

Review: Two art forms can co-exist at Megalo's Bonsai/Print in Canberra

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Bonsai/Print at Megalo Print Gallery, 21 Wentworth Avenue, Kingston. Closes April 30, Tuesday – Saturday 9.30am-5pm.

Bonsai is an ancient Japanese art form, based on the Chinese "penjing", where the artist horticulturalist creates a miniature tree that can be viewed as a meditation on ageing and the passing of time.

As in any art form, in bonsai it is not difficult to master the rudiments, but it takes talent, patience and technical mastery to achieve a great bonsai, like the Chinese Juniper, the Prostrate Juniper and the European Hornbeam bonsai trees in this exhibition. Bonsai is an art of constant growth, change and development and in fact there is a Japanese saying: "When a bonsai stops growing, you know it is dead."

The exhibition at Megalo brings together five bonsai artists with five printmakers: Sui Jackson, Peter McLean, Annika Romeyn, Amy Kerr-Menz and John Hart. Although apparently some of the Bonsai artists have started to make prints and some of the printmakers have commenced their own bonsai, it is predominantly two separate exhibitions of bonsai plants, where a number of quite wondrous creations easily steal the show, and the image-makers whose pieces line the walls.

The most successful of the printmakers is Annika Romeyn, whose work for a number of years has been growing in scale and in complexity as she explores in her prints dynamic and innate forces in nature. She appears preoccupied with the idea of being in nature and conveying the experience of travelling through nature. As opposed to those artists who set out to observe the "wilderness", she seeks to participate in it and through her art to evoke it.

Romeyn has two pieces in the exhibition, a huge monotype (made up of smaller sheets), titled *Precipice* (2016). Measuring 228cm x 112cm, and within a muted monochromatic palette, it has this sense of ambiguity, where the boundary between the microcosm and the macrocosm is blurred and it is unclear if we are observing something huge that is seen in minute detail, or something quite miniature, that is viewed from close-up. In this, there is a tangential connection with the bonsai theme. Her other piece, a drawn concertina book *Fallen Sentinels* (2015), is an effective journey through a landscape, where an idea is taken for a walk through the bush and is allowed to have a series of visual adventures. Both are outstanding and captivating pieces.

The other artist whose work stops you in your tracks is Peter McLean, who had a solo exhibition at Megalo last year. It consists of two monotypes printed on old maps, titled *Batchelor N.T.* and *Eucumbene*, both made in 2016. For a long time artists have played with

the idea of the body as a map, that John Donne memorably described: "Whilst my physicians by their love are grown, Cosmographers, and I their map, who lie Flat on this bed". McLean has made the tree as the body on the map that is explored through time and space. Conceptually it is quite challenging and artistically effective. There is a combination of the defined cartographic space and the organic growing shape, both in a way mapping the known and in a strange way opening the path to the unknown.

John Hart's screenprints are dramatic and possess a certain "wow" factor, but have the potential to be pushed further beyond the literal. Amy Kerr-Menz, best known as a textile artist, employs katazome dyeing and katagami stencils, to create simplified tree designs, while Sui Jackson takes her tree shapes onto blown glass.

Bonsai/Print is an unusual exhibition where two art forms are allowed to coexist and on occasion they speak to one another.

This story was found at: <http://www.canberratimes.com.au/act-news/canberra-life/review-two-art-forms-can-coexist-at-megalos-bonsaiprint-in-canberra-20160415-go4bv7.html>