

m Gallery.

**T**his year's visual arts openings began in earnest last week with a couple of student-run initiatives showing the way. At the Artshouse Gallery in the Northbridge cultural centre, Patrick Doherty and his friends have put together Duty Free, a highly organic and socialist statement with a strong vibe.

Even if the title came from a throwaway line it seems apt to ask questions about social duty in the climate of recent catastrophe. When does our sense of social duty kick in? Where are our personal boundaries in relation to community, duty and a sense of wanting to care?

In light of these questions I found walking into Duty Free intriguing. The show works on the seesaw of refusal and acceptance. Refusal to feel duty toward a system, to be part of the mainstream, but the show is also about building some form of alternative communal consciousness.

Duty Free, as did the recent graffiti extravaganza at PICA, continues to proffer street art as the art of social

consciousness made by individuals who sidestep social duty by sitting outside the system.

This position feeds off the old quandary of Marxist alienation, the taking away of creative power and indeed social consciousness by capitalist society. But these shows always make me wonder how much of this artistic positioning is just aesthetic bluff.

In terms of these questions, there are some stand-out pieces among the barrage of material covering all available wall space. Jacob Smith's Modern Man Series illustrates beautifully the need of adolescent manhood to be seen standing aside from social duty.

His soft, almost pathetic photos of male ego come close to nailing the socialist riddle put up by Duty Free.

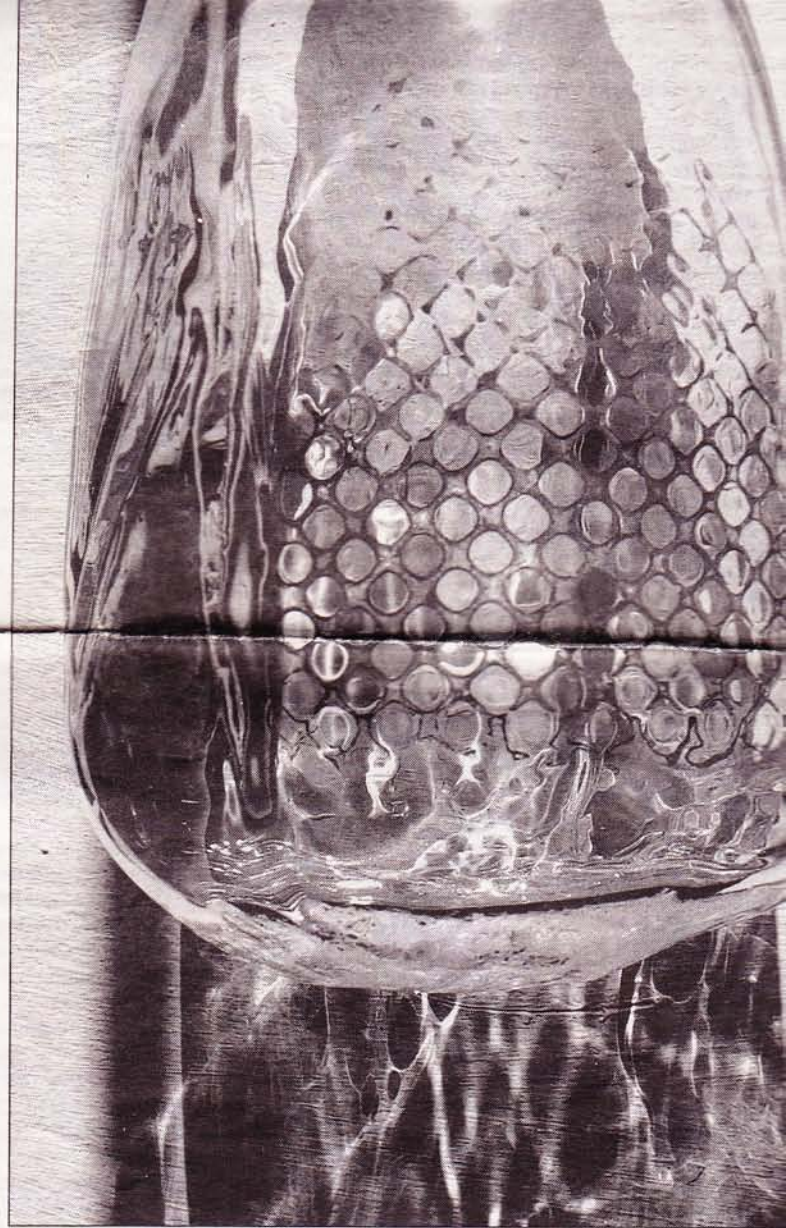
The portraits of Thomas Jeppe's local band, Homicide, in full throttle show the adolescent male in another light. Raw and aggressive, the band sits outside the mainstream, yet there is a form of social duty in both what the band is undertaking and in the images themselves.

Patrick Doherty's Series 1-8 are skilfully drawn, sexually explicit works which explore that inept, hollow feeling you get when you first realise you're a whore to an economic system.

Duty Free came together over a few days in the Artshouse space and is curated in an open and vital style. Uninvited guests were also welcome to show alongside those sought for the exhibition, adding to the sense of communal cause.

Revivify, at Spectrum Gallery, is a collaborative effort between Brooke Zeligman, Claire Canham and Ben Mitchell. The exhibition consists of a number of slump glass pieces and some urbanscapes by Mitchell. Zeligman and Canham have the same melancholic love of glass that an alcoholic might have for a bottle.

There is a cherub of a show at the



Brooke Zeligman's slump glass.

Free Range Gallery in Hay Street, Subiaco. Hummingbird Lives is the first solo effort for Jodi Bassett. The exhibition is a cascade of small works, over variously by hammering, drilling and weaving. Each depicts a hummingbird, caught in different stages of flight.

Bassett could not be at the opening because she is bed-bound with myalgic encephalomyelitis or chronic fatigue syndrome, a debilitating illness that manifests symptoms based on neurological, cardiac, immunological and endocrinological dysfunction. She can't sit up for too long so the fact that she has managed to put this show together lying down is astounding. She has chosen the hummingbird as her proxy and also as a metaphor for her relationship with her illness.

It's easy to overdo a metaphor, or even simply miss with it, but in this case it works well. These hummingbirds are meticulously painted, treated with love. They are controlled — but they break out, venting their frustration at every opportune time. They are both the artist and the illness.

I couldn't help but think of Matisse's bed-bound later works while viewing Hummingbird Lives. Matisse's cut-outs give me that feeling of insight into the personal nature of the artist as an organic entity, dealing with both fragility and strength.

I left Hummingbird Lives in adoration of Bassett and the relationship she has with her illness. The exhibition speaks of respect, awe, containment and pure hatred. This is a critical and intensely personal show and I felt very humble viewing it.



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