

Death school

**SAM LEACH/
ROBERT DOBLE**

Where: Nellie Castan Gallery, 1/12 River St, South Yarra, until May 31
Reviewer: Jeff Makin

DEATH looms large at the Nellie Castan Gallery, where Sam Leach and Robert Doble have both taken on decidedly sepulchral subject matter — Leach with painted skulls and galloping skeletons, Doble with his memento mori, referencing the life-suspending qualities of amber.

Leach has a career moving fast since winning two of the richest art prizes in the country in 2006 — the \$40,000 METRO 5 and the Fletcher Jones \$25,000.

Right from the start, his imagery was a shade on the

dark side. Dead things. Hung birds. Stuffed animals. Skulls — that sort of thing.

Initially painted and coated by a thick layer of glossy resin, the idea was one of suspended animation, meticulously painted and embalmed. His prize-winning works were small pieces, and here again at Castan, Leach is consistently hyper-real, trompe l'oeil if you like, some embalmed, some not.

In paintings such as *Podia 2008* we see a skull in profile gazing at a ferret-like furry creature curiously staring out at the viewer. There is a circularity of gazing going around the nocturnal gloom of a tenebrist background.

Such circularity picked up again in Leach's *Ouroboros Stoats*, each one chasing the tail of the other on a circular path. Such a form has a long



Snapper judgment: *Albino Crocodile* demonstrates the suspended animation art of award-winning Sam Leach.

history in the mythology of many cultures.

The extreme chiaroscuro of these works strikes a Caravaggio chord.

Caravaggio, of course, painted by candlelight, a single source of illumination also used by Leach.

Light touches his dead *Rossella and Magpie* softly and one can only surmise that the addition of a miniature satellite called Sputnik is an attempt by Leach to bring such a dated treatment of still life into the modern world.

Doble is also going back to find a future.

His citing of the Amber Room, from the Catherine Palace near St Petersburg,

refers to a fabulous lost treasure sometimes known as the Eighth Wonder of the World.

Made of carved amber, precious jewels, gold and mirrors, weighing six tonnes and about 45sq m, created in 1701-09, it was looted by the Nazis during World War II and never seen again.

Doble's installation is much smaller and glows in a darkened room.

Birds, bees, butterflies and dragonflies are drawn, painted or incised across an amber-like translucent ground in an attempt to recreate, in part, what this lost treasure may have looked like.

Amber itself is a resin, tree sap, that over time has yielded

fossils of prehistoric insect, and other, life.

Hence its association with past life, death, here reinforced by Doble in images such as a bee picking at a human skull.

Installations such as this one become quite fascinating as they prompt a history lesson, in this case a mystery lesson that has already featured in many books on lost Nazi loot.

Doble lives and works near Daylesford and his golden creation has little or nothing to do with Australian art other than being made in Victoria.

History, mystery or other, it reads today in South Yarra only as a decorative hobby horse or possible installation of an academic exegesis.



State of her art: Kate Rohde's *Flourish*, commissioned by TarraWarra Museum of Art. The artist grew up in the Dandenongs and spent her early years surrounded by animals.

Wonder grads

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Williams compares this with the enormous budget for 60 people wearing exotic costumes in Opera Australia's *Carmen*.

The costume design sounds, well, yummy. The colour palette, says Williams, is high gelati, to make it look Italian and lickable, we presume.

It's quite a pretty production with bows everywhere.

The budgets may be bigger in major companies, but the stakes are high for artists and these students need to savour every last, tantalising moment of creative freedom before they launch into the big, bad world of professional theatre.

This collaboration between two disciplines and 30 students augurs well for a successful and entertaining performance.

All Rohdes lead to being collectable

VISUAL ART
Mischa Merz

WHEN Kate Rohde sold a 183cm grizzly bear for \$2000 soon after finishing art school she could hardly believe her luck.

