



Timelessness: Angus McDonald's super-Realist *Oranges and Bowl* at Scott Livesey.

Eons captured in a bowl

THERE is an obsessive presence to Angus McDonald's latest still life paintings at Scott Livesey that goes well beyond perceived reality.

Sometimes called "Hyper" or "Super" Realism, McDonald's style of painting was an offshoot of the Photo-Realist movement in the early 1970s.

This was primarily an East Coast American phenomenon, consistently debunked by New York art critic Clement Greenberg on the grounds that it was prescriptive rendering and uncreative.

This may have been so for the Photo-Realists, who arguably did little more than enlarge and hand-paint photographs (such as the early works by Malcolm Morley).

But for the more perceptually based Super-Realists such as Richard Estes and William Bailey, there was a lot more than just technical rendering.

While Estes got caught up in the extraordinary light-reflecting aspects of shop windows and the contained and reflected illusions of reality, Bailey dedicated his life to painting still-life objects.

These bottle, bowl and vessel forms he placed on a shallow ledge, with or without fruit, or drape, in much the same way Italian master

■ VISUAL ARTS

ANGUS McDONALD: RECENT WORKS

Where: Scott Livesey Art Dealer,
1120 High St, Armadale
Until: December 22

WENDY STAVRIANOS: SILENT FIELDS — THE GATHERER 2004

Where: METRO 5, 1214 High St,
Armadale
Until: December 5
Reviewer: Jeff Makin

Giorgio Morandi did, though in a stricter, less painterly manner.

This is an exacting genre that can trace its origins to Chardin and Vermeer.

You have to be able to draw — and, as in a good portrait, impart to your subject not merely a good likeness, but, as Chinese masters have written, "to see the one in many and the many in one".

These recent still-life paintings by McDonald have this "beyond perceptual" quality.

They are not just about bowls, oranges or jugs, as illustrated in *Oranges and Bowl*, but are about the timeless nature of these objects — the bowl-ness of all bowls, and the quintessential orange. Such paintings unfold slowly. There is no

bravura, no narrative; they decelerate at a time when the very essence of *now* is hype and speed.

The absence of articulated brush strokes is also the absence of artist's ego. An animated gesticular technique is like a series of signatures, self-consciously signing, as it were, each turning of form.

Instead, ceramic glaze is depicted here seamlessly, around which the softness of drape caresses the form, rather than arguing with it.

Most of McDonald's objects are lit from the side, suggesting a morning or evening light that illuminates horizontally, casting long shadows and slowing down form.

These paintings have been imagined by an artist in search of universal truths and as such float away from time, period and place, offering illusionistic windows for contemplation.

WENDY Stavrianos at METRO5 is also concerned with a metaphysical space.

Her continuing homage (begun in 1993) to the French Barbizon School painter Francois Millet combines contemplative transcriptions of Millet's wheat gleaners of 1857 in an almost flat-plane modernist field of colour — a colour field rather than a wheat field.

As a recent visitor to Millet's studio at Barbizon, south of Paris, I find the philosophical grounding of Stavrianos's reference absorbing.

It was Millet who influenced Louis Buvelot. Buvelot taught Tom Roberts, who taught Arthur Streeton and so on. Hence the very beginnings of the Australian landscape school can be found in Millet's humble little studio.

To Millet's now mythic rural symbols, Stavrianos has overlaid Ceres, the Roman goddess of cereal crops.

There is also a political reference to the now pressing need to preserve nature's ecological balance — her colour fields symbolise vacant lots, or become a desecrated environment.

With such layered historical, political and environmental references, one might expect to end up with over-didactic or bombastic paintings, a pain in the eye — but this is clearly not the case.

There is a warm, golden, earthy glow throughout this exhibition that has little to do with the Midi of France, but the "midi" of Victoria in summer, near Harcourt, where Stavrianos lives.