



Pictures give voice to the trees

VISUAL ARTS

Tree Lines: New Works by Tony Windberg

Gallery East

REVIEW **DARREN JORGENSEN**

Australian artists have always gone into the countryside to paint, leaving their city studios on trips to work directly from views of nature. However, some choose to live and work in the landscape they make art from.

WA's most famous example of such an artist is Howard Taylor, who lived and worked in his home town of Northcliffe,

between Margaret River and Denmark, using local materials.

Today another artist, Tony Windberg, lives and works in Northcliffe. He draws images out of charcoal and resin extracted from local trees. Like Taylor, he can convey the sensibility of the bush he lives within.

With a deep knowledge of its changing identity, Windberg makes long, oblong pictures of farms, forest clearings and trees.

These are incredibly detailed pictures, so photographic they appear like holograms.

Some tree trunks waver within the eye, so that as we look at the sky beyond it is as if we can feel them growing. This illusionistic effect

means his works would sit as well in an exhibition of innovative contemporary art as they would beside other Australian landscapes.

That such precise images are drawn with local materials, adds to the richness of these works. It is as if Windberg wants to distil the soul of the bluegum, karri and marri trees themselves.

There is more to this exhibition than great technical facility. The subject of one of the many diptychs in this show is an area that has been clear-felled.

Logs lie in piles in a freshly cleared paddock. We look at the devastation from a roadside that has not been cleared, as if the artist wants to show us what goes on behind an illusion of holidaying in the South West.

The material on which Windberg has printed some of his

landscapes looks like a thinly manufactured wooden flooring. Brown tones of dark and light flow through these imitation wood panels, while also flowing through scenes of clear-felling.

The wood we are looking at is also wood that has been harvested, wood that has ruined a landscape to become decoration. These are ghostly images, as we look through the shapes of trees at a shiny wooden surface.

The work plays with perceptions of depth and surface and our sense of what it means to appreciate the feeling of a landscape and its materials. He performs a kind of transubstantiation, as he turns mass-produced surfaces into art.

These alterations in perspective, as we look from different angles, bring with them the complexity of issues at stake in living in a region like the South West. Whether Windberg

draws agricultural land or forests, he gives the impression of a contested landscape, one alive with competing interests.

There are also smaller works, stereoscopic views painted on Bunnings colour cards that bring out the variation within the artist's drawings of hills and tree lines. Again, there is a contrast between the landscape and the mass-produced textures of forest products.

The arrangement of works in this show, from these small cards to major, illusionistic trees, turns the space into a kind of altar to the natural world. The lives of trees and humans are entwined into the depths of this artist's soul. **T**



IN AWE Windberg's Woods/Wald.

Tree Lines is at Gallery East, North Fremantle, until November 25.