

The fetish objects that **DARYL AUSTIN** makes – and his paintings of them – are remarkably cool studies of things that in the supernatural beliefs of the African Congo are considered 'hot'. Congolese nail-figures are dangerous. Nails and blades are driven into them to enrage the figure and activate his forces. In earlier paintings Austin depicted one of the nail-studded Congolese ritual objects, then started making his own with the paraphernalia of a painter's studio. *Painting fetish #2* inflicts this violent treatment on a wooden stretcher from an artist's canvas. Unleashing the dark powers of art is suggested with the same dry irony that is characteristic of all his work. The larger-than-life nude portraits of friends from his local pub use understatement in a similar way. The clear, bright and completely non-atmospheric light of these stringently precise portraits contributes to their confronting presence, yet is also strangely at odds with it. There are some incongruous details – a convex safety mirror on the wall, a pet dog on a leash – but no dramas. The portraits are studies of absolute normality that are startling to the viewer. Austin uses exceptionally refined technical skill in the most offhanded way. A work of art, like an African fetish sculpture, can have extraordinary and mysterious powers, but Austin's work never advertises this fact with bravura displays. Instead he paints with relentless mild curiosity. His subject matter is generally what he finds in his studio and he depicts it casually, as if he were pleasantly surprised to discover that he can. The transforming magic that artists have at their disposal is the real subject of his work.

Daryl AUSTIN

Greg, 2007

oil on linen

230 x 92 cm

courtesy the artist and Greenaway Art Gallery, Adelaide

Daryl Austin is Head of Painting at the Adelaide Central School of Art. He was born in Lincoln, England, in 1964 and arrived in Adelaide with his parents in 1967. He completed study for a Bachelor of Arts (Visual Arts) at the South Australian School of Art in 1986. The following year he joined South Australian Workshop (SAW), an artists' cooperative with premises near the centre of Adelaide, notable for the diversity of art practices fostered there. He was a member of SAW until 1992, when it moved to an old factory building that was too dusty for his increasingly meticulous paintings. An intense interest in illusion and artifice was apparent in the first works he exhibited as a professional artist, and it has remained fundamental to his thinking. He was represented in the 1992 Adelaide Biennial by drawings that mimicked etchings and he carefully reproduced the freeform accidental shapes of Rorschach inkblots (used by clinical psychologists to test what the viewer could see in them). There was an element of playful mischief in Austin's illusionism, but he used the trickery of *trompe l'oeil* (deceiving the eye) as an analogy of art and perception. We never really know what we're looking at in his works of art, or anybody else's. He was included in the 1993 Moët & Chandon Touring Exhibition. He was the inaugural winner of the Emerging Visual Artist (EVA) Award in 1995 and made a study tour of Europe. Austin was included in the finalists' touring exhibition of the 2000 Doug Moran National Portrait Prize, and now receives official portrait commissions. Darryl Austin is represented by Greenaway Art Gallery in Adelaide.