

CRAIG PARNABY

I am a figurative painter working primarily with oil on linen. I look for beauty in simplicity. My paintings depict the human figure, engaged in leisure activities, usually in a beach context. A group of figures caught somewhere between a candid and contrived moment, or a panoramic depiction of beach activity, makes for the majority of my subject matter. Figures riding bikes is another theme I return to.

I want my work to be as accessible as possible, for the audience to feel okay about leaving the cerebral behind and simply experiencing the images for what they are.

My figures are stylised. Their treatment is the result of a long and ongoing experiment. Torsos are stretched and necks are elongated, enhancing their beauty and injecting a quiet humour into the work. Physical differences between figures are diminished and they are often left faceless, eliminating any overt sense of personality. This is not to dehumanise the figures, but to make them as generic as possible, thus allowing the viewer to project themselves into the scene. In contrast to the stylisation of the figures is the natural approach I take in the creation of skin tone. This brings all the stylisation of the figures back to a place where it does not seem as pronounced.

The coastal landscape is used in a minimal way, usually placed at the edge of the painting, allowing for the drama of the figures to dominate the scene.

I use colour as naturally as possible. Although open to the entire spectrum, I try to drain luminosity from the colour in order to create the effect of things being weathered by the unrelenting Australian Summer. This muting of colour also lends itself to the theme of melancholy in my paintings. The figures often project a sense that they are more engaged in their inner world than the landscape they inhabit. This is what I believe allows the beach, so often associated with exuberance, to be toned down to a mood of quiet contemplation.

Although the subject matter, a bikini-clad girl on a bike or a group of young people at the beach, may seem over-idealised, it also registers as something you may have seen yesterday or this morning.

I like to think my paintings are a kind of pictorial journal of local experiences that grab my attention and need to be recorded. That, mixed with a bit of pure fantasy.