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Name: Xiaolin Xue

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CONTENTS

Australian Figurative Painting	
--A Review of Slides.....	4
Painting Proposal.....	29
The Work and its Context.....	31
List of Work.....	41
Colour Plates.....	42
Working Sketches.....	53

AUSTRALIAN FIGURATIVE PAINTING: 1975-1985
--A Review of Slides

Peter Booth

Noel Counihan

William Delafield Cook

Brian Dunlop

Gareth Sansom

Jeffrey Smart

Jenny Watson

Salvatore Zofrea

AUSTRALIAN FIGURATIVE PAINTING: 1975--1985

--A Review of Slides

The Insight from a New Arrival: A Preface

When this writer, being himself a painter who had come from a non-European cultural background, first stood before a large painting of Peter Booth in the Art Gallery of N.S.W. in August 1988, he was astonished at its dauby quality. A man who had only seen the early achievements of Australian art, who had landed on this continent for just a few days and suddenly saw the 'wrong side' of its art, had to do his utmost to digest what was feasting his eyes.

However, after two years of living and working as an artist in this island continent, especially after studying the oeuvres of many of its contemporary artists, he changed his attitude so greatly that he even began to adopt some of Booth's principles in his own painting, that he finds that the longer he lives in this country, the more he understands its people, the harder it is to get rid of such a style.

Contemporary Australian painting is, in fact, an aggregate of the feelings of many artists, based on their experiences and fantasy of a mutual post-modern life on the planet's oldest continent. Species imported from the outside world quickly take cover of the indigenous, an old gene lurks under the surface of the new, that's what people see from the development of art in Australia.

1975--85: A DECADE OF CONTINUATION, COEXISTENCE AND CHANGE

Although growing in geographic isolation, Australian figurative painting, in the 1970s and 1980s, was dominated by a quasi-European character. This was not only because of Australia's colonial origin and many aspects of its subsequent development, but also because of the influence from a continuous international art movement. This makes it easier to consider

the figurative art of the island continent and the rest of the world as a whole.

However, owing to a context in historical background, Australian figurative art can hardly be regarded as an equivalent of its European or North American counterpart. While Joan Miro was doing his *Constellations* series in Europe and Max Ernst was engaged in his *Europe after the Rain* in US, in the southern hemisphere artists organised the Angry Penguins in 1940s to paint with their own signatures and mythologise their own environmental realities and unique inner concerns. Their style was then accepted as the 'new visual language for a new Australia'. In 1959, a group of figurative artists, worried about the predominance of abstract art, wrote a manifesto declaring a style of 'painting life as they saw it', that the artists' role was to ask questions about the society in which they lived, to promote understanding and to ensure the maintenance of human values. They were known as the 'Antipodeans'. The decade from 1975 to 1985, was in a sense the continuation of the previous decades. If we consider this period as a time of resurrection of figurative painting, what have affected the Australians are two major factors, i.e., 1) the failures and closures of the late modernism in world's painting; and 2) the miscarriage and its aftermath of the Antipodeans movement during the sixties. As a result of the latter, the attempt to create an indigenous dreamtime art proved to be a fleeting crotchet. Multiculturalism, which presents an image of Australia as heterogeneous, has never had much impact on its figurative art.

The decade of 1975--85 was a period of a series of changes in European and American art. After a three-decade-long journey of glory, non-representational arts, such as abstractive expressionism, came to an impasse. People began to divert their interest to other representational styles. In Australia, where figurative painting had survived the explosion of abstractionism, the last five years of the 1970s was in fact shared by artists of almost all styles. Some realist artists of the older generation, 'the Angry Penguins', like Noel Counihan, Albert Tucker and John Brack, then in their fifties or sixties, were still producing new paintings in their own styles which they had been executing so well. Those who were born in the 1920s and 30s, during this period in their heydays, played an important role in the innovation and experiment. That was a time of chaotic coexistence, a prelude where the protagonist hadn't yet turned up.

NEO-EXPRESSIONISM: REINVENTION OR REDISCOVERY?

In the eighties, the world art entered an epoch of neo-expressionism. This art quoted, or "appropriated" freely from any previous styles and associated disparate images enigmatically on the one, usually huge, canvas.

