artists from that same Babylon of fashion (Dallas Brooks Drive, South Yarra; ends 25 January). Once again we are being urged to be *au fait* with what is happening over in New York.

Greenblat's works, it must be allowed, are not wholly devoid of appeal. You don't have to look for long to see that his exuberantly decorative works are sustained by an affectionate and witty eye for the sheer inventiveness of the United States.

With their somewhat Disneyish charm, these works (which were all created here during Greenblat's tenure as visiting artist at the ACCA) form a kind of suburban fantasia. In them we see a world in which neat and orderly houses smile at one another, are visited by space-craft, and stand in close proximity to enormous shopping complexes with their multitude of competing billboards.

It is also a world in which people wear Davy Crockett caps and travel from place to place either in utilities-cum-covered wagons or in what Greenblat terms go-pods.

Along with the two 'Decorative Heads of Wonderment' which form part of the main installation here, these go-pods are among Greenblat's most witty inventions. As one drawing informs us, these machines are powered by converting the impulses of the brain into electricity with the aid of a Rodneytronics Exchanger Coil. Greenblat, who must have been raised on 'Home Mechanics', clearly delights in the American mania for gadgetry.

Like all fantasias, Greenblat's looks both forwards and backwards. Some works envisage a future of unlimited freedom and the endless availability of goods: others are concerned with revising the central episodes of the past. The latter occurs in a drawing called 'Early Flight', which pictures the way the West was won not by the Winchester and the covered wagon but by the one-rotor go-pod.

The trouble, as I see it, is that there is too little irony in Greenblat's vision of the US. To the best of my knowledge, it is only in a drawing with the accurate title of 'The Land where Everything is Available' that we find any trace of a divided response on Greenblat's part. Here one of the billboards makes the proud claim: 116 point 3 Shops.

Apart from that, we could just as well be in a nursery. The bright colors and decorative excesses of Greenblat's works are in part derived from the middle-class American nursery.

It seems to me that the values in

ART

GARY CATALANO

Greenblat's works are also those of Ronald Reagan. Just as Reagan refuses to acknowledge the failings of the US, so Greenblat's works present us with a sanitised and simplified America. Revealingly, his nursery-like world contains not one single black.

CLIFF BURTT'S exhibition at the Caulfield Arts Centre is most successful in his 'Large Black Box', a work I recall being on view in Rhumbaralla's "Spring Collection" some three months ago. Burt's exhibition at CAC contains 12 mixed-media drawings and two sculptural installations (441 Inkerman Road, Caulfield; ends 10 January).

Clearly enough, what links his seemingly disparate interests together is a concern for the gulf between reality and illusion. Just as his drawings make extensive use of foreshortening, so his sculptural installations dramatise the way in which a selective point of view can wholly distort the literal realities of a specific place.