

# panorama



Official Newsletter of Brighton Art Society Inc.

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## FROM THE PRESIDENT

Dear BAS members,

The uncertainties of the present lockdown are challenging for us all. This would have been the final week for Term Three classes at the studio, however, what began as a short shutdown has extended and placed all our activities on hold, with no clarity to where we will go from here.

It seems unlikely that classes for Term Four will be able to commence on the scheduled date of October 11th and as a result, we have not posted any TryBooking class enrolments on the website as would usually be the case. We have no choice but to monitor the government restrictions as they unfold and make decisions accordingly. Sadly, it may be the case that no further classes are possible this year.

I hope that you have been, able to stay engaged with your art activities nonetheless. Several people have mentioned to me that they have been busier than usual, exploring new avenues and enjoying it. I've watched more art related videos on YouTube than I would have imaged and there is certainly much of interest on offer.

We will send out further updates via email, once we know what's happening. In the interim, soldier on!

**LYNTON DAEHLI**

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# RETAINING THE DRAWING IN THE PAINTING OF MICHAEL SHANNON

Once upon a time.....well sometime around 1970, which now lingers back in the dreamy past, I was given a book on Contemporary Australian Art of that time, which included an entry on the Melbourne painter: Michael Shannon. The picture included was titled: Early Morning Melbourne. It was painted in 1968 and is now in the collection of the NGV



EARLY MORNING  
MELBOURNE - 1968 -  
92x122cm

Back when I first saw it, my attention was firmly captured and looking again now, it remains alluring. The painting is an imagined vista of Melbourne, hinging on the motif of a city built around the sweep of a wide bay. Perhaps if we were to float above a point, somewhere between Middle Park and Port Melbourne at the time and look northward, we would see a similar cacophony of buildings, clamouring for position around the water's edge.

There is a toughness in the brushwork which has its own appeal. The compositional balance between the busyness and detail of graphic marks which comprise the depiction of buildings, slowly accumulating on the horizon line, then sweeping around and down to fill the picture's lower right hand corner, becoming a heavier mass as our eye descends to the base of the canvas and the less busy, more expansive passage of sky and water, is distinctive.

The area occupied by this graphic detailing of buildings, is not great. Perhaps less than 20% of the overall surface of the canvas. Most of the picture is taken up with the broadly brushed depiction of the water and sky. This pushes out from a warmer yellow and rose around the horizon, to darker blues in the upper reaches of the sky and lower reaches of water. For me, the evenness of the colour palette across the entire painting is a strength. It allows us to keep our attention on savouring the texture and variety of the brushwork and the playfulness in composition.

Michael Shannon was born in regional South Australia in 1927. He moved to Melbourne in 1945, to study at the National Gallery School under William Dargie, following this with travel and study in Europe. In the later 1970s, he taught for a number of years in the art department of the former Prahran Technical College and from 1975, sat on the Visual Arts Board of the Australia Council for several years. He died in 1993.

In 2012, the Art Gallery of Ballarat staged a comprehensive exhibition of his work which I was fortunate to see. This expanded my familiarity with his work and reinforced an affection for it.

A focus that I would like to take up, by reflecting on some additional paintings of his, is the way in which Shannon retains a presence of drawing and characteristically drawn marks in his finished paintings. At times, colour and drawing float in independent realms within a given work, but even when they are more integrated, the presence of the type of mark making we would associate with drawing continues to show through in the final painted surface.



MIDDAY IN CAIRNS - 1965 - 122x122cm

Midday in Cairns from 1965, is one of a number of paintings from this time, which feature old style Queensland houses. This one is rendered at close range and concerns itself with the simple domesticity of hanging washing. What I find of interest, is the restraint in colour use. In many ways, the mass of the building, which occupies most of the picture's surface, is almost just a tonal drawing. There is a bluishness in the shadows cast below the eaves, which link to the blue wash of sky above the pitched roof. The rich pink of the woman's dress, is echoed discreetly in the small corner window panels, but nowhere else. The other strong element of colour, the green of foliage in the foreground, is again held in place by the drawn detail, albeit with brush and oil paint, of the sugar cane heads.

Colour is playing an important role in this picture, and for me, it is sumptuous and satisfying, but drawing as a strong and independent ingredient, stands its ground.

I will include these two small works from 1976, to come at the question from the other end. Both are rendered in a combination of conté and pastel and are identified as “untitled studies”. They are inquiries into two groups of incidental objects and I think, would fall under the heading of drawings. However, the few floating scratchings of colour, loosely linked to the drawn objects, add much to the richness of the final image and offer an insight into Shannon’s approach in his paintings.



UNTITLED STUDIES - 1975/1976



SUMMER SKY -  
1983 - 122x152cm

As I mentioned earlier, Shannon taught for a time at Prahran Technical College. By the 1970s, the art department was housed in a modern building of some seven or eight storeys. The building still exists though it now has a different use.

I’m only guessing here, but there are a number of his paintings with a similar vista to that of “Summer Storm”, which feature a sea of corrugated iron roofs, atop single storey Victorian cottages, of the kind one would witness from an elevated outlook in an inner Melbourne suburb such as Prahran. This may well be the outlook from the former art school.