Appropriation was the most commonly used measure among the artists who comprised the main stream of Australian figurative art in this period.

One of the primary achievements of the neo-expressionist painters was their radical reinvention of the figurative painting, that is, a new language with a restructured syntax and an intact morphology. But to the artists who had rejected painting and turned to alternative media, painting has not been 'reinvented' but 'rediscovered', as a medium for expressing the relationship between meaning and matter. Distinctive from other figurative arts in the history, their approach somewhat relates to surrealism, leading to a rather personal and psychological expression. But neo-expressionists seemed to have no interest in psychoanalysis.

Pessimism was what many neo-expressionist artists revealed, if not deliberately expressed, in their works. Often with a cynical social attitude, these artists had significantly an end-of-century metropolitan pathos. Another artist Jenny Watson, who began as a photo-realist and then changed to neo-expressionism in the 80s, was an example in this respect. Later developments of the neo-expressionism show that it has been a finite style.

Unlike the Heidelberg School, the Angry Penguins or the Antipodeans, who were coherent groups of artists of the same generation whose work was stylistically similar, the neo-expressionists in the eighties worked in a far broader range of styles and a more relaxed individualism.

The transition from the 70s to 80s, in figurative art, is perhaps most clearly marked by the 1982 Venice Biennale, where Peter Booth was one of the two artists selected to represent Australian art.

PETER BOOTH

- 1 *Painting*, 1981
 197.5 x 304.5 oil on canvas
- 2 *Drawing*, 1981
 72.0 x 102.6 gouache, crayon and ink
- 3 *Painting, Untitled*, 1982
- 4 *Painting* 1977

The 1980s has seen the development of Post-Modernism or Neo-Expressionism in the UK, USA, and, especially, West Germany. In Australia, Peter Booth is one of the artists who have embraced this style of art enthusiastically.

Born in Sheffield, England in 1940, Booth first studied at the Sheffield College of Art before his arrival in Australia in 1958, and then, from 1962-65, at National Gallery School in Melbourne. Like those of many Australian artists who began to exhibit in the late 1960s, Booth's early works were minimal in appearance. Characteristically his paintings of that time often contained nothing more than a black rectangle bounded on its upper horizontal and two vertical sides by a thin strip of lighter-toned canvas.

However, the appearance of his work changed greatly in the eighties, when many Australian Abstractionists adopted Neo-Expressionism, possibly because they felt non-representational art had come to an impasse. Booth's painting, though some of them are in the form of drawings in coloured crayon or a combination of charcoal and white gouache, reveals a strong influence of German Neo-Expressionism: brutal gestural brushwork and heavy impasto with morbid colouring.

But the most striking characteristic of Booth's painting, is his concern for the future of human society, found in most of his large and boldly painted compositions. Many of his recent drawings suggest that civilised man is no better than a cannibal, that human relations, at least as he sees them, are inherently violent. A clear expression of pessimism can be felt in his two paintings of 1981 and 1982, in which the crowded world of human society is invested with those qualities the romantic imagination once assigned to, or

discovered in, the world of non-human nature: in romanticism society is seen as something vast and abnormal, if not totally sublime. In a 1981 drawing made with gouache, crayon and ink, a huge group of lumpish figures are presented in a fallacious background with an arid land and a pitchy sky, implying the aftermath of a calamity. At the centre of the crowd is seated a colossus with a human body and a ram's head, obviously ignored by these iconoclasts who are now engaged in a big brawl--a turmoil on the eve of the doomsday. In fact similar figures had appeared in his earlier works. In 1979 Booth produced a group of drawings in which he pictured crowds for the first time. Those early crowds, however, were all on a journey or 'long march', as if fleeing from some catastrophe.

Like many romantic artists, Booth appears to believe that emotions of fear and terror are not always to be shunned. It is fear which makes courage possible; and to the extent that fear enables people to act with courage it should be considered a life-enhancing emotion. Pausing at the edge of a precipice or filing wearily through a bleak and comfortless landscape, these early crowds were clearly objects of intense pity and compassion - hardly the emotions we feel when contemplating the crowds in his two recent paintings mentioned above. Here the crowd is victimiser, not victim; here the crowd is the master, which is performing an apocalyptic scene of horror, a noisy holocaust of monstrous happenings. Today Booth is among few Australian contemporary artists who have built up an international reputation, though his style is sometimes considered wooden and clumsy, with a melodramatic message and therefore unconvincing.

