

Different levels maintain illusion

Express Advocate

October 2003

Surface and texture are important to these paintings within paintings,' writes **Tim Brahan**



'The surface of water is one of the most mesmerising illusions,' is a quote from the introduction to the exhibition of paintings by Andrew Bennett, which opened last weekend at Gallery 460. Titled *Water and Other Illusions* this exhibition is a collection of recent paintings by Bennett that look at the illusion of painting.

Bennett is fascinated by creating an interaction between different levels of surface on the canvas. He does this by often creating two paintings within each other.

Often the foreground image is a photo-realist depiction of a textured surface, the insert picture is a totally incongruous scene.

In the painting *Suitcase Sailing* an old-style suitcase is perched on a stool set in a room with polished floorboards and a mauve wall. This is a static interior scene with its tranquility broken by the placement of a sailing boat sitting in water inside the suitcase on the stool.

Bennett creates alternative worlds for us to explore, as with the sailing boat in a suitcase, or the scene that is revealed in the meatsafe in the painting *Meatsafe with a View* where he seeks to combine the everyday with the majestic, the history and old-world feeling of the meatsafe with a view from a gorge in the Northern Territory.

This is a form of escapism where the main scene is tranquil, but often fairly benign. The alternative world allows us to escape with an enchanting or whimsical image.

In other paintings the difference between the two worlds is more subtle, as in the painting *Mudcrab Haul* where the fine detail of a mud crab is juxtaposed with the fishing trawler in the background. The two objects of vastly different proportions occupy a similar sense of importance within the painting.

Surface and texture play an important part in Bennett's work.



ALTERNATE WORLDS: Andrew Bennett's *Meatsafe with a View*, above, and left, *Seaside Shack*.

In one group of eight small paintings Bennett paints a frame around the central image. This frame is in itself a painting of a textured surface from the central image, for example, the painting *Seaside Shack* of a weathered seaside cottage has a detail of the flaking paint framing the image.

The large painting *Bovine Drop Zone* is at the other end of the scale, a totally whimsical painting, where a cargo plane flies through the interior of a house casually dropping cows in parachute cages onto the polished floorboards of the room.

Another painting *Indoor Fishing* has a fishing trawler sitting on a table in the middle of a room while fish circle, flying through the air.

What is noticeable in Bennett's painting is the complete lack of animation, of all of the images, even the flying plane appears to be suspended motionless.

The surfaces of the paintings are flat with little show of brushwork, leaving an overall work that is lacking atmosphere and yet remain appealing.

tim.braham@gosford.nsw.gov.au