Be that as it may, what I would like to draw attention to again here, is the residual aliveness of the marks of drawing within this painting. There is a rich and well controlled colour composition at play here. The firm cluster of red, green and silvery rooftops at the picture’s lower left, form a strong diagonal axis with the broiling dark cloud mass at the centre right, which gives the picture its title. The confined mass of this approaching storm against the much more expansive neutral greys of the remainder of the sky is evocative. The composition is assured and satisfying.



In the late 1970s, Shannon purchased a property near the Victorian country town of Heathcote, south east of Bendigo. He went on to spend much time there in the later years of his life and painted an extensive body of pictures featuring the landscape of that region.

"Landscape, Heathcote" from 1984, is representative of this group of paintings. Depicted from an elevated position, it captures the majesty of this characteristic Central Victoria landscape. The near valley nurses a dense copse of eucalypts which recede from us to be joined by other lines of trees articulating the contours of the landscape to the right, which folds down into the shadowy basin of the central valley. Beyond this, we are offered a long vista carrying our eye to the distant horizon. Above all this sits a vast open sky. It is an elegant composition and a powerful capturing of its subject.

**LANDSCAPE HEATHCOTE - 1984 - 90x122cm**

Let's turn again to our observation of residual drawing. In many ways, these paintings of the Heathcote region are more painterly, when considered within Shannon's oeuvre. However, if we focus on for example, the lower left corner of this present picture, we can again observe a very graphic approach to depiction of the trees, which preserves a quality of drawing. In fact, the rendering of the trees and in particular their trunks, maintains his scribbly mark making, which link the developed paintings with preparatory drawing such as that pictured below.



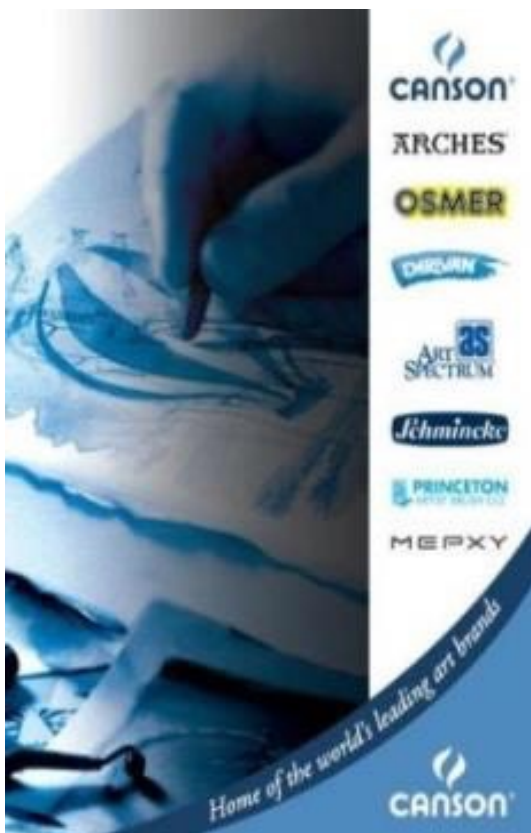
**UNTITLED STUDY - 1981 - 40x81cm**

There are of course, a myriad of ways in which to approach the capturing of any given subject. And the handling of paint and our approach to mark making is an individualised thing, not dissimilar to our personalised hand writing. It is nonetheless, always valuable to give our attention to such considerations when looking at paintings and to enjoy the expressive value of various approaches.

**LYNTON DAEHLI**



**A**rtwork  
 “Bayside  
 Playground” by  
**Annee Kelly**  
 received a  
 Highly  
 Commended  
 by Bayside  
 Gallery curator  
 Joanne Bosse,  
 in the Portrait  
 of Place  
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**Simone supports The Brighton Art Society**

I would love to hear from anyone who has questions about preparing to sell, or who simply would be interested in a discreet chat about how this current market has affected their property value.

**Call me on 0403 857 266** to book a confidential, no-obligation chat.



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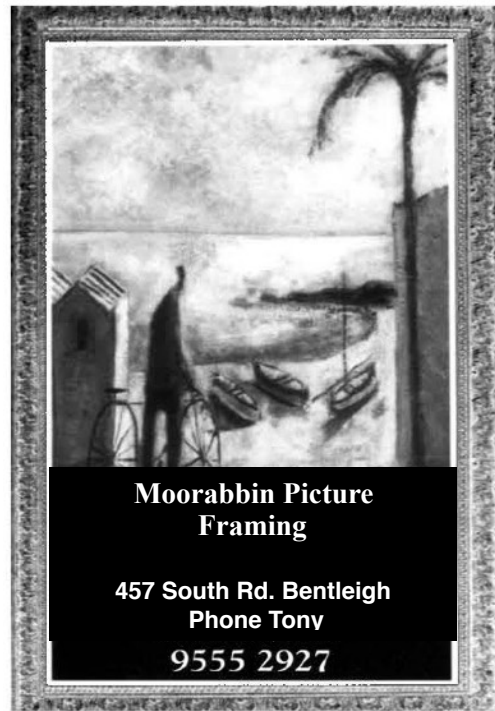
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