

ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT

Edited by
LOUISE ADLERCryptic girlhood fantasy
and plaster appliances

EXHIBITION

Anne Wallace
Darren Knight, until 5 August.
Histories: Andrew Wright-Smith
Linden, until 13 August.
Night and Day: Lynne Boyd.
Charles Nodrum Gallery, until 5 August.

ROBERT NELSON

ANNE WALLACE paints cryptic sexual fantasies of an introverted girlhood. In her work, a girl in a thin dress is often seen from behind in a vulnerable position, perhaps confronting a forbidding landscape or sinister park; elsewhere she's naked, crouching in front of a cage.

Her works have an unholly pregnancy. A scene of footies under the table unleashes cramped erotic energy. Elsewhere, a girl is asleep on a bed with a semi-naked male too near. The scariest picture has the girl bending over a chair in a corridor. We're looking at her legs and bottom.

If Wallace weren't female, we'd probably take a dim view of her pictures. They'd be judged as sexist with paedophilic and sadistic overtones. We'd say that the girl is "objectified", a faceless icon of female submissiveness for the gratification of male fantasy. We might even say that they're in bad taste.

Wallace's licence in painting what she does isn't just her sex. Her authority is the open-ended introspection of her pictures: it's their quality of distant musing, their sense of abstraction as wishful memories, their remoteness as symbols of an awakening erotic consciousness. There's no immediate sense of the painted events actually happening.

Statuesque figures in a desolate eerie ambience make up Wallace's favorite formula; so the facts or "contingencies" of narrative are largely abolished in favor of a surreal slumber-scapes.

We're already suspended in fiction-land from the improbability of the motif. For instance, the naked gloomy girl of "Sibyl" wouldn't really live by a birdcage or spend her whole life examining her knees.

If the technique were surer, Wallace's hidden poetry would be stronger.

Her application of paint doesn't always argue with her forms; her thin semi-opaque whitish upper layers sometimes sit unapphily with neighboring darker zones and her outlines are sometimes arbitrarily differentiated. The result sometimes undermines the coy gravity of adolescent

eroticism.

Of course, figure-painters always encounter such criticisms. But Wallace — who is in her mid 20s — needs to watch lest certain technical shortcomings direct her subject matter. It would be a shame if a reluctance to paint faces committed Wallace to a symbolism of the derriere. Her drawing is often excellent; with more secure modelling, she should make a true pictorial psychologist, our first for yonks.

WHILE Anne Wallace fathoms private girlhood memory with symbols, Andrew Wright-Smith embodies public memories with the physical traces of old industrial goods.

His installation at Linden comprises plaster casts of fridges, hand-basins, suitcases, kitchen sinks, pipes and so on, occasionally displayed in a glass case.

Although each object is elegant, I'm not sure that I would have understood the installation without Linda Williams' helpful and ambi-

gious essay. Williams links the objects with many phenomena, from the academic plaster casts of ancient statuary to the history of Linden, that elegant Victorian mansion which ignominiously became a guest-house before being refashioned as the prestigious gallery which it is today.

I'm sure that this speculative content agrees with the artist's intentions. But the art doesn't compellingly act out the spookiness of its ideas.

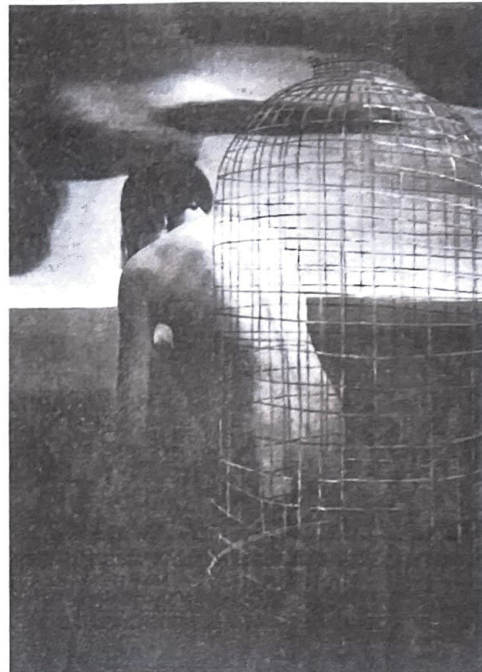
The number and placement of the objects seem arbitrary. I get the impression of an artist who habitually makes plaster casts of unceremonious objects: this is something "he does" and then puts them in a gallery without a logical spatial argument coordinating them.

