



The spirit behind the obvious

■ PHOTOGRAPHY

INVISIBILITY

Carol Barroso
 Customs House, Circular Quay

Reviewed by Robert McFarlane

CAROL BARROSO'S elegant photography belongs more to the world of painting than the camera. Barroso is one of the few photo-artists who, aided by computer, successfully embrace surrealism (Jeremy Park and Samantha Everton are two notable others) and divert the camera from simply mirroring life. In her backlit colour lightboxes at Customs House, she reveals a vision where logic is often denied, gravity subverted and even death sometimes masquerades as life.

In this exhibition, the talented, instinctive photo-artist explores the language of dreams. In *Foundation*, four coloured balls rest on a granite plinth overlooking the sea. The image is restrained, with the stone's surface rendered the same shade of grey as the sea. But a jade-green ball hovers just above the other three, defying

gravity. No reason is given, hinted at in the title or emerges from within the picture. Barroso appears to understand instinctively that Surrealism is indifferent to logic.

Previous exhibitions have seen Barroso follow a similar path but, with extravagant computer manipulation, create more complex, difficult to manage scenarios than here. These latest works appear increasingly distilled in their imagery and show restraint, often to the point of austerity.

Consider her key image *The Invisible Self*, in which a clay-encrusted death mask lies in darkness next to a disembodied hand that appears to have just sliced through a blue sheet of paper. A dash of dripping, crimson blood and six small globes hovering in the gloom beneath the mask complete what might be a classical psychiatric picture puzzle.

If this sounds grim, it is not. This picture is sparsely elegant in its use of jagged injections of colour and geometry in a similar manner to the paintings of Paul Klee. Oddly, the great German-Swiss artist himself declared in his famous 1920 Creative Credo:

"Art does not reproduce the visible; rather, it makes visible."

Barroso's explanation of her theme of invisibility is more oblique. "It's all about spirituality – which is invisible ... I use colored balls a lot because they're like molecules and I found they're effective in representing the macro-cosm of what makes us ... I'm trying to catch the spirit behind the obvious and computers are tools that facilitate what I want to say. If they didn't exist, I would use something else."



Capturing the surreal ... *The Invisible Self*, a key work in the exhibition.