

# Idiosyncratic treatment of different landscapes

*Landscapes of desire and melancholy*, by Brenda Runnegar, at ANCA Gallery, 1 Rosevear Place, Dickson, until Sunday.



**SONIA BARRON**

## Review

**B**RENDA RUNNEGAR is showing two series of paintings, one the result of an eight-week residency in Prato, near Florence, in which she responded to the surrounding gardens, and in the other her reaction to the desolation of the Canberra roadside landscape after the fires. These two environments have little in common yet would seem to have generated a similar response, as suggested in her exhibition title.

Modest in scale, these oils are thinly

painted as if emulating watercolour. You might perceive them as naïve, but Naïve art as a genre is generally more pronounced for its fine detail. Runnegar has opted for a sketchy rudimentary articulation of forms. In the Italian works there is an element of

theatre in the focus on elements of the garden, broken disintegrating sculptural features and the distorted forms of old trees. These are removed from their surroundings and reassembled within a defined space.

Runnegar writes, "I have endeavoured to depict not only the feelings of neglect and melancholy that I associate with the gardens but to capture some of the mystery and haunting beauty, and magic which is evident even today."

Paintings from the *Clearing Series* were mediated by driving along the Tuggeranong Parkway after the fires, when the surrounding hillsides had been cleared of burnt vegetation, leaving the bald land forms

clearly defined and exposed. A persistent feature is street lights that line the roads and in some works a glimpse of high-rise building beyond the denuded landscape. In both series there are larger works which encompass a broader vista, notably *Medici Villa* and *After the bushfires, Canberra*.

These works are part of Runnegar's yet to be submitted MA thesis with Monash University. Especially in the Italian works, her treatment of her subject is highly idiosyncratic and struck me as yet to be resolved conceptually. Nevertheless they are intriguing, introducing a different approach and sensibility to an experience which has captured her imagination.