

RED

Adelaide Central Gallery

Until November 11

Reviewed by John Neylon

Red apparently is the new black. And I still haven't worked out what happened to Guy Mitchell Blue. A couple of years ago, Artspace at the Adelaide Festival Centre had a White show. At this rate, it's going to take Adelaide about 300 years to get through the ROYGBIV colour spectrum. And when we do, who'll notice? But, right now, who's arguing with red? Or RED in this instance? It takes a talent to go wrong with red but greater talent to go right. This crop of street-smart artists has risen like well-behaved soufflés to the occasion, embraced le rouge with passion and entertained us all royally. The surprises start with Monica Majzoub's Untitled RED, strategically placed in clear sight on entry. This lyrical abstract painting looks initially like a five-star sunset hung the wrong way, but up close delivers some very enterprising passages of paint and brushwork. Another surprise packet nearby is Areti Devetzidis' candy-pink-striped composition Colour study for girl in red dress, which manages to hold its painterly nerve despite the potential banality of the motif. Among the remaining abexers, Sue Ninham's Site is an impressively-stylish exercise in textural exchanges with a touch of St Ives in its delicate balancing act of line shape and colour. With each artist basically strutting her/his stuff, interest in the red theme runs out when the more figurative images just get on with the business of being seductively interesting. Almost everyone gets in on the tease. Christopher Orchard shines with an enigmatic figure of one of his X men, sitting reverse astride a wooden horse. The mojo gets cranking once the viewer realises that there's a bit of Sid Nolan's doomed explorer lurking in this bulked up, binocular toting, Trojan-horse-riding action hero. More irony with Yve Thomson's clever appropriation of traditional Chinese scroll aesthetics, complete with shifter spanners floating with the grace of a crane (that's the bird) on a honey-brown field of MDF board. Lots of

technical assuredness tinged with lyrical sentiment in the form of Nona Burden's Alizarin # 9, an ambitious orchestration of over-glazed texts and other motifs. Ambition also drives the offerings of Paul Limpus and Mervyn Coles. Coles' imagination looks to have run ahead of his ability to deliver. But, while it is fair to expect a far more convincing capture of such things as angel wings, it is great to see an artist fancying that the symbolist spirit of Rupert Bunney merits some 21st century oxygen. Lucy Turnbull is exhibited signs of sustained growth in her Cat's Cradle, an assured image, more open in its drawing debt than most previous work. Of the entire RED brigade, Laura Wills makes the strongest claims on speculative imagination. Her nuggety little images of scrunched-up figures drawn and painted onto topographical maps are not the slickest images in the group but they have a nervous intensity that shouldn't go unnoticed.