JENNY WATSON

- 1 *White Painting/Margaret*, 1974-75
179.4 x 183.0 oil and acrylic on canvas, Bendigo Art Gallery;
- 2 *London Sequence No. 4*
118 Gloucester Terrace, Paddington:
Camera Obscura (facing flowers), 1978
58.7 x 76.0 cm, gouache and coloured pencil on fabriano paper,
Newcastle Region Art Gallery
- 3 *Australian Artist of the 80s as a Lady and Ophelia*, 1984
85.0 x 180.2 cm, oil on velvet, Collection: Roslyn and Tony Oxley
- 4 *Transavantgarde Horse (Pissing)*, 1982
320.0 x 192.2 cm, oil on yellow unstretched taffeta. The artist

The four paintings, dated from 1975 to 1984, appear so heterogeneous that one can hardly believe they were painted by the same person, and yet they were. The artist is Jenny Watson. From her paintings we see an evolution (if not a revolution) of Australian art during this period.

As a matter of fact during the past sixteen years Watson's work has been exhibited sited under a variety of stylistic descriptions. The apparently unprogrammatic nature of her work, together with the mobility of her borrowing from photographs and printed images, suggests that her work involves free transactions with style, fashion and mass-mediated imagery. Yet other readings are opened up by the complex play of semblances and symbols in her work.

Jenny Watson's work was figurative from the start, although it was strongly underpinned by an art school training in abstract painting, and a familiarity with the conceptual art of the 1960s and early 1970s. Her work has consistently dealt with the world immediately about her and the projection of her psyche within that world. The symbolism in her paintings is generally derived from specific events and personal experiences.

Jenny Watson belongs to a generation which first came to maturity in the 1970s, during periods of minimalism and conceptualism, and post-object art in Australia. At that time faith in the dynamism and openness of art was

accompanied by a critique of the closures and failures of late modernism itself. Many of these artists have accommodated significant shifts in their work, from the speculative and propositional art projects of the 1970s into the deconstructive, texture readings of cultural codes and languages of representation in the 1980s.

In Watson's work, there appears to be an almost *art brut* expressiveness and directness. But beneath the rawness of her confessional, diaristic texts, there is an objective concern for language, and a self-conscious awareness of the strategies of art. During 1980 Watson did a work named *Conversation Piece*, consisting of 24 canvas boards, on which were painted images of found objects or debris around the studio, or painted 'found texts' and random thoughts. This work not only had an important transitional role in her own thinking, but also created an artistic strategy that was soon adopted (and adapted) by other artists. The wall to which the canvas boards were attached became the 'screen' through which the viewer was able to gain snatches of a fragmented narrative, at once personal and remote.

Instinctively grasping the importance of tactility as a dimension of the perception of form, Watson in later work usually gives her fabric 'screen' a simple symbol, which emphasises the gestural nature of the image it supports. So in *Australian Artist of the 80s as a Lady and Ophelia* (1984), the unique visual tactile luxury of red velvet bears the image of the artist in a double guise: that of a 'lady', and of the unfortunate Ophelia. References to the plight of the artist are echoed in the text, an extract from Norman Mailer's *The Executioner's Song*. Murderer Gary Gilmore, who successfully petitioned for his own execution, speaks of his youth. Gilmore wanted to be an artist and painted in prison while waiting to be executed. The text reads as follows:

GILMORE: I came out looking for trouble, though that's what you're supposed to do. I felt slightly superior to everybody else 'cause I've been in reform school. I had a rough-guy complex, that sort of smart, alert juvenile-delinquent attitude. Juvenile delinquent—remember that phrase? Sure dates me, don't it? Nobody could tell me anything. I had a ducktail haircut, I smoked, drank, shot heroin, smoked weed, took speed, got into fights, chased and caught pretty little broads. The fifties were a hell of a time to be a juvenile delinquent. I stole and robbed and went to Fats Domino and Gene Vincent at the local balls.