CONSIDER a contrast. At Charles Nodrum, the painter **Lynne Boyd** is exhibiting 12 fairly abstract paintings. Each comprises horizontal zones; about half of the paintings are predominantly pale,

about half are dark. They often have simple words faintly embedded by collage in their horizontal strata. So this, if you like, is what "she does"; this atmospheric abstraction in luminous lights and darks is Boyd's thing.

However, repetition serves Boyd in a way that can't serve Wright-Smith, for Boyd can infinitely "aspire" to an unachievable abstract pictorial essence of atmospheric qualities. Each variant tastefully stresses the peculiarity of every other example. Far from such moody formalism, Wright-Smith's repetitions require fresh interest for each object which he casts in plaster. But once you've seen one, you feel that you've got the idea.

To overcome this embarrassment, Wright-Smith resorts to mannerism. He plunks the fridge on its side upon the mantelpiece or hoists it upon a pole. With all this, his fridge still leaves me cold; his sink is a wash-out; his suitcases are empty and I fear that repetition semiotically pulls the plug on his hand basins.



Sibyl from Anne Wallace's exhibition at Darren Knight.

Breathing easy after adventures with Batman

Jim Schembri talks to the man who was trusted with Warner Brothers 'number one corporate asset'.



Joel Schumacher: 'I'm glad I followed the initial instincts of the kid in me, because the businessman in me should have turned it down.'

THERE were only two paths director Joel Schumacher could have taken *Batman Forever* down. Over one was the sign RUNAWAY SMASH HIT. Over the other was the sign YOUR CAREER ENDS HERE.

Having successfully negotiated the \$80 million merchandising monolith through the former, and having eased the troubled minds of the Warner Brothers executives who had trusted him with their "number one corporate asset", Schumacher is breathing easy.

He's not used to making high-concept films like this. Sure, he did *Flatliners*, a highly stylised sci-fi thriller about science students playing with death. And he made *The Lost Boys*, a Gen-X vampire movie set to a rock soundtrack. But Schumacher is best known for films about people and relationships such as *Dying Young*, *The Client*, *Cousins* and *Falling Down*.

Batman Forever is the kind of film event people buy tickets for to see what all the merchandising is about. It's not really Joel's style.

"I didn't see it that way, though it was naive of me, I know. I should have," he says. "I grew up on Batman comics. I traded them and collected them, so when they said 'would you like to make a new Batman movie?' the little kid in me went 'Wow!'"

"Very shortly after that the adult in me realised what the job was, and the job was being responsible for the corporation's largest asset! Then I wasn't so sure. I went through a short period where I thought 'wait a minute. Is there still time to get out of this?'"

There were also the merchandising nightmares. Schumacher heard about how the success of *The Flintstones* had not translated to its merchandise, which was turning up in remainder bins across America.

It was nice to get the support from the "talented, creative, brilliant people" from corporations associated with the "Batman franchise", Schumacher says, but being responsible for the fate of all that additional investment did little to settle his nerves.

"It seemed like I had not done well by emotionally leaping forward to take this on," he recalls. "But my life has been a constant dichotomy of being desperately insecure and overwhelmingly arrogant and bold."

"I'm glad I followed the initial instincts of the kid in me, because the businessman in me should have turned it down."

He sure is. Five weeks after its United States release, *Batman Forever* has taken \$US163 million. Since its

local release on 29 June, it has taken over \$13 million and is currently the country's top film.

But that doesn't mean Schumacher, a softly spoken, sensitive man, is immune to criticism.