At the time she had only recently taught herself how to build an armature that would hold the creature upright where it stood in St Kilda's Linden Gallery.

Now that she has been named one of Australia's 50 most collectable artists by the influential *Art Collector* magazine, the value of that bear must be making its owners very happy.

Rohde has hit a major career artery with inclusion in this year's Adelaide Biennial and a profile in a major art book, *Untitled. Portraits of Australian Artists*, by Sonia Payes. She was also a

KATE ROHDE: FLOURISH

Where: TarraWarra Museum of Art, 311 Healesville-Yarra Glen Rd, Healesville, Tue-Sun 11am-5pm until July 20. Ph: 5957 3100 or visit www.twma.com.au

finalist in this year's Helen Lempriere National Sculpture Award and now the TarraWarra Museum of Art has commissioned her to create a major piece, titled *Flourish*, for one of its galleries.

The 28-year-old artist's work, a kind of deranged blend of taxidermy and natural history display, mixed with a cabinet of curiosities has already undergone many permutations.

Early on, moose heads and baroque display cases made with

cake decorating tools combined with animals clad in fake fur to sugary effect.

This time she has kept some signature elements like the display cases and filled them with slightly more off-centre interpretations of the natural world.

A graduate of the Victorian College of the Arts Painting department, Rohde credits being told by a lecturer that she couldn't paint as one of the spurs that led her to experiment with soft constructions — her first piece based on a mouse dissection.

More recently she has included paintings in her dioramas, proving how wrong her former teacher was.

Her Collingwood studio is crammed to its ceilings with plastic storage boxes and expanding foam,

National Geographic magazines and books on taxidermy. Animals and nature have been the foundation of Rohde's work from the start.

"I grew up in the Dandenongs and we always had a lot of pets. There was an abandoned horse at the place when we moved in and we were always picking up stray dogs and cats. The animal world has so much variety, so many interesting design elements, I suppose. Humans seem so boring and undecorated and unadorned."

A residency in Paris last year also helped inspire *Flourish*, which draws on the ideas that sprang from the many formal palace gardens such as Versailles she visited, and is built around the idea of the four seasons — each set-up reflecting seasonal colours and textures.

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IRON MAN (M).....10.15, 11.40, 12.50, 2.20, 3.30, 5.00, 6.30, 7.45, 9.10 pm
WHAT HAPPENS IN VEGAS (M).....10.30, 12.40, 1.40, 2.50, 3.50, 5.00, 6.00, 7.10, 8.10, 9.20 pm
21 (M).....11.00, 1.30, 4.00, 6.40, 9.10 pm
SHUTTER (MA15+).....11.00, 1.00, 3.10, 5.10, 7.20, 9.20 pm
MADE OF HONOUR (M).....10.00, 12.10, 2.20, 6.50 pm
FORGETTING SARAH MARSHALL (MA15+).....11.10, 4.30, 9.00 pm
CLUB LOUNGE
No Free Tickets
INDIANA JONES AND THE KINGDOM OF THE CRYSTAL SKULL (M).....10.45, 11.30, 1.15, 2.00, 3.45, 4.30, 6.15, 7.00, 8.45, 9.30 pm

