

VISUAL ARTS

Ric Spencer



Domestic hit and bliss

The Australian dream of a family home dominates our national psyche. The private space of the home has fuelled much Australian art over the years — and in the cyclical nature of things much of it ends up on the walls of these very same homes.

This relationship between art and the emotional and psychological spaces of a home is the theme of the *Domestica* exhibition.

And what better space to play out some of the dreams, fears and neuroses that accompany our desire of domestic bliss than in the historical walls of Heathcote Museum and Gallery. The tenuous line between household harmony and things going slightly askew has been drawn in the sand and then crossed by the seven artists involved in *Domestica*.

Thematic exhibitions can be a hit and miss affair but *Domestica* is for the most part an enjoyable mix of emerging artists' work.

Pierre Capponi's excellent output continues with a number of works in this show. His life-size *Piano* and *Flying Ducks* on a wall give us the quintessential homely entrance statement — but these works are pop-riveted together in rusting tin sheets.

Capponi's clunky and rough sculptures take the representational element out of the work and make us focus on the meaning they have in our lives.

Do we garnish the ducks with loving memories of a simpler life or invest the piano with happy memories of family singalongs? His empty shells allow the viewer input meaning into the work and doing this with rusty tin gives it more cultural connotations.

His excellent installation of *Bedbugs and Rocking Horse*, in a nursery setting, verges on neo-gothic and underlines the transient nature



Bedbugs and Rocking Horse by Pierre Capponi at Heathcote Gallery.



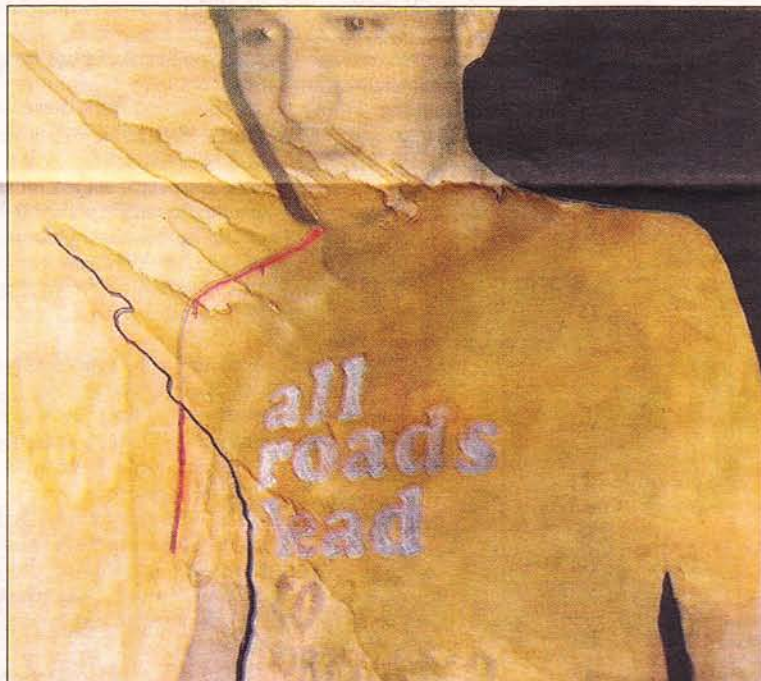
Curioser and Curioser by Angela McHarrie at Heathcote Gallery.

of our dreams and childhood wishes and their relationship to a sense of place.

Jacob Ogden Smith seems more concerned with the nature and functionality of art within the home and intertwines the history of household objects and art in two clever works titled *Photo Table* and *Linen Tables*.

Both integrate visual art into a table through aesthetic embellishment while equally taking away the object's usefulness. Angela McHarrie has a similar theme in her piece, *Curioser and Curioser*, a line, of course, from Alice in Wonderland.

McHarrie's cabinet of curiosities plays on our fear of the unclean and an incessant need for sterility. Several everyday objects have been represented in plaster finish as insect and plant life intermingle with toothbrushes, razors and the like.



All Roads lead to Portland by Tess Boyes at the Breadbox Gallery, Northbridge.

I've seen this type of work a lot — it was a big thing in the early 90s — but McHarrie fills her work with a sense of the carnival and this holds the work in good stead.

Rhett Jones' life-size cardboard shed reminded me a little too much of Richard Giblett's work, his photographs as extensions of the sculpture are much more interesting. Like Thomas Demand, his sculpture picks up more meaning as an image, unlike Amanda Verschuren's *Pitched 2* which stands alone as a strong sculptural work full of tension and impact.

She has also pitched a tent at *Hatched* at PICA but more on that another day.

Domestica is at Heathcote Museum and Gallery, Duncraig Road, Applecross, until May 20.

At the Breadbox Gallery, on James Street, is another group of emerging artists. The theme this time is *Reunion*.

Of the eight artists on show, I enjoyed Daphne John's acrylic works while much of the photography had something to offer. John's lyrical *Beauty in Extinct But Vertical Stripes Are Still Slimming* shows us a dinosaur being photographed with a background of stripes.

The colour scheme sets up the artificiality of beauty as a superficial construct but one that is under scrutiny more than ever. Sarah Brown's photographic series of a bride lost in suburbia brings about the same tension you get from dreams when you are running late to something but are never going to make it.

Mike John's excellent collection of images of friends as royal portraits