

A sense of place in art

Chasing Palmer, by Ron McBurnie, and *The Sea Inside*, by Nicolas Goodwolf, at Impressions on Paper Gallery, Braddon, until October 22.

RON McBURNIE is a distinguished Australian printmaker who is working out of Townsville. He is an artist for whom narrative, the sense of place and awareness of traditions all play a significant role in his process of making a print.

If 15 years ago he engaged with the great historical allegories, where ideas and compositional inventions from Hogarth, Grünewald, David Hockney and Breughel were transposed to suburban Townsville, now the imagery is more distilled and the historical references are to artists like Samuel Palmer, John Martin and Giorgio Morandi. It is not that he has only recently discovered these sources, but by now they have become fully integrated into his personal artistic morphology.

I wish I could say that McBurnie has started to mellow as he approaches 50, but it is almost as if the opposite is true. While formerly he set out to illustrate his rage and moral indignation, now a profound pathos grips his work. This exhibition includes a cross-section of his intaglio prints from the past two decades.

If we look at a couple of his early pieces such as *Court of Desire*, 1991, and *The Final Moment*, 1987, much of the emotion has been externalised and illustrated, while in his more recent work, including *Tree*



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Review

Planting for a New Year, 2004, and *The Lines are Drawn*, 2005, there is the sense of an internal tempest.

The Lines are Drawn is possibly the strongest image in the exhibition, and while there may be references to both John Martin and William Blake, the backward-facing figure in the mango grove appears to be moving out of this world into something of a spiritual realm beyond. It is peaceful, but also gloomy and deeply disturbing.

McBurnie creates a rich fabric of vision which can be read on numerous levels. His etchings hint at a level of interpretation which lies beyond that which is immediately apparent in the literal narrative.

In the other exhibition at the same gallery, Nicolas Goodwolf, a German born, Tasmanian-based printmaker, is showing his *Sea Inside* series of etchings. This relates to his recent experiences in Sicily, and in his spirited and expressionist images, he combines a sense of place with a sense of mythology.