REALISM: AN ENDURING LEGACY

In the 1970s, the "coming back of realism" did not seem to suit Australia, where this style had never really disappeared. Figurative painting, as it were, is an enduring legacy of Australian art. From early colonial paintings to Nolan's *Ned Kelly* paintings of 1950s, there can be seen a strong link between British influence and an enthusiasm in discovering the unknown (mental) interior of this vast country. This link is verified and unmovable. As the aftermath of abstraction's purge of figuration, and also as a result of the jet travel, many young artists abandoned figurative styles for abstraction, and the realist painting in 1970s and 1980s remained bound to a quasi-Angry Penguin style, updated more by subject-matter than by more expressive means of painting. Social context, so important to the realist painters in the previous decades played only a minor role in the renewed efforts of realism during 1970s and 80s

JEFFREY SMART

- 1 *Corrugated Gioconda*, 1975 - 76
80.8 x 116.6cm, oil on canvas,
Collection: Australian National Gallery;
- 2 *Picnic 3*, 1980
104 x 70cm, acrylic and oil on canvas, private collection, Rome
- 3 *At the Window of Fattoria*, 1969
- 4 *Portrait of Germaine Greer*, 1984
96 x 120cm, oil on canvas, private collection.

Born in Adelaide in 1921, Jeffrey Smart is regarded as an outstanding contemporary artist of Australia, despite the fact that he has spent many years working in Europe and now lives in Italy. He describe himself as "a European with an Australian passport".

Smart has studied at the South Australian School of Art and the Académie Montmartre under Fernand Léger. His training gives his painting a rather academic look: accuracy in perspective and anatomy, refined colour system, and high finishing. But unlike the academic painters, Smart has greater

interest in what is painted than how it is painted: for many years his work has been keeping an unchanged style. He has a deep concern for the human environment, and most of his paintings are about an isolated figure in a man-made suburban cityscape.

His paintings celebrate "man as fabricator and artificer", and are proof of mankind's capacity for beauty. They provide a mirror which, if we dare to confront it, may give us back an aspect of ourselves and of that world we have wrought, for better or for worse. Underlying his simplified shapes and colours is a sophisticated thought written in an extremely complex language, which can be understood easily and translated swiftly into sensation. Smart's work reflects the cold impersonal quality of our industrial age. His remark that "man has made prison for himself in every city, and for threw ordinary person escape is difficult" might seem to support such a pessimistic interpretation.

Corrugated Gioconda (1975--76) is one of Smart's best paintings. It shows his combining construct with a printed human image. The title itself suggests his idea that an over-familiar image from the world of "Art" seen afresh in the processed lights and shades of the manufactured, corrugated surface upon which it is produced. The adjective of mechanized process qualifies a human icon as to be a cliché. There are no people in this picture, but the fence testifies to their presence with a delight in energy and colour balanced by the cool simplicity of the buildings it partly conceals. To see the building as hostile or ugly would be to misunderstand Smart's interest in architecture, just as to see the painting as a reductive comment on Leonardo, would be to ignore the beauty of the fence. Of this beauty the Gioconda's familiar image is a part, but a part only. This painting is an example of the translation of the banal to the exceptional.

Quotation of familiar images from other art works is also found in his painting *Picnic 3*. In this painting the individual elements come from three sources: the foreground group from Edouard Manet's *Le Déjeuner sur l'Herbe* (also from Raimondi and Raphael), and the background from two photographs; the gesturing figure in the original, has become now a woman, offering fruit to the others. A transistor radio stands on the grass, its aerial pointing upward to the water tower, a rather startling and thrilling eye-

catcher, which suggests some monumental change that mankind has brought to their environments. But, its great bulk in no way devalues the human qualities of the figures in the foreground, and the picnic is no more threatened by the tower than by their own radio, that all too ubiquitous product of technology.

During the past twenty years, Smart's works became bolder, more spare in detail. The boldness came not from any simplification of the end pursued or the craft involved, but from a surer sense of direction and a growing confidence in judging how much could be reduced to allow the vital elements full scope. In his painting *At the Window of the Fattoria*, the familiar middle-aged, balding figure that appears in many of his paintings, looks out from a first-floor window, reduced to a face, white shirt and striped tie by the shadowed room beyond. So the vast part of this painting is a flat, textured wall.

