

Back to the ways of seeing

Daryl Austin

Greenaway Art Gallery

Until Sunday

ADELAIDE artist Daryl Austin, the winner of the 2002 Whyalla Art Prize, has set aside, at least for the moment, his recent renditions of unpeopled cityscapes. In a new and highly resolved body of work *Here then, now there*, he returns to an enduring preoccupation with ways of seeing and with the paraphernalia of the painter – the palette, easel, stretchers, brushes, et al.

Austin has expressed his desire for a “casual clarity” within a “matter of fact style of realism”.

Yet within this clarity, all is not what it seems.

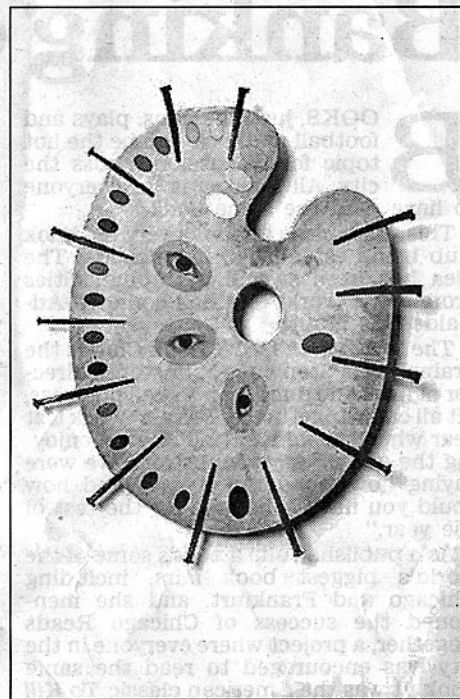
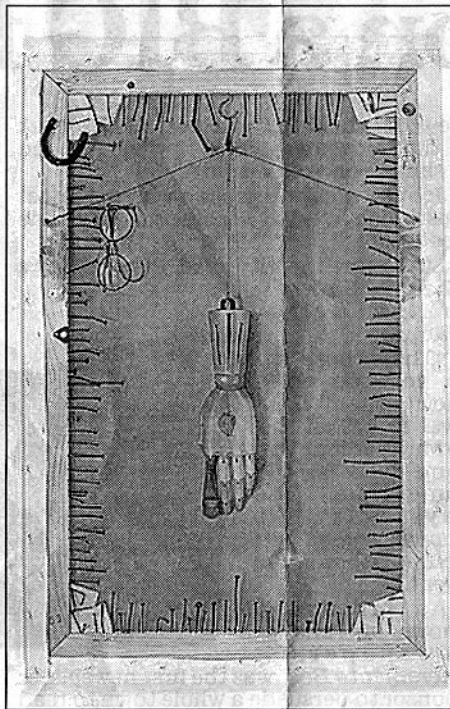
Employing trademark drollery, wry twists and inversions and trompe l'oeil effects, Austin for the first time shows objects both found and constructed, in tandem with their representations in paint.

One of the most striking works is the surrealist-inspired object *Palette Fetish 2*, in which an artist's palette featuring thumb prints and disembodied human eyes is embedded with nails at regular intervals.

Nails are tools of the painter's trade, but their abundance in this latest group of works seems to imply a bed-of-nails, flip side to the life of an artist.

The antique spectacles of *Painter's Credo* are goldleaf-etched with the legend “heart to hand and eye to mind”, in an allusion to the frequently conflicting impulses of emotion and intellect.

Spectacles as an ongoing metaphor recur in a number of other works along-



STRIKING: *Painting Fetish 2* and *Palette Fetish 2*.

side an anatomical heart-adorned, wooden hand in which a missing finger has been replaced with a paintbrush.

With the elegant narrative understatement we have come to expect from Austin, *An older couple* simply depicts a pair of vintage, patterned neckties, subtly looped together.

Nevertheless, such restraint co-exists with a more larrikin surrealist/Dadaist spirit that resonates in combination with other art historical references.

The paintbrushes wrapped in rabbit skin of *Painting the Dead*, for example, recall an august tradition of still-life

painting and the suspended rabbits of Chardin in particular.

In one of three large portraits, Adelaide artist Frank Grauso peers through the plate-glass window of a gallery which, with a jolt of recognition, we realise is in fact Greenaway Art Gallery and that we are under observation. By such means, Austin heightens our awareness as he takes the viewer behind the painting, unravelling the illusion, demystifying the process and bringing a gratifying verve to one of the more traditional areas of contemporary art practice.

Wendy Walker