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Complex goods with boxes and dead birds

VISUAL ARTS
Exploded Diagram/Florid
Turner Galleries
REVIEW LAETITIA WILSON

Sometimes it is a relief to be given the space to think in the sparseness of so many contemporary art exhibitions. At other times the density of artwork provides a necessary abundance of visual stimulus for the mind to digest — and the two exhibitions at Turner Galleries offer both experiences.

Resident artist Marcel Cousins has a succinct show titled Exploded Diagram with 11 works. The more information-dense show is Florid which has 73 works by six artists.

Cousins' entry feature wall is a black-and-white pattern



Detail: Marcel Cousins' Lotus Flower.

reminiscent of Turkish patterning. It is airbrushed acrylic on canvas and the quality of the surface is particularly alluring. Called Glitch, part of the pattern jumps out as though magnified but this disruption is more like a design demand than the error the title suggests.

This work, and many of the other paintings by Cousins, are details drawn from banknotes of various currencies, a fact that is less than obvious. They are abstracted to be points of curiosity in and of themselves: a lotus flower, a star, a landscape, a portrait.

There is also a pop sensibility running through his work as evidenced by the reference to Jasper Johns (paintings of targets) and to Andy Warhol (a pile of cardboard boxes resting on a plinth in the middle of the room).

These boxes are not your average everyday boxes — they are highly detailed sculptures created out of resin. Their simulation of the real thing is disconcerting and reminds me of the fake food popular in restaurant windows in some parts of Japan.

Boxes have broad symbolic meanings but the effort endured to replicate them as such is



Above: Marcel Cousins' The Storage King. Left: Eva Fernandez' Flora Obscura 5.

beguiling. This could be said for most of Cousins' work; the attention to detail and process is excruciatingly fastidious.

Florid is a group show curated by local artists Clare McFarlane and Andrew Nicholls. What might be surprising here is that rather than being an onslaught

of elaborate floral decoration, floral elements are seen to furnish the exhibition more subtly. It is more comfortably couched in a darker aesthetic as the thorny side of the florid.

This becomes apparent in the sombre themes and dark colours that dominate the show, interspersed as they are with



Sombre: Nature Morte I is one of Clare McFarlane's dead-bird themes.



Portrait: One of Thea Costantino's unsettling images, Ancestor III.

elements of beauty. This is seen in McFarlane's exquisite paintings of dead birds, Thea Costantino's unsettling portraits, Eva Fernandez' native flora pictured against a black void and Nicholls' drawings and ceramics with a darkly humorous edge.

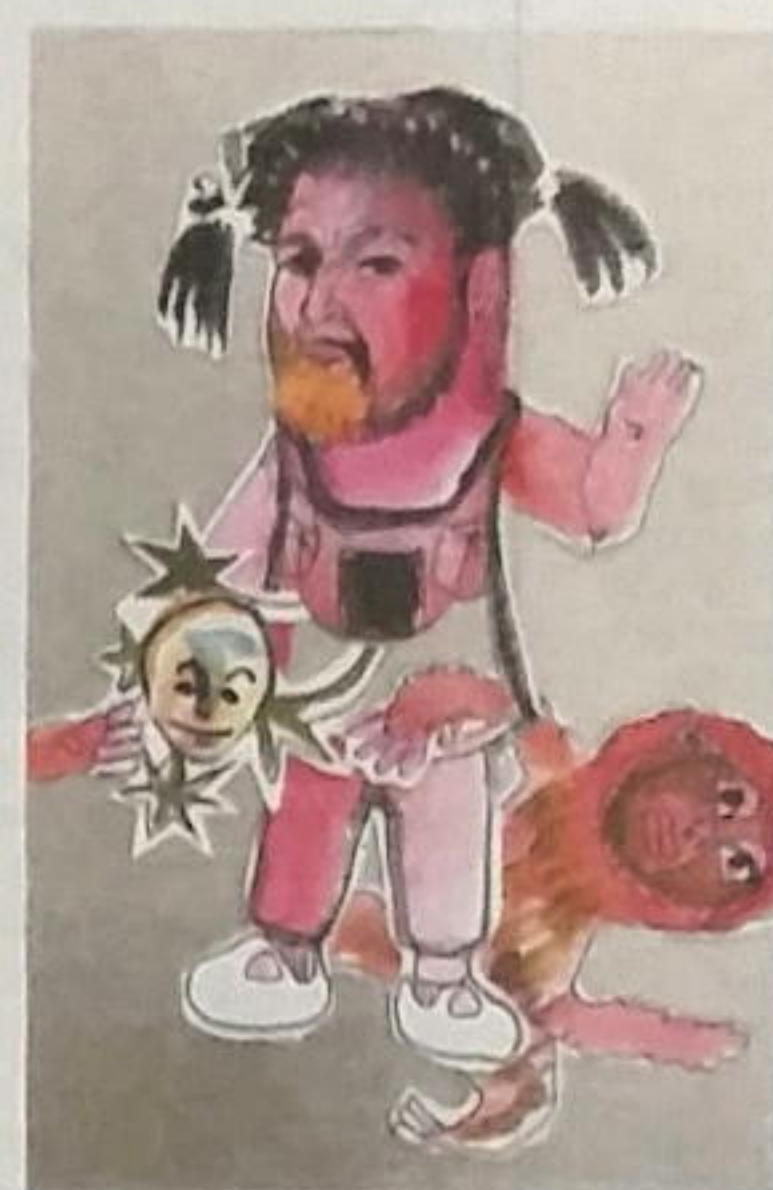
It is not just the dark aspects

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Elaborate: Ryan Nazzari's Mismatched Cabbage Patch 2.



Protagonist: Ryan Nazzari's Mismatched Cabbage Patch 3.

comes into focus and then blurs into the background with a fluid formality.

The only works that initially seem at odds with the rest are a series of small images by Ryan Nazzari.

Titled Mismatched Cabbage Patch, they feature a cabbage-patch doll as the protagonist in various scenarios.

This is where the complexities of the florid are drawn out; its meanings vary from flowery to excessively elaborate to ruddy to abundant bacterial growth. It is the latter two that would be most applicable to Nazzari's works.

Despite the quantitative imbalance, together these two shows make for a well-rounded experience and offer points of interest from the level of the handling of paint through to the teasing out of complex ideas.

but also the nuanced complexities of the term florid that unite this exhibition.

The works of Mel Dare articulate this well: they are hauntingly beautiful images evocative of states of transition, becoming and disappearing.

In some, such as The Ghost of Contentment, lace detailing

Exploded Diagram and Florid are at Turner Galleries, William Street, Northbridge, until August 2.