

Visual arts

Andrew Harper



Show is a sheer delight

CONTINUUM,
by Emma Bingham,
Top Gallery,
Salamanca Arts Centre,
Salamanca Place,
Until January 28

A caul is part of the amniotic sac that remains attached to a baby when it's born. It's a rare thing; only one in 80,000 children are born with a caul. Way back in the 17th century, people believed that cauls – which are thin, filmy membranes – had magical properties. During these times, when belief in supernatural powers was at an all-time high, cauls were regularly dried out, attached to cards and sold as talismans. It's claimed that possession of a caul would bring luck and prevent drowning.

It's an interesting superstition, but it also speaks to the wonder of bodies and thin barriers between worlds and states of being. The caul is a relic from the secret pre-world of the womb, a reminder of the sheer strangeness of bodies.

I was reminded of cauls and membranes and veils by much of Emma Bingham's rather beautiful exhibition Continuum, which is filled with delicate papery constructions, light and transformation, all made from exquisite fine papers.

I love good paper. I think a lot of people do; especially if you do anything in the arts: paper is something you work with, and it is rich with potential. Paper comes with a narrative, with work; it is a story and filled with a very particular aesthetic wonder long before you ever do anything with it. Paper is made, sometimes by hand, and is deeply precious. It might be one of the most important of all human inventions.

Bingham clearly likes paper as well: there's an extent to which Continuum is very much about her respectful interaction with her own materials, which gives everything here an aura of delicacy and preciousness, invoking the delicacy of the skin of a newborn child and the worn thin nature of the skin of the elderly.

It's subtle, but in a way this work speaks very delicately to the passing of time across the arc of human life. There are layers and stages here, and serendipity: the work is



Continuum, pictured above in the foreground, features 13 monotype prints on usu kuchi kozo paper; and in the background a piece titled Holding Pattern, both by Emma Bingham.

incredibly affected by the room light, depending on the time of day you see it and how the weather is. It's not quite interactive, but Bingham's art has a filmy translucence that she fully takes advantage of to create a feeling of otherworldliness.

The work is also really, really beautiful. It's interesting: there's a criticism that floats around that art should be beautiful, and work that ignores that fails. I don't understand this, because art can be so many things, and it seems a bit of a waste of time to suggest that art should be anything in particular. That said, Bingham has captured

something quite sublime in her art, and the aesthetic found here is just stunning; this is art that I find mesmerisingly beautiful, and that doesn't happen to me all that much. Whatever else is going on here, Bingham has a subtle feel that's delicate and measured, which makes her work truly stand out. It inhabits the Top Gallery space extremely well, it has a feeling of crystalline poetry and while we can certainly see a lot of work has gone into the creations here, Bingham knows when to stop, which is a rare skill in the arts. A delightful show that invites contemplation.

37TH ANNUAL SUMMER SHOW
DESPARD GALLERY,
CASTRAY ESPLANADE
UNTIL FEBRUARY 3

Joshua Andree, Liam Ross Baker, Katie Barron, Lorraine Biggs, Anthea Boden, Harrison Bowe, Wayne Brookes, Chris Bury, Jo Chew, Patrick Collins, Joanne Currie Nalinga, Jeff Dyer, Sam Field, Josh Foley, Lisa Garland, Zoe Grey, Patrick Hall, Julienne Harris, Maggie Jefferies, Todd Jenkins, George Kennedy, Graham Lang, Rosanagh May, Milan Milojevic, Jeffery Mincham, Anne Morrison, Rosella Namok, Ian Parry, Micheila Petersfield, Dale Richards, Matthew Sims, Paul Snell, Jacqui Stockdale, Lucia Usmiani, Michael Vale, Hannah van der Wal, Bill Yaxley Shows like this are often a good spot to find surprises and a big dose of lots of different art; the 37th annual summer show at Despard caught my attention because a lot of artists I enjoy are to be found here. Rosanagh May builds on her exciting show from last year with a suite of works based around notorious singer Meatloaf's Bat Out of Hell. The work is hilarious and also heartfelt, and this balance is fast becoming something May does very well – these works are a step up for her, again. May just keeps getting better, and funnier. Harrison Bowe's work is of particular interest because of the subject matter: Bowe managed to be in Strathgordon when the Gordon Power Station was shut down for maintenance, essentially stopping the river. Bowe seized the moment and headed down past impassable rapids now a mere trickle, and his new works are what he saw: sights usually below tumultuous water. Bowe dives into the inaccessible in his art and returns with powerful records of personal immersion and these works are potent as you can get. There is of course a lot of other great stuff, so if you want a lot of impressive work in one place, this is the show to see.



Subject to change,
Harrison Bowe.