



Tony Clark's acrylic on canvas *Jasperware Painting*, 1993: like an historical footnote

Background, form and shadow create the illusion of relief through four elements of colour and tone – blue, off-white and two greys. To emphasise the idea of production-line work, all these paintings are sold in a fixed number of standard sizes.

**Overview:** Lindy Lee is a Sydney-based artist who regularly exhibits at the prestigious Cologne Art Fair and at international biennales. Her work at Michael Wardell's Verity Street Gallery is a comprehensive overview of the range of obsessions she has dealt with in recent years. Images appropriated from art history are re-presented through multiple photocopies that remind one of the mechanical reproduction of art postcards and book illustrations (which are their source), or they are etched from a surface built up with layers of molten wax.

With dark colours laid on top of even darker ones, light rarely seems to have the power to leave these heavy surfaces. When it does, it is as an iridescent blue or a rich crimson, "singing" at the viewer across the pristine white gallery space.

The strengths of Australian contemporary art, at the end of a long commercial recession, are highlighted by each of these exhibitions. ■

## X-ray visions

Three Australian artists of international standing probe disparate obsessions in separate showings

BY PETER HILL

Three Australian artists with international track records have exhibitions in Melbourne. All are approaching "mid-career" and all draw on images from art history for their subject matter, but there the similarities end.

Bernhard Sachs, who is soon to take up a one-year residency in New York, is exhibiting a series of large works entitled *Elements* at the Australian Centre for Contemporary Art. These appear like giant X-rays flickering on the gallery wall in blacks, greys and silvers. The types of grids that will make you think of big city maps and never-ending streetscapes are rubbed out of the surface of these darkly brooding pieces.

**Structure:** Within the grid structure, figurative elements from Old Master paintings emerge, suggesting titles such as *World of Ciphers – Or the Whole City (from X-ray of a Painting by the Anonymous Master of Incarceration)*. Another work, titled *Suicide, Room 69, Hotel Ostbahnhof*, reflects the artist's obsession with three cities – Vienna, Melbourne (particularly St Kilda) and Jerusalem – and his quest for a central European identity. Vienna may be the home of Freud and psychoanalysis but Jerusalem evokes both the origins of "the World and the Law" and a messianic destination.

Shadowing this urban mapping is a complex web of veins and arteries from which are woven facial features and limbs. Emblems on the skin refer to traditions of tattooing and in the catalogue Christopher Chapman quotes an Australian tattoo artist with the appropriate moniker of "eX de Medici" and who, in turn, is a disciple of Kandinsky.

The dust of the charcoal, the references to death by drowning and the ambiguous relationship between the inner and outer selves make this a sombre yet important exhibition. Manhattan, with its grid structure, its permanent angst and its European origins, should feel like home to Sachs.

Tony Clark first came to my attention at last year's *Documenta* exhibition in Germany with his tiny landscapes arranged in linear formation. Each body of work he creates differs from the others in all respects other than that they comment on art's past. Like historical footnotes, they concentrate on the edges of knowledge. His latest sequence at City Gallery takes Wedgwood decoration as a starting point and the dividing line between high culture and the mass consumer market as a point of discourse.

In the accompanying essay, Robyn McKenzie traces the history of how "Classicism goes Pop", from the decorative reliefs of the Renaissance artist Mantegna through Josiah Wedgwood to Tony Clark. All these paintings refer to jasper ware and its place in neo-classical interiors.



A section of Bernhard Sachs's *World of Ciphers* ...