

## VISUAL ARTS

Ric Spencer

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## A treat waiting to be devoured

**P**ippin Drysdale: Lines of Site is a seductive experience. John Curtin Gallery is laid out as a meander through 20 years of Drysdale's ceramics and as with all good retrospectives, the exhibition is a comprehensive look at the journey of an artist's work.

One can circumnavigate Drysdale's earlier work in the southern gallery, which is dark except for direct lighting on the works. This heightens the viewing sensation, taking the form away from the architecture and giving the work its own presence. Halfway through the first gallery you can look up and see the plethora of pots and closed forms as they extend down the gallery. It's a fantastic sight with the newer Kimberly series at the end like a treat waiting to be devoured at the back of a candy shop.

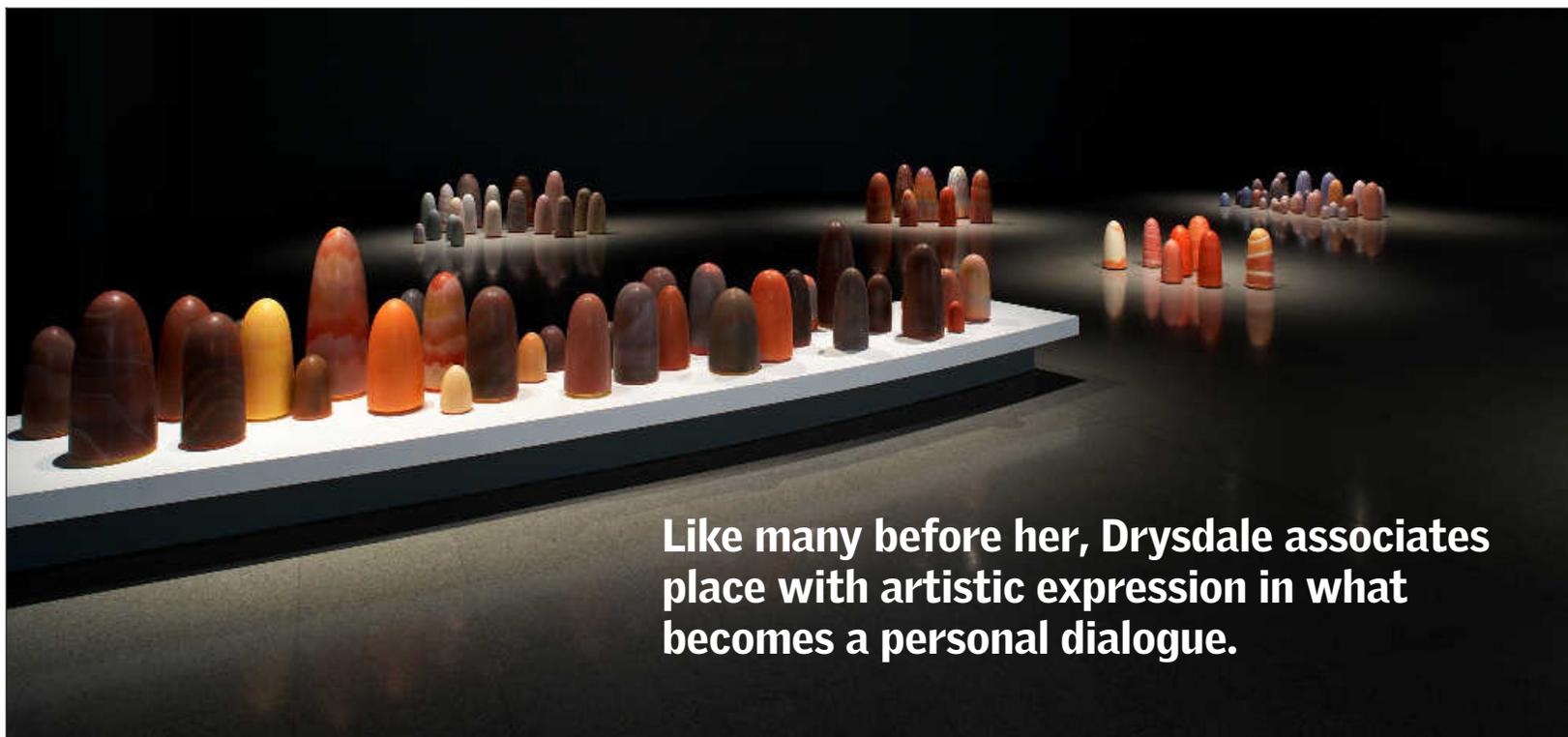
The earlier works, platters and wide bowls of lustred porcelain, soon give the viewer the impression of Drysdale's connection with, and translation of, landscape. Of these earlier works the eastern Goldfields series is the pick for me, rigorous yet restrained, the greens and yellows are held together by the cracks in a clever and observed reconstruction of earth. From the Southern Gallery we slowly move through pots that become more extended in their throwing, slimmer, tauter and more graceful in their balancing.

