

# WA ART

## review

WORDS Ted Snell



Ted Snell is the director of the University of Western Australia's Cultural Precinct, and currently the WA art reviewer for *The Australian*.



### Artist to watch

#### IAN WILLIAMS

An artist's most creative act is to create his or her practice. "I have constructed my practice out of my passions," confides Ian Williams, by way of explaining how he has reconciled his commitment to making oil paintings on canvas and board, while maintaining his enthusiasm for gaming and his fascination with the digital world. Combining those two environments and exploring what are the unique properties of both has directed his works as a student and now as a professional over the past six years.

The small-scale pieces that fill his walls and are stacked neatly in racks testify to his fascination with the traditional processes of painting. Their soft tones and pristine surfaces exude restraint, yet they

have a compelling quality that demands closer attention. Neatly aligned tubes of paint, containers of oil and medium, an assortment of brushes and a stack of easels are the stock in trade of any plein-air painter. But instead of gathering up his equipment on his back and setting up in some scenic patch of landscape, Williams enters the digital world, and paints in streets strafed by gunfire and patrolled by terrorists armed with bazookas. Not infrequently he is forced to retire when his avatar is mortally wounded, but he immediately returns revived and ready to continue painting.

His first Atari in the 1980s offered a creative escape for a young boy. It was a place of excitement and one that demanded great leaps of imagination to convert pixelated forms into a concrete



Photography Adam Borello



*Mimic 1 2015. Oil on canvas 30x45cm.*

reality. Playing in the 'real' world and the 'imaginary' world at the same time required flexibility and adaptability. Those same skills are at the core of Williams's ability to mimic/mirror/refract the digital environment in his wonderfully seductive paintings. Their surfaces may

have the allure of slick professionalism, but there's nothing glib or clichéd in his translations. Just as the digital is famously seductive, so Williams embraces the tropes of Romanticism to construct enticing equivalents. Proficient in managing the technical sophistication of the medium, he works 'in the moment' to capture the instant of transition between one and the other. Through a soft blurring of the image, he situates us on that membrane between seeing and knowing, which provides new lenses that offer insights that seem to bridge the Utopian and Dystopian extremes of both worlds.

This is the "magical, sacred space of viewing" he assigns us when we stand before his paintings. It is a space for contemplation, a quiet and slow place incommensurate with the cacophony, pace and ubiquity of the digital environment. Standing before a single, still work that demands our time and attention opens a portal onto multiple possibilities of engagement. The results can be game-changing. The vastness of *Cascade* – shown in last year's Bankwest Prize – with its tantalisingly nuanced ambience, creates an arena for projection, speculation and deliberation.

Last year was extremely busy for Williams, with work in six shows in Perth and at MOP Projects in Sydney, so 2016 will be a time to rebuild and re-focus. Whatever transpires, he is most definitely an artist to watch.

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