Melbourne

_Shifting Light_
Lydia Wegner
_Arc One Gallery_
13 March—13 April

The set-up of Lydia Wegner's staged photographs is unassuming. Cast from readymade materials, the results are otherworldly. This 'other' world, however, is grounded in formalism. It is one of geometry, light and colour.

"I've titled the show _Shifting Light_ because I've always been interested in light, colour and objects, and how they interact," says Wegner. To create these images she experimented with materials such as reflective paper, Perspex, mirror and sometimes small bits of metal on her studio tabletop, resulting in compositions which were then lit by lighting gels. Their colours resemble candy or gems: turquoise, garnet and sherbet orange.

Wegner says of her new works: "I think there's a lot more depth and layers. They're not as minimalist as my previous photographs." Though they appear harmonious there's a dynamism to their composition. "There's more of an intensity of colour, and layering of objects and shadows. And there's also a bit of play with mirror, which results in the bouncing around of light and shadow!"

Wegner uses an analogue process where she aims to achieve the desired hues and shadows in the studio - this method involves an element of surprise. "There's a kind of magic which happens when I use the camera. You kind of get an image that you may not be able to see by the eye," she says.

The outside world informs Wegner's work, but ultimately her practice is studio based. "I'm really interested in architecture and the casting of shadows that buildings can make. I feel that there's a bit of influence coming from that, but also I think the constructed image and the studio still life is where my work is situated." — Zara Sigglekow

Sydney

_Memento_
Darren Gannon
_May Space_
27 February—17 March

Spending most of his life on the coastal fringes of Sydney's south, Darren Gannon would, as a younger man, head further south for surfing trips with mates. He loved those years of sleeping on isolated hilltops and gazing lovingly at landscapes that are now embedded in his consciousness. He hopes his new gauzy, enigmatic works — mainly monochromatic — go beyond nostalgia in conveying his love of the misty atmosphere that comes with the moist Illawarra countryside.
Memento, comprising more than a dozen oil paintings, has an elegiac quality. Gannon says the works were mainly created from memory rather than setting up on site for an exercise in “look and put”.

“It seems to have got into my psyche, I have been going there for such a long time. I get a sense of comfort from the place.”

Returning from a more recent visit to the coast, he started to “paint things out of [his] head.” Even though some of the scenes he recalled weren’t all that attractive – he cites the steelworks – they were enjoyable to paint, and he has managed to instil a romantic, melancholic aura into his works, with resonant titles such as Veil, Solace, Wish you could hear me and City of Rust.

Gannon says he builds his paintings up slowly in thin layers of paint and glaze; and when things aren’t going well, he refers back to Lloyd Rees’s paintings for “some sort of guidance”. There is just a hint of colour: some ultramarine, burnt umber and cadmium. Not so long ago he was using vivid colours but pared it right back for this exhibition because, as he rightly says, “it seems to suit that tone and mood.” – ANDREW STEPHENS

Hobart

*Time Traveller*

Michael Vale

**Despard Gallery**

6 March—31 March

Michael Vale knows a lot of people find his paintings dark. He’s not surprised, given the prevalence of skulls, skeletons, ghosts and even more frightening – clowns. But Vale insists the grimness is not unsmiling. “I find it hard to be too serious. I’m serious about painting but not necessarily about the content – when it comes to the content, I like to have a bit of fun,” he says.

The Melbourne-based painter’s new exhibition at Despard Gallery in Hobart, *Time Traveller*, features characters and elements that are peculiar yet oddly familiar. Vale, who has worked in film and television, cites cinema, (particularly Chris Marker’s 1962 *La Jetée*, and horror films), as a major influence.

Vale says the exhibition title is a play on the art of painting. For the artist, painting is a continuum that is timeless, regardless of style. He describes his process and practice as a “flirtation” with historical styles, borrowing from the past to create something that’s neither present nor future, but a surreal alternative. “In my lexicon that’s a form of time travelling,” Vale says.

In *The Package*, 2018 – one of Vale’s recent paintings in the exhibition – a skeleton carries a brown rectangular parcel along a cliff set amidst majestic snow-capped mountains. The setting here is reminiscent of Romantic landscape paintings from the 18th and 19th centuries – though in the score of the epic setting, there is a distinct off-note.

Vale spends a considerable amount of time thinking about the setting for his figures and characters. “It provides an absurdist context for the figures, and I bring an element of abstraction into it as well, mixing it all up into a kind of brew,” he says.

— NADIAH ABDULRAHIM

Michael Vale, (Time passes slowly) Up here in the mountains, 2018, oil on linen, 122 x 97 cm.