



Square deal: Jennifer Joseph's "hit-and-miss" approach to her art relies heavily on having a good eye for abstract creations.

Trash is treasure

By **PETER TIMMS**

SOMEONE said recently that Jennifer Joseph was "an artist's artist". The phrase is cliched, but I know exactly what he means.

Joseph's paintings and constructions rely upon our appreciation of processes and materials, so they will strike a chord with anyone who loves the "feel" of things.

They are uncompromisingly abstract. Most are no more than happy conjunctions of colors, textures and shapes constructed from junk she has played with.

It's hit-and-miss art. It depends heavily on having what used to be called a good eye, for no intellectual effort needs to be expended. Fortunately, Joseph hits more often than she misses.

What distinguishes these works from others using junk is that Joseph has a refined sense of what combinations succeed, and a penchant for utmost simplicity.

She is not content, however, to let her found objects do all the work. She adds loosely brushed painted motifs which have an energy and immediacy redolent of calligraphy and which set up

REVIEW

painting

Jennifer Joseph

Where: Michael Wardell Gallery, 2A Waltham St, Richmond

When: until March 1

a lively dialogue with the found elements.

The results, at least in the best, are not sloppy or careless-looking, despite the junk being rugged. The triumph is that they manage to transform base rubbish into something of utmost refinement and delicacy.

Among the most effective works are a series of tiny panels which hang above the desk in the gallery office.

On discarded chunks of wood, Joseph has painted some simple abstract shapes. Again, these are simple, almost to the point of being throw-away, yet they achieve an elegance through the sensitive interplay between painted shapes and the rough, irregular outlines of the wooden panels.

Joseph is less successful when she moves away from



street opposite that could easily have passed for one of Joseph's paintings.

We are used to art being more controlled, more carefully crafted and more deliberate-looking than this.

But in traditional Japanese aesthetics, for example, the job of the artist is simply to let things happen.

To the Japanese, the artist must never impose his or her ego on the work but rather

the rough, weathered textures and colors of old wood and tin.

A series of box forms, for example, which in any case don't work visually because they can't be read as flat pictures, are spoiled by the addition of polished steel sheets, which look too industrial, too harsh and cold.

A lot of people might find this sort of art just too "easy".

After all, there is little to distinguish between the works on the wall and the rugged textures of the gallery's old concrete floor.

In fact, on leaving the gallery, I noticed a dilapidated, wire-covered window in the

must learn about the processes of nature and let them express themselves with as little interference as possible.

In this sense, Joseph's works are very Japanese in character. They have that delicate balance of casualness and pinpoint refinement that we admire in the decoration of Japanese folk pottery.

In her catalogue note, Joseph says, "My art is not about anything. It just is."

These days, that's a brave statement to make, and these are brave works of art.

Peter Timms is editor of *Art Monthly Australia*