The idea of a large wall can be seen in his another painting: *Portrait of Germaine Greer*, 1984. The figure is his old friend, and the picture grew from affection and enjoyment. So there is something more than a portrait: the painting coolly displaces the seated figure and gives compositional prominence to bland or brightly coloured surface of wall and door. We are drawn to the red door on the left before moving to the seated figure. Her white blouse becomes coagulated with the identically coloured *trompe l'oeil* wall, on which the large "R" *sgraffito* both echoes the figure's shape and mimes the hooking movement of our eye across the canvas. The visual and emotional tensions generated by Greer's presence in the composition dominate the picture, and make possible the boldly monochrome areas, which act as counterfoil to the human figure. While as an individual Smart responds with affection to Greer's individuality, as the painter he has no hesitation in harnessing the strength of her face and personality to advance the form of the painting.

NOEL COUNIHAN

- 1 *Old Woman*, 1981
111.5 x 111.5cm, oil, National Gallery of Victoria
- 2 *Beirut*, 1983
56 x 81cm, acrylic
- 3 *Woman with Candle*, 1985
122 x 122cm. oil
- 4 *Homage to Goya*, 1985,
97 x 122cm, oil

With the death of Noel Counihan in 1986, Australia has lost a unique and remarkable artist. Having worked for more than 50 years as an artist, Counihan was a major figure in Australian art. His unemployment and suffering during the Great Depression led to his lifelong struggle against capitalism "with all its social class relations, its conflicts". With this context, his art was his principal, but not only weapon. "The artist has duty," he wrote, "to appreciate and gather information from the political developments of the time."

Counihan did not treat art as somehow an exception to other phenomena of life, but as fully amenable to normal human concerns: to the hopes, aspirations, fears, passions and doubts which beset us. His response to the whole surrounding social world was as important as the more purely artistic influences.

His work was always concerned with social issues and especially the plight of the under-privileged. He always held that art should have an appeal for and be able to communicate with all people in society. To this end he worked in a realist mode all his life even if it ran counter to mainstream trends in the 1960s and 70s. Underpinning all of his work was his superb draftsmanship. With the renewed interest in figurative art in the 1980s, Counihan's work drew the attention of many people.

Counihan's art was realist, but not in any naively illustrative or declamatory way. It celebrated life and the dignity of ordinary folk, while dealing uncompromisingly with the crucial issues of art, which nonetheless

confronted particular causes and manifestations of the humane and the inhumane, transformed them through his creative imagination into compelling visual metaphors. Counihan's work was often disturbing, yet it possessed a defiant optimism and faith in humanity.

Counihan didn't work fast. He made drawings and studies to each part and built up step by step. This weakness was to become Counihan's strength, for it allowed him to manipulate his imagery to serve the content and, at the same time, it gave his work a sense of solemnity and of deliberation. Ancient Mexican art forms and the icons of Western Europe also find echoes in his work.

In 1980 Counihan and his wife Pat went to South West France and lived in a small village called Opoul, for nearly five months. Opoul is situated only 20 kilometres from a city not far from the Spanish border. It is difficult to reach by public transport and rarely attracts tourists. Counihan became interested in making studies of the peasants whom he viewed as something of an endangered species, in both social and historical terms. He was particularly interested in the old women in the village and their relationship with their environment. He felt that the old women represented a determination to survive which was characteristic of the villagers of Opoul and the peasant tradition.

On his return to Australia he made a suite of lithographs and a series of paintings based on the drawings. In the painting *Old Woman*, 1981, the walls and the figure became one, alluding to the close relationship the villagers have with their environment and with the past.

Towards the end of 1981, shortly after the Opoul works were exhibited, Counihan went into a hospital for a minor operation and suffered a cardiac arrest followed a few days later by a stroke. When he arrived home he was moved by television reports on the fighting in Beirut, where people were being slaughtered in the streets. He did two paintings on this theme. In his painting *Beirut*, 1983, Counihan set out to see how far he could develop his forms and the mood of the painting if he reduced the colour scale to grey, white and black. He worked quickly in acrylic washes and in impastos. The greys are modulated greys and in the background there are blues and violets

that move delicately through what is an overall grey. Counihan explained:

I've always believed in the theme being primary and that in general the form is dependent on and conditioned by the theme. It isn't always so. Sometimes a theme arises out of formal preoccupations.

