

•REVIEW•

Quick on the draw for Christmas

VISUAL ARTS

Works on Paper (1982-86)

By Paul Boston
Deutscher Gallery, Gertrude St, Fitzroy,
until December 23

Reviewed by Ronald Millar

THIS is the time when commercial galleries slip into gift-mode. Smaller work, prints and drawings, little gems for the stocking.

So it's a surprise to find that the quality of several drawing-and-print shows is unseasonably high. Paul Boston (Deutscher Gallery) has left his run late in the year for a full one-man exhibition, but his works on paper (1982-86) are thoughtful, mature, with an obsessive intensity about their sign language. Each has its own enclosed life, its own system of hieroglyphs.

These are diagrammatic and occasionally cryptic; they bustle around like the solid bits in a bowl of alphabet soup. Boston fills whole heads with them, permitting them entry to some schematic skull, encouraging them to occupy the brain for a while, then allowing them to drift off into space to engage someone else's head.

It's a process of pictorial thought-transference, a way of suggesting that, verbal communication being sometimes difficult to establish, visual form may



Paul Boston's *Head with Lamps* 1984.

provide its own intellectual means of exchange. Boston's shorthand signs always remind me of Klee's last picture, a still-life, where similar signs lie scattered on a table to resemble the discarded flowers of Klee's last thoughts.

Boston's symbols serve a quite different purpose, of course; but this is not the only hint of Klee's example in Boston's work. Boston's bricked-up heads, torsos within torsos, tumbling spheres and other enclosures have many associations with dreams and dark imaginings, sun and clouds and stars, ships and waves and landscapes. All of this supports

the idea that, as with Klee's work, meanings may proliferate, once released into the picture.

The features in Boston's heads (nose, mouth, eyes at different levels) repeat themselves or find their way into foreign objects to begin another life. All the drawings imply that metamorphosis is their business, ambiguity their condition, linear symbolism their method.

Boston, perhaps unhappy with color or uncertain how to cope with its additional complexity, sticks mainly to black and white, to mottled puffs of dark, stiffened by clear outlines: in Klee's own

SOME OTHER SHOWS

■ **JIM Paterson**, along with John R. Walker and Amanda Laming, shows drawings at Tolarno Gallery this week.

Paterson is one of Melbourne's more extraordinary artists. He has not a careerist bone in his body, is relatively unsung, works in sometimes contradictory manners, and has a mind that brings forth very disturbing images.

Tolarno's selection gives a good idea of his pictorial range, from the most factual waterfront reports to some densely-structured, mysterious landscapes and the wilder, almost panicky, emotional extremes. It's interesting to compare Paterson's startled jack-in-the-box head with one of Boston's more detached observations.

Part of the shock you feel in front of almost any Paterson drawing is that it has the force of an apparition, unaccounted for, spooky.

■ **AMANDA Laming's** work is based on intimate unions and conversation-pieces between different figure-groups: mother and child, lovers, friends. Reticent penell drawings, these have an air of quiet tension, are full of sensitive observation of both appearance and mood.

■ **JOHN R. Walker's** large, sprawling figures, nudes mostly, have the opposite effect: extrovert and dashing, bold with color, the implied sexuality all on the surface rather than tucked away as in the Laming pictures.

■ **REALITIES Gallery** shows prints by Brack, Counihan and Kemp and Williams; in the smaller gallery, Rachel Rovay has some pastels. Little need be said about the prints: the work is familiar, typical, the reputations long established and the quality exemplary. Rovay, when she lets the eroticism arrive indirectly, can be persuasive. She fails only when there is too much literal and un-subtle description.

terms, thoughts with lines around them. I prefer those works that place the symbols in deep space (*Head With Closed Eyes*), those that seem to have secret echoes (*Torso*), or those that explore the not-quite-random connections with (and barriers to) thought

patterns in a more subtle way (Wall, 1983). These are contemplative drawings, somewhat displaced in the calendar. Many have a rather carefully-assembled look, lacking that inspired liveliness you get in some Jim Paterson drawings, for example.

Tolarno

Such is