

# Booth's fearful visions

## Art

By RONALD MILLAR

**A** sober account of the week's art may as well begin with the most sobering works: Peter Booth's five new canvases, each one floodlit in the darkened Pina-cotheca Gallery.

A dogmatic claim lately has placed Booth as our best contemporary painter. Well, he is certainly best at what he does: but one can think of many painters at least as interesting, in different ways, half-a-dozen of whom might have a larger claim to eventual significance. No matter: all such attempts at ranking today's artists are speculative, and Booth is an original.

These latest paintings are desolate indeed, though not without hope. Doomsday threatens: projectiles and goutts of exploded rock fly out of control or jerk through their dying spasms; a final missile hurtles across the landscape to impale itself on a vulnerable, red-veined nucleus; a human-headed scorpion lunges to destruction with a last arch of the back.

Even in this shattered place, strange eggs and kernels survive intact. In Booth's quietest but most menacing work, a leaden sea flops down its waves near the low hills of a deserted brown land. Something like the snapped prow of a boat lies impotently near a dull sphere that seems to be the new source of life.

All these are fearful, nightmarish visions, perhaps more open and obvious than some of the artist's earlier, more private horrors; and painted with a gritty

immediacy that brooks no argument. You might not like this painting and it is not for the salon or boardroom decorator, but it is impressive.

**D**ONALD FRIEND, at Australian Galleries, allows himself only a brief grey pause of apprehension at turning 70, the moment recorded in his most introspective self-portrait. For the rest, he is happy to celebrate the changing pace of life, the visual luxury in simple things, the joy of doing something very well. Friend's effortless brilliance with watercolor is best seen in three works: *Williamstown*, *Flower Piece*, and *70th Birthday Portrait*.

**A**T the Christine Abrahams Gallery, Brian Yate's paintings are vivid and complex, the work of a born painter. With an acute sense of color that seems very Celtic, Yates pulls together his two biggest pictures: *Davy Jones' Locker*, and *Sacred Place*. The imagery owes something to Klee, the surface is packed with lyrical incident and succulent effects in the paint. An attractive show.

In the smaller gallery, Deborah Halpern has drawings, paintings and ceramics. Two or three of the paintings have verve and dash; the drawings are flabby by comparison, and the ceramics have little to do with the painted vision.

They are big, funky totems about mutant lizards and swooping figures; if you like folksy bush mythology, you might like these.

Kevin Lincoln at the Gerst-

man-Abdallah Gallery continues his gentle pursuit of the still-life theme. Muted greys, blurry edges, a few simple objects that change places to become first space, then solid. Lincoln strikes a new note with two misty and remote self-portraits, so reticent as almost to lose contact with the viewer.

His charcoal portrait is more emphatic than the painted ones. Lincoln's subtle use of color in the greys asks to be contemplated slowly.

**N**IAGRA Gallery has a survey show by the 86-year-old Harry Rosengrave, and some elegant prints and textiles by Mary Newsome. Rosengrave's innocent eye looks with affection at country cricket, abandoned guns, midnight hikes. The spirit of this work is charming and genuine, the manner often very gauche.

You either accept that clumsiness as part of the charm, or you don't.

Downstairs, Mary Newsome's refinement and wit could not be more of a contrast; her use of pattern and clever variations of perspective in the prints gives much pleasure.

**E**LSEWHERE, at Profile Gallery, Rachel Rovay's most recent picture in her solo exhibition is much better than the earlier paintings. At the Roar Studios, except for a couple of blunt portraits by Kim Hafey, Geraldine Burke's painting *On The Beach* is the most mature work.

And at United Artists Gallery, the energetic Peter Liri's bondage and discipline exercises fall flat by comparison with his sprightly little science-fiction fictions.