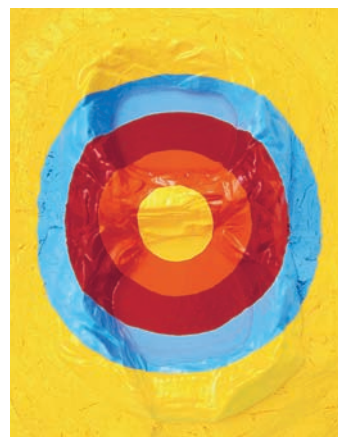
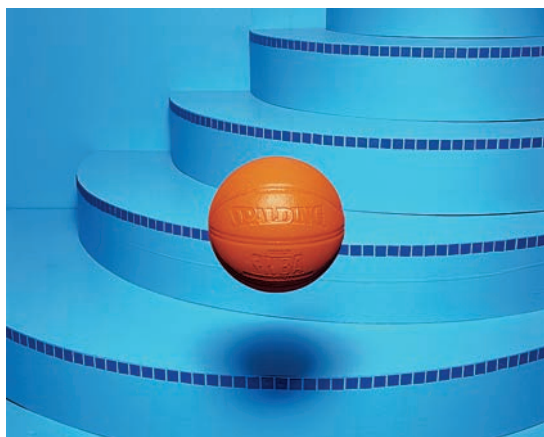




# Degrees of aptitude

Talents in the contemporary local scene cause the mercury to rise and plummet



STEPS TO ENLIGHTENMENT ... Paul Adair's bright and shiny works *Basketball* and *Rock Pool* contrast with Francesca Rosa's *Zone #2* (from her series *Fire Zone*)

When viewing an artwork featuring a clown I can't decide whether to laugh or shiver. There's something scary about clowns, don't you think?

Stephen King ruined things for me. If you saw the mini-series based on his novel *It*, you'll know what I mean because the clown factor in that is terrifying. Knowing the American serial killer John Wayne Gacy used to dress up as a clown doesn't help the perception that clowns can be spooky, or worse.

Maybe this is the reason artist David M. Thomas has used the clown motif in his video work *I am quite sure I do not understand the question*. It's one of the most engaging pieces in the interesting but exasperating exhibition *Temperature 2: New Queensland Art*.

This show is interesting because the work is new and occasionally compelling, exasperating because just as often it's not. Much of the art

is visually arresting but offers little substance beyond a strident style.

David Thomas, however, is one of those who offer more. His video features him behaving as if he's had a personality bypass, asking his clown alter ego questions market researchers usually ask. This is an absurdist piece, highlighted by the clown's failure to answer the questions and the perplexity this engenders. In a sense, contemporary society, like a market researcher, asks irrelevant questions and draws the wrong conclusions. As purposefully banal as this work is, it captivated me.

Equally engaging is another impressive offering from Brisbane artist Tony Albert. Using his signature Aboriginalia (Aboriginal-themed kitsch), he skewers Australia's European society by showing how its romantic notions of indigenous culture are impoverished. In *exotic OTHER* we see how the original

Australian culture has been objectified and demeaned. There's humour as well as a withering chronicle of ingrained prejudice here, as Tony explores his issues via the objects he collects and arranges – ashtrays, black velvet paintings and others, which depict Aboriginal people in an unrealistic fashion.

Another artist whose work grabbed me is Francesca Rosa, who is senior visual arts teacher at the Anglican Church Grammar School (Churchie) in Brisbane. Her photographic series *Fire Zone* is a record of the burnt-out buildings of three businesses destroyed by fire in Coorparoo last year. These works have a strong resonance after the Victorian bushfires.

David M. Thomas, Tony Albert and Francesca Rosa all deal with weighty subject matter. Many of the other artists, however, seem to be indulging in head-tripping. Curator Frank McBride seems to hint in his catalogue

essay that an artistic response to a superficial society might indeed be superficial art.

He describes Queensland as "an artificial paradise" or "resort culture". "Bright and new-looking cities with manufactured beaches, engineered lagoons and transplanted trees contribute to an extremely alluring environment, but from ecological and aesthetic points of view, it may not be altogether ideal," he writes. (You can tell he's not from here.)

Slick but ultimately wishy-washy works reflect that. There's plenty of colour and movement but most of the work lacks soul. Perhaps that is considered redundant in our brave new world. I hope not.

**TEMPERATURE 2: NEW QUEENSLAND ART**, until Jun 8, Museum of Brisbane, City Hall, daily, 10am-5pm, ph: 3403 8888. [www.museumofbrisbane.com.au](http://www.museumofbrisbane.com.au)

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