In the Tanami Traces Series the works start to focus more on thoughtful groupings based on tone and design. For instance, in the Southern Rest Area Drysdale's distinctive lines emerge, while in the Central Gallery the higher bench sports the softer pastels, with the middle bench the warm red tones and the lower bench the cooler blues and greens. These groupings are a reminder of the colour possibilities in the desert.

In the final Northern Gallery the vessels are overturned and become enclosed forms, reaching up from the floor. The Bungle Bungle-like shapes stand in familial groups, safe in their huddles.

The gallery is a splendid veneer of tonal qualities and the repercussions of seemingly long hours of being in the landscape.

This Kimberly Series, seen here together for the first time, seems a fitting culmination of Drysdale's



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**Lines of Site: Pippin Drysdale's exhibition at John Curtin Gallery is a thoughtful and thorough retrospective.**

influences and experiences. I think they pay respectful homage to the painting and crafts of not only indigenous Australians but also many of the other cultures she has engaged along the way. These influences are there to see in the work but the Kimberley forms also extrapolate on cultural meanings and in doing so engage in very personal experience.

Like many before her, Drysdale associates place with artistic expression in what becomes a personal dialogue. This personal relationship is particularly prevalent in the later work, which is distinctly different from her earlier heavily lustred works. The earlier observed reconstructions have slowly been replaced with a more subdued resonance and an alignment of form with line that produces works of being. Not reflection, not artistic responses, but of being with place and this is the dimension of mature and highly articulated art.

Lines of Site is a thoughtful, thorough retrospective that is well worth spending some time with.

**Lines of Site is at John Curtin Gallery until August 12.**

Also engaging is Andrew Daly's *Sitting . . . in China* at the Johnston Gallery. Daly is a stalwart of the Perth art scene and an exponent of the Gotham school of figurative painting.

His painting style is straightforward and uncomplicated, the paint put down as if it was always meant to be there. Once again Daly's matter-of-fact portraiture caught me off guard. It presents, then opens up to reveal plenty of space for contemplation.

Divided into two parts, *Sitting . . . in China* is a number of self-portraits and portraits of individual Chinese girls variously sitting, reclining or lying in an apartment. The works have been painted while Daly spent some time teaching English at a University in Jinhua. Immediately, through such a simple exercise, the paintings bring into question the history of portraiture, particularly as it resonates from the Western colonial side of things, but also early Chinese modernism and the opening up of Chinese painting to European influence in the early 1900s.

*Sitting . . . in China* also critiques the Western male gaze and rather uncomfortably, because there is no decorative element here.



**Sitting: Girl in Floral Dress.**

These paintings are as you see them, one girl folds her arms and looks down, another points the remote at the TV, bored and listless, another reads on the floor, nothing is given away.

Daly treads all over the history of cultural imagery, voyeurism and photography (by painting in actual sittings) and in doing so gives us some excellent, contemporary painting.



**In China: Girl Reading.**

This is difficult and frustrating work to penetrate, the realism tends to act as a barrier and yet paradoxically Daly has a unique and uncanny ability to displace the painter's position while giving the viewer ownership of the moment.

**Sitting . . . in China is at Johnston Gallery until August 5.**