

CITY WEEKLY

EYE OF THE BEHOLDER

SEXY But Vacant, it could almost be a motto for the modern world and all its superficialities. But for artist Stephanie Smiedt the adage also typifies the rebellion of the Mannerist period, when the beauty of the Renaissance was replaced with a reaction against perfection, a freedom from classical ideals of beauty.

In her Sexy But Vacant exhibition Smiedt "decided to contrast [the Mannerist's] achievements with reflections of our current take on beauty".

"Music videos are a good example," she said. "Their dual ability to tell us what is beautiful and show us how we should look gives us an interesting

insight into how standard our concepts of beauty really are."

In her works, Smiedt combines lush brushstrokes of oil paint on linen with decorative fabrics from discarded curtains – "life stains and all" – to reveal a collection of works reminiscent of the past but extremely contemporary in design.

"It's like [musician] Bjork once said: 'Everything is so designed and airbrushed and Botoxed, it makes us think, Oh, everybody's perfect except me. Everything's smooth except me. But nothing is smooth'."

Sexy But Vacant will show at Wall, 115 Union Road, Ascot Vale, from April 2-23. Details: www.wallgallery.com.au

