

# These things are made for summer

## ART

Ronald Millar

**R**ICHARD Crichton's sun-drenched paintings at Powell St. Gallery have put everything else this week in the shade.

We have not seen much of his work in recent years, though he's shown in Sydney and the United States.

Those with long memories may recall how strongly he began 25 years ago. Crichton's glowing *Summer Diary* series is partly about beach ritual, but he finds meaning beyond the gently-browning flesh of these hedonists.

He could always draw well, but the key to this fine show is color and paint; then perhaps time itself.

His figures are protected and exposed simultaneously, to and by each other.

Crichton gives each figure its own sun-screen and life-screen: creamy pink paint, the raspberry pout of lipstick, the security and anonymity of dark glasses; womb-like deckchairs, flying-saucer umbrellas, the mini-sunshade of a lifeguard's cap or the bizarre disguise of a snorkel.

You feel both the heat and the cool changes of mood in these works. Crichton shows that you can still paint lovely pictures, loaded with portent, without lapsing into false sentiment or ugliness or despair.

He follows the arched divers as they plunge in symbolic evasions for comfort or retreat. He squints straight into a bleaching summer heat so strong that everything reads against it like a black negative.

Crichton paints all this with a succulent and complex palette.

For example, in *Heatwave for Monet*, separate green and pink areas emerge as a violet haze over the whole surface.

For people who might have forgotten what decent oil paint can be made to do, *Northerly* and *Woman in Shade* are both brilliant translations of vision into feeling.

Crichton's omens may be



Richard Crichton's *Summer Dreamer* on show at the Powell St. Gallery.

sobering, but the pictures are actually about the survival of art and life: comets come again, Giotto's people are still with us, baptisms are for optimists.

A curious image recurs of boat, horse and people, all linked in a dream-like sequence with shared destinies.

As Emile Zola wrote to Cezanne, the friend of his youth: "In the artist there are two people: the poet and the workman. One is born a poet, one becomes a workman."

Crichton is a classic blend of the two, and these works give satisfaction on both levels.