True, *Batman Forever* is far more exciting than *Batman* and *Batman Returns*, but then so was *D2 — The Mighty Ducks*.

One of the most irritating things about the film is that it tries to do too much. Ideas crash up against each other. We have a new Batman (Val Kilmer replacing the woefully miscast Michael Keaton), two new villains — The Riddler (Jim Carrey) and Two Face (Tommy Lee Jones) — the introduction of Robin (Chris O'Donnell), some new set decoration (Nicole Kidman), a new-look Gotham City (which means some of it is actually shot in daylight) and some new Batman hardware, including a new Batmobile (whoopie doo), a new Batplane (yee haa) and a new Batboat (which lasts about 30 seconds before being blown up).

"Maybe this is just my jaundiced eye, but I feel the balance works," Schumacher says. "It is a comic book movie and I didn't think we should dwell too long on one story."

About the Batboat. Although it is dispatched moments after being

introduced, it is no more useless than Batman hardware from previous films.

In *Batman*, the Batplane, for all its sophisticated aiming devices, couldn't bullseye the Joker at point blank range. In *Batman Returns* the Batmobile, for all its fancy security shields, couldn't keep out a gang of the Penguin's vandals.

Where does Batman get all this high-tech junk? Sam's Hot Car Lot? "I think it's always fun for the heroes to be in jeopardy," Schumacher says. "Remember, Batman and Robin are human."

And Jim Carrey as the Riddler? Robin Williams, who was up for the part, would have been better and funnier, yes? "Believe me, you wouldn't want to see Robin Williams in that green suit!" he quips.

But criticising a film with such a huge marketing push is academic. Surely, films like this are essentially critic-proof. Schumacher muses.

"I've heard this term 'critic-proof' for a long time. I guess it means the audience loves the film so much they don't care what the critics say. But I don't know any filmmakers that are not hurt by bad reviews, so I don't know if directors are critic-proof. We don't make these movies for people to hate them."

Batman Forever is on at Village.

TODAY'S HIGHLIGHTS

FILM

Out of the Past

Cinematheque State Film Theatre, 7.50 pm
Hard-boiled cinema noir features in tonight's Cinematheque program with two late 1940s gems, *Out of the Past*, starring Robert Mitchum, and *Crossed*, with Burt Lancaster. In *Out of the Past*, Mitchum finds himself in a tangled web of murder and double-dealing. In the other film Lancaster plays a pathetic loser whose fatal weakness is his attachment to his treacherous ex-wife.

STAGE

Farmyard & Ghosttrain

Napier Street Theatre, South Melbourne
This program of Franz Xaver Kroetz plays, starring Liz Jones and Malcolm Robertson, features two with interconnecting characters and a dog. Kroetz is known for his use of silence on stage. *Ghosttrain* is on tonight. *Farmyard* is on tomorrow night. During the three-week season the plays will alternate with both plays being performed on some nights (eg, this Saturday and Sunday).

LECTURE

Redmond Barry: Is there a 20th Century Equivalent?

Old Treasury Building, Spring Street, 5.30 pm
Dr Ann Galbally leads the search for the new Barry as she discusses her recently published biography one of Melbourne's most important social and cultural benefactors in the 19th century. Victorian historian Mary Ryllis Clark also contributes. Admission is \$15 with a complimentary glass of champagne thrown in.

RECORDING

Schumann oboe music

Douglas Boyd oboe, Maria Joao Pires piano
DG 439 889-2

The five pieces on this attractive CD were all written in 1849, all but one for other instruments. We get *Three Romances*, Op 94; *Adagio* and *Allergo*, Op 70; *Fantasiestucke*, Op 73; three of *Five Pieces in the Popular Style*, Op 102; and *Evening Song*, Op 85. These small-scale works are full of charm and invention, and are irresistibly played by Boyd, who displays the oboe's wide range of shading and feeling, and Pires.

Compiled by John Mangan; recordings by Barney Zwartz.