The Beirut paintings bring together the graphic qualities of much of his drawings and prints, demonstrating his interest in the quality of paint, and the suggestive and sensual qualities of the painted surface.

Since the 1950s Counihan had made paintings on childhood memories. *Woman with Candle*, 1985, begun some years ago was one of a series based on recollections of his mother. It is a tonal painting but conceived in terms of colour tone. Counihan felt a strong debt to French painting, especially to Cezanne, Bonnard and Degas. In the French tradition he looked to the way tone and form were perceived as colour, and colour as space. In his own work, Counihan worked not only from light colours to dark but also from warm to cool areas. *Woman with Candle* was chromatic and delicate. The figure emerged from the dark ground where the deepest tones were clear colour.

Homage to Goya, 1985, related to Counihan's political concerns. This particular image was intended as a tribute to or a requiem for the people engaged in struggle in Central America. As in Beirut Counihan was influenced by television reports and newspaper images. There was a link with the work he had done in the 1960s and 1970s based on political prisoners and war.

PHOTO-REALISM: AN UNDER-EXPOSED PICTURE

In 1970s the swelling of an interest in Realist Art was world wide and threw up a crop of young artists such as Chuck Close and Richard Estes. Imbued with 20th-century sensibility and assisted by technological developments not available to the realist painters of the late-nineteenth century, they claimed to have revived the old schemata and created images that were original and of considerable technical virtuosity. Their style was known as Photo-Realism or Super-Realism. This style was seen in its most radical

development in the United States. However, it didn't thrive in Australia, where artists had deeper concerns about human condition. Perhaps this was because Photo-Realism offered no answers to the important questions about art, any more than photography did; moreover, interest in how it was done (the process) outweighed what was done. Also, Australia was technically less prepared than the US, for such a style. Although there were some artists working in this style, their attitude was different from the Americans'. The two artists mentioned in this essay, being in their early forties during this period, had more sophisticated approach to Photo-Realism. A pessimistic yet clear-headed Brian Dunlop thought that Expressionism, instead of his own style, suited Australia. (Conversation with Geoffrey Groen). In the light of this, we've got an under-exposed picture for Australian Photo-Realism.

WILLIAM DELAFIELD COOK

- 1 *Museum Piece*, 1974 - 1975, 112cm x 127cm, acrylic, owned by Elton H. John, London
- 2 *Climbing Frame*, 1975
 119cm x 119cm, acrylic, owned by Elton H. John, London
- 3 *Berlin Leaves*, 1973 - 74
 97cm x 127cm, acrylic, owned by Elton H. John
- 4 *Park Bench*, 1976
 60" x 40", acrylic, Possession of the artist

Many ancient Chinese critics believed the saying that art should "turn the banal into the marvellous". This old oriental maxim is verified by the works of an Australian artist William Delafield Cook (b.1937) through their commonplace subjects and refined quality.

Delafield Cook was first trained as a secondary art and craft teacher. Working his way through an early landscape phase into an abstract style which paid homage to Graham Sutherland and Francis Bacon, he decided, in 1958, to leave Melbourne and to go to England for further study. An Italian Government Scholarship gave him a year in Rome working at the British Academy, after which he returned to England to continue at Bath what was, by modern standards, a very lengthy apprenticeship in his craft. The next

move was to Maidstone where he taught art in company with Norman Stevens and David Hockney. After a number of years spent living and working as an expatriate artist in Europe, Cook returned to Australia in 1976. Although leading a somewhat peripatetic life, commuting around the world, he had always regarded Australia as his spiritual home, and feeling it was very important to retain his national identity.

In Cook's art, the banal - walls, benches and lawns - is given a pictorial significance that is inexplicable and yet evocative as shown in the four acrylics he painted in a period between 1973 and 1976.

Museum Piece (1974 _ 75) holds up to our attention the singular achievement of Vermeer, who transformed the commonplace occurrence of Dutch bourgeois life into lyrical poetry in praise of the daily miracle of light . In Cook's painting, the same gentle light that floods into Vermeer's pictures suffuses the wall upon which these painted replicas hang. At the same time that this point is gently made, Delafield Cook is demonstrating his technical virtuosity and jokingly repeating the floor pattern and the style of the Vermeer in his own painting - a clever conceit in a witty and very beautiful picture.

