

Dino puts his finger on it

AMORE: Dean Martin's intonation of the word in his cornball classic pop song, *That's Amore*, captured the sentiment perfectly: breezy, cheeky, casual and evocative.

As Edward Colless notes in his introduction to the *Amore* show at tspace — there's something about the Italian word for love which conjures up a sweet life.

In contrast with its English counterpart, the very rhythm of the word evokes a sense of whimsy and caprice, suggesting, as Colless puts it, "a moral reference for the skin-deep, for appearance".

In framing the exhibition at Artace, curator Sally Coucaud plays off exactly this kind of juxtaposition. All romance, emulsion and gloss, the works display share a seductive luminosity, contrast with the rigid and subdued character of much 1980s contemporary work, *Amore* evinces more than a hint of flirtation with beauty.

In a series of cibachrome photographs Jeff Gibson serves up a delight-

reckon you'd better ask my therapist."

On the other side of the gender gap, Rosemary Laing indulges in a different kind of flirtation.

The two works, taken from her Paradise series, use cibachrome photographs, chrome and tinted plexiglass in a frieze format.

The colours in the photographs of freshly-blown roses have been bumped up to emphasise the seductive potential of the subject matter. Rather than appropriating advertising images Pop-style, Laing has gone one better and used technology to create images which look like ads.

Her use of a minimal art format — flat vertical panels and industrial materials — is an interesting contradiction in formal terms.

Minimalist art is normally characterised as impassive and cool. But under Laing's direction, industrial materials and high-tech methods of production take on a luxurious, glamorous quality.

The source for Laing's work lies beyond the flat surface traditions of painting and photography in the realm of the media and advertising.

Her concern is with the way television and magazines favour description over analysis.

Her images reflect this format. Generic and glamorous, they draw their presence by a literal occupation of the present. Confronted with the sheer seductive force of the works themselves, there is no reason to worry about what they might mean.

Susan Fereday's large cibachrome transparency displays suffer, perhaps, in comparison with the work of Gibson and Laing.

Mounted on lightboxes and framed with enamel on wood, the blue, watery images work on a more ephemeral level than those of her fellow artists.

Fereday's works have an eerie, subdued quality but the hard-edged character of the frames work against the power of the central images.

Bette Mifsud is another young Sydney artist currently flirting with the seductive potential of high-tech process. In her first solo show at the Art Gallery of NSW, *Mute*, Mifsud has chosen to show a series of cibachrome transparencies completed while working in Tokyo.

Suspended from the ceiling by nylon threads, the images are spaced unevenly throughout the room, giving the viewer the opportunity to walk between them and look through them to other images.

The transparencies detail a satellite image, two images taken through a microscope and a 16th century woodblock print of a mythical beast.

But when printed and hung on identical sheets of plastic there is



Detail from the *Mute* exhibition by Bette Mifsud.

nothing to indicate the different technologies used to produce the original images and the works become equivalent.

It is this equivalence which provides a key to Mifsud's title. Images, she implies, do not possess an inherent guide to perception.

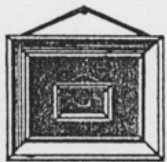
While the 16th century woodblock is the product of human imagination, the satellite image is the end result of scientific imagination. Yet, taken out of context they become purely visual phenomena and it is up to us to make some sense of them.

A key to the transparencies hangs in one corner of the room. A small image of the gardens of Versailles mounted on a mirror, reminds us of the space between seeing and recognising.

The gap between the superimposed picture and its reflection is a metaphor for this space.

Images, Mifsud suggests, reflect back only what we already know or expect to see.

It is perhaps this ability to reflect us back to ourselves which accounts for their power to seduce.



GALLERIES
CATHARINE LUMBY

host of B-grade crooners caught, quite literally, with egg on their face. The smiling visages of Dean Martin, Jim Jones, Des O'Connor and Kenny Rogers vie with superimposed images of mouldy sour cream, sloppy spaghetti and the kind of culinary horrors you find at the back of the fridge.

This weird sandwiching of images is surprisingly successful — at once defacing and heightening the impact of the original pictures.

Gibson's fascination with masculine stereotypes, or as the artist puts it, with chetypal schmucks, has none of the academic, detached hallmarks of an inquiry into gender politics.

Quite clearly he likes these guys. And it is this sense of empathy with the humanness of the original images which accounts for the success of the finished products.

Gibson, himself, has a refreshing lack of interest in justifying his sessions. Questioned recently about his art he declined to be drawn out on theories about the work, telling the interviewer simply: "I