

Elwyn Lynn : Weekend Australian 17 September 1988

Review of an exhibition held at the Macquarie Galleries Sydney, September 1988

"From the sublime to the meticulous

Michael Shannon's exhibition of landscapes at the Macquarie Galleries places him in the front rank of our most consistently penetrating landscape painters. Including even Lloyd Rees whose vision Shannon sometimes shares.

Rees's later visionary painting aims at the lyrically sublime, but Shannon, despite panoramas that predict infinite bliss, resists grandeur, the grandiose and anything suggesting sublimity by a myriad of everyday observations..

*Quarry Near Gawler* certainly has a grand sweep in the majestic quarry but it has been hacked into areas of sumptuous paint. Above it wanders one of Shannon's bush tracks that are always full of nostalgic dreams and intimacy. Maybe there is a whisper of the sublime as the quarry so meets the horizon that the sky could tumble into it.

Those winding roads that drift and wander into the bush have their predecessors in 17<sup>th</sup> century Dutch painting where there are paths of destiny, but Shannon's are ephemeral, uncertain and indecisive. In *Jugionng Landscape*, new and old tracks wind cautiously into shattered trees.

Shannon has a fresh appreciation of how the Dutch painters modified fields and slopes by the shadows cast by clouds on the earth so that it seems as shifting as the heavens. The speeding clouds in *Jugionng Landscape* pattern the rounded hills and gentle slopes in the background with subtle changes of tone. Those fleeting shadows compete with less ephemeral blue-grey shadows of the foreground trees clustered about the river.

As everywhere Shannon holds the visionary and shadowy in check with realistic touches. In *Outskirts of a Country Town* a vast, tired and infertile yellow hill, its top greyed by a vast shadow stands over a cluster of houses reminiscent of Shannon's earlier days.

Some panoramas are built around long, horizontal stretches of land; the splendid *Trees on a Hillside*, the simplest and most direct of his landscapes is composed of a fairly bare foreground that falls into a gully from which surges the hillside swarming with trees. It stays just on the humble side of the sublime.

Shannon remains the modest master whose genius emerges quietly like the roads that cross the dried grasses in *Mt Ida Summit* to be lost in the creek bed and re-emerge on the distant range."