

An exuberant kaleidoscope of colours

Vivid oils distinguish Gregory Burns' paintings

By Ben Munroe

THE windows and doors in Gregory Burns' paintings are both semi-abstract studies of observed scenes and symbols of the transition he recently made between the corporate world and life as a full-time artist. Or, as he puts it, "leaving the security of a nine-to-five pay cheque and going back to art — returning to my roots".

Mr Burns worked as a marketing manager for PepsiCo in Singapore and Hongkong, has won swimming medals, hosted a radio show, taught art in Taipei and made documentary films about the South Pacific islands for Star TV.

With such a full resume, it is surprising that the 40-year-old has found time to paint. "I always paint at the weekends, sometimes when I come home at night. When I travel I always churn out a bunch of stuff; when I went to Nepal for two weeks I did about 50 paintings, not all full scale, but once I get out, I can't stop painting."

And this instinctive love for brush and canvas is communicated in the vivid oils he liberally applies and the off-beat colour schemes he stamps on landscapes and buildings, resulting in an exuberant kaleidoscope of hues.

The burning gold of the sky, reflected in the cobblestones of *Mihintale* (oil and mixed media, 1997) or the rectilinear blocks of yellow and blue in *Chinatown I* (oil, pastel and mixed media, 1997) bear testament to this.

Mr Burns says his choices of colours and composition are as spontaneous as they appear: "I would love to say that all the paintings start with a sketch or an idea, but I just lay the colours down and it evolves or morphs into something. I've never been into pure reality and so I suppose my pieces are semi-abstract and those are the colours that I would be feeling at the time."

Over 50 works are on dis-

play in *Portals: Gateways To Sanctuaries*, paintings of scenes in such diverse locales as Malaysia, Nepal, San Francisco, Sri Lanka and Japan. Some of the portals are close-up architectural details while others view a stupa or doorway from further away, taking in the landscape.

But Mr Burns is keen to stress that while this exhibition is very focused, his drawing and painting interests are much wider, as his previous exhibition in Singapore at the Substation, *Nudes & Abstracts*, might indicate.

"I draw nudes and I do a figure drawing class at the weekends." He has a tactile approach to his art, which he applies to figure drawing but which is also true of his landscapes. "When I draw hands, I feel the knots and the lines. I do have a sensation when I'm drawing a figure that I can feel where I'm drawing."

The American has been an avid traveller, spending 18 months backpacking around Asia after college, and his love for landscapes has produced the works in this current show. "I've been out here (Asia) for 14 years and I love the architecture. Landscapes to me have a lot of meaning, and I have a real feeling towards mountains."

The idea for the portals theme came after one of his many trips, this particular one to Sri Lanka, where he spent a lot of time drawing Buddhist temples and stupas. And the notion of transition between one state and another is also part of the reason behind the exhibition, although he says the symbolism is universal and does not just apply to his situation.

"I see them as portals between childhood and adulthood, between one relationship and another; there are many different transitions. Playing the corporate game was a great stepping stone but never really me. I was never a Pepsi boy. I'm an artist."

Portals: Gateways To Sanctuaries is on at Notices The Gallery until Feb 15



Chinatown I: symbols of transition