PALACE THE GEORGE
135 Fitzroy St. St Kilda 9534 6922
INDIANA JONES 4 (M) • MON/TUE 11.00, 1.30, 4.00, 6.30, 9.00, WED 11.30, 4.00, 6.30, 9.15, 21 (M) • MON/TUE 11.30, 4.15, 6.45, 9.15PM, WED 11.30, 4.15, 6.45PM
THE COUNTERFEITERS (MA15+) • MON-WED 12.30, 5.10, 7.20, 9.30PM
LARS & THE REAL GIRL (PG) MON-WED 2.00
PARIS (M).....MON-WED 2.30PM
SHINE A LIGHT (M) @ 7X \$20 WED 9.00
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231 Whitehorse Rd. 9817 1277
INDIANA JONES 4 (M) • MON 10.00, 11.00, 12.30, 1.30, 3.00, 4.00, 6.30, 9.00, 9.30PM
TUE 10.00, 11.00, 12.30, 1.30, 3.00, 4.00, 5.30, 6.30, 9.00, 9.30PM, WED 10.00AM, 11.00, 12.30, 1.30, 3.00, 4.00, 5.30, 6.30, 8.00, 9.00PM
21 (M) • MON-WED 1.00, 3.30, 7.00, 9.30PM
THEN SHE FOUND ME (M) • MON-WED 11.00, 2.45, 7.15, 9.20
MISS PETTIGREW LIVES FOR A DAY (PG) MON-WED 10.30 (WED) • 12.45, 5.00PM
MADE OF HONOUR (M) MON-WED 10.45AM
THE PAINTED VEIL (M) MON-WED 2.00, 4.20, 6.45, 9.15PM

DENDY BRIGHTON
26 Church St. 9582 7815
INDIANA JONES 4 (M) • MON-WED 10.00, 11.00, 12.30, 1.30, 3.00, 4.00, 5.30, 6.30, 8.00, 9.00
21 (M) • MON-WED 1.45, 4.15, 6.45, 9.15PM
THEN SHE FOUND ME (M) • MON-WED 11.00, 1.30, 4.15, 7.15, 9.30
WHAT HAPPENS IN VEGAS (M) MON-WED 12.30, 5.00, 9.30PM
IRON MAN (M) MON-WED 10.15, 2.30, 7.00PM
MADE OF HONOUR (M) MON-WED 5.15PM
NIM'S ISLAND (PG) MON-WED 11.30AM

BRIGHTON BAY
204 Bay St. 9586 3550
LOVE IN THE TIME OF CHOLERA (M) • MON-WED 9.45AM, 4.30, 9.15PM
THE COUNTERFEITERS (MA15+) • MON-WED 10.45, 12.50, 3.00, 7.15, 9.30PM
THE PAINTED VEIL (M) MON-WED 11.45, 2.15, 6.45, 9.15PM
LUN SECRET (M) MON-WED 11.00, 3.15, 9.30
MISS PETTIGREW LIVES FOR A DAY (PG) MON-WED 11.00, 4.45, 9.30PM
BEFORE THE DEVIL KNOWS YOU'RE DEAD (MA15+) MON-WED 10.45AM
LARS & THE REAL GIRL (PG) MON-WED 5.10
MOLIERE (PG) MON-WED 5.15PM

WESTGARTH
89 High St Northcote. 9482 2001
INDIANA JONES 4 (M) • MON-WED 11.00, 1.30, 4.00, 6.30, 9.00PM
THEN SHE FOUND ME (M) • MON/TUE 11.15, 2.30, 5.15, 7.15, 9.15PM
WED 10.30, 1.15, 4.15, 6.15, 9.15PM
MISS PETTIGREW LIVES FOR A DAY (PG) MON-WED 11.00, 12.45, 3.30PM
THE PAINTED VEIL (M) MON-WED 1.15, 4.30, 7.00, 9.15PM

CINEMA COMO
Car Tourak Rd & Chapel St 5th Yarra 9827 7533
LOVE IN THE TIME OF CHOLERA (M) • MON-WED 9.45AM, 4.30, 9.10PM
THEN SHE FOUND ME (M) • MON-WED 11.00, 3.15, 7.15, 9.15PM
THE COUNTERFEITERS (MA15+) • MON-WED 12.15, 2.15, 6.30, 9.30PM
MISS PETTIGREW LIVES FOR A DAY (PG) MON-WED 10.30, 12.45, 2.40PM
THE PAINTED VEIL (M) MON-WED 9.45AM, 1.30, 6.45, 9.35PM
THE EDGE OF HEAVEN (M) MON-WED 4.00, 7.10
MOLIERE (PG) MON-WED 11.00AM
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