

Quiet works with a restrained magic

Review

Sasha Grishin

PETER BOGGS *By the light of the sky.* Beaver Galleries, 81 Denison Street, Deakin. Until August 27. beavergalleries.com.au.

It is curious how many visual artists, when asked about the impact of COVID-19 on their art practice, will answer that it had very little if any impact.

They simply spent a bit more time than usual working alone in their studio and did not catch up with friends at art gallery openings.

However, what I have also observed is that in the art of many of these same artists over this period, there has often been a gradual transformation as in their art they have explored a more spiritual dimension.

Peter Boggs is one of Australia's finest tonal painters. Over several decades he has established an enviable reputation with his exquisite distilled and refined paintings and drawings of ordered landscapes and the interiors of deserted grand buildings, where all is lovingly illuminated and closely observed.

In this new series of paintings, he has once again returned to his beloved subject of the 16th century Boboli Gardens in Florence.

However, there is a subtle but significant development. The sense of "otherness" that is evident in much of his art, at times bordering on the uncanny, has now been increasingly changed into an exploration of a mystical and spiritual dimension.

Most of the scenes are set at night or at early morning or at dusk, a time when the spirits are most active and the atmosphere is particularly spiritually charged.

The conditions of light necessitate a simplification of form and the whole composition is frequently related in terms of dark, gloomy, almost geometric masses. Very few visual distractions are permitted to enter these generally sombre paintings with weighty forms occupying the layout of the gardens.



Peter Boggs, Morning Update. Picture: Supplied

Boggs titles about a quarter of the paintings in this exhibition "nocturne" with its full musical connotation of a composition inspired by or evocative of the night – something dreamy, pensive and with perhaps a touch of melancholy.

One of the strongest works in the show, *Into the winding dark (nocturne)*, is a powerful evocative work that reproduces poorly and must be seen in the flesh to be appreciated fully.

It is a dark painting that draws you into its depths, where the ordered simplified masses impose what at first glance appears like a geometric structure. It is not an austere or rigid geometry and the forms have a degree

of plasticity, seeming to bend and gently fade into the distance.

Although it is not a threatening darkness as in the northern European tradition of dark forests with wolves and witches – here it appears like a path leading into the darkness of the unknown.

There may be something lurking in this darkness, a feeling of foreboding and the anticipation of some possible disaster, possibly more on a global and even cosmic level, than on an individual level.

However, at the present moment, we simply sense that, despite appearances, the world is out of joint and that the darkness is taking over.

Boggs possesses a rare ability to evoke a mood or sensation without illustrating it or employing a literal narrative.

These are subtly "transfigured realities" that simultaneously appear real and almost tangible, but, at the same time, abstracted – almost like a dreamscape – something exists that is not fully graspable by the eye and needs to be sensed and somehow intuitively felt.

Boggs is not an expressionist artist in the sense that his works do not scream out at you and demand attention.

They are quiet, seductive paintings that invite you to contemplate them and to enter their particular restrained sense of magic.