

Visual arts

Andrew Harper



Work that really gets under your skin

PREMAYDENA STUDIO
Amanda Davies
Bett Gallery, Hobart
Until November 16

Amanda Davies is, to my mind at least, one of the best painters we have in Lutruwita/Tasmania. This may be a contentious claim, but I'll stand by it. Davies manages to use the brush and palette as a surgical tool to expose raw and complex emotional states and moments in a way I do not really see anywhere else.

Something about what Davies does touches nerves, or unsettles, or even disturbs; her work has never been about being comfortable or distracting. Yet the work has beauty—beauty that is inherent in the medium itself.

I find Davies' work consistently fascinating, enticing and alluring, because Davies understands paint, and knows how she wants to use it, and that skill is a sheer delight to see. Sometimes that sits at odds with the subject matter, and that's a beautiful dichotomy—what am I seeing here? Is it grotesque? Well, it can be. Grotesque is fabulous though—when an artist paints something apparently ugly with great skill and commitment, the medium itself makes the image gorgeous. Or to put it another way, well painted stuff looks great no matter what it is—or that's how I see it, and how I see this work. There is history and study and obsession as well—Davies is a painter who has studied painters, and is informed by the history of



The Painter and the Model, by Amanda Davies, is one of the raw, intimate pieces in her latest exhibition titled 'Premaydena Studio'. Picture: SUPPLIED

the medium.

Premaydena Studio, as a collection of work, is very intimate, but Davies is always intimate. She makes her surroundings and herself the subject matter, which is not new, but seems rawer and more exposed than ever before here—indeed, some of the most potent works feature Davies reclining on a white sheet covered lounge, her naked form glowing in sunlight. She even calls one such work *The Artist and The Model*, and of course she's both. The gaze is subverted, even parodied. Behind the artist drenched in sun are frames, paintings, easels and corrugated tin walls.

Another work features the artist standing near a skeleton, with the green bush view outside the studio as a background. This is a very direct reference to a work by German artist Lovis Corinth—who, as it happens, also painted a number of reclining nudes. Davies names one of her nudes as being after Corinth. Art is a historical continuum, and painting is in particular. Influences are shared and why not? Painting is work. It is practice and study and obsession, and sometimes, an artist chooses to paint history and the ideas that form them and the place where they work. They need to strip everything away

except for the intimate core of everything they do. Davies has always gone to the complex, sensitive places; here she looks at herself as a painter, placing herself in a lineage, stripping away what she does back to herself as a painter, as an artist.

The work is intimate, slightly disturbing, raw, and very beautiful.

Davies is a superb painter, who reflects on herself and her work, and is totally prepared to get under her own skin. Do you find it uncomfortable to see? How comfortable do you think it could have been to paint, and to paint this well, with such commitment to seeing.