The choice of a famous art work as a subject with which to play upon our conceptual and visual limitations has, of course, a long pedigree in the twentieth century, beginning with Duchamp. However, Cook approaches the subject not so much as a cultural icon but rather in a spirit of visual play. The glossy, sharply-focussed edges and the over-simplified colour range of the colour slide from which Cook often works is set against the more complex association-tinged view of the human brain receives from the naked human eye.

Compositionally, Delafield Cook ' s work is characterized by a bland frontality, which, combined with the apparent artlessness of his subject-matter, like the one in *Climbing Frame* (1975) and the one in *Park Bench* (1976), makes his work susceptible to a variety of interpretations, all equally valid or equally spacious since, in the majority of these works, the artist subscribes to no philosophical position.

Nevertheless, there is a nagging suspicion that the subjects selected and the neutrality of their treatment must have a meaning beyond the objective recording of the facts. In *Berlin Leaves* (1973 - 74), for example, one is tempted to suggest that the neglected grass and dying leaves are imitations of mortality, our own or that of Berlin itself; but, in fact, what the artist has given us is nothing beyond a superlatively painted and detailed rendering of a lawn scattered with withered leaves.

Invariably, his pictures are utterly deserted, and in none of them does man make any appearance. His presence is felt only through the evidence of his efforts to structure the elements of the natural world and to impose his own order upon it; hedges are always neatly clipped, fences are freshly painted and even a scatter of leaves across an untrimmed lawn is contained and ordered by a strip of concrete paving. man, though unseen, is everywhere in control.

BRIAN DUNLOP

- 1 *Room*, 1977 - 78
 168cm x 66cm, oil on canvas, Art Gallery of New South Wales
- 2 *Shaft of Light*, 1977
 122cm x 92cm, oil on canvas, collection: C.A.Fay, Sydney
- 3 *Studio with Seated Nude*
- 4 *Glossing over*, 1979
 76.5cm x 122cm, oil on canvas

Brian Dunlop was born in Sydney in 1938. He studied painting at the National Art School of East Sydney Technical College, a fairly inadequate technical training for the type of painter he desired to become. He first went to Europe in 1960 aged 22. When he was 25 Dunlop was in Europe again, this time for four and half years. At this stage he was very confused. He was painting abstractions, semi-abstractions; he even tried semiheroic figure compositions with a basic geometric structure.

So Dunlop was in Rome, gifted and rather lost after much experimentation. He did not know in what style to paint, and worse, sometimes, why he

should paint at all. Then he remembered his old days of going out sketching. Almost in desperation he went back to drawing from nature, much as he had done with his father before going to the art school.

Then he started doing a great deal of drawing, everything nearby and many drawings of Rome, even daring to try some of the famous old hackneyed Roman motifs. The drawing, naturally a vehicle for meditation, evolved into painting --which can be another vehicle for meditation.

The subjects of Dunlop's paintings selected here are about a posed nude in a "spacious" room. In some of these paintings the linear perspective tells us that they are the outcome of a wide-angle lens. (In some cases, the sizes of the figures have been reduced when they appear in the foreground, to correct the spherical aberration.) With these works Dunlop is identified a Photo-Realist. Otherwise, he is a portrait painter working in a rather conventional style, and on commissions. He said he was "basically a hack."

From Dunlop's photograph-based paintings we see an approach totally different from his portraiture. Take *Room* (1977-78) for example, the painter's defiant attitude towards academics is seen through the composition of this enormous painting. The unusual arrangement of large areas of walls and windows gives the painting an aspect of a stage scene, against which a dramatic play of bright and dark colours unfolds before the audience. The artist has some astonishing distortion in the light, for example, the tone around the window is lifted to a similar brightness to the landscape seen through the panes. We can tell that this brightness comes from another exposure, instead of a spotlight. The magnetism of this painting also depends on its huge size, measuring 158cm x 336cm. A room-sized picture in Photo-Realist style and with many details is really a *trompe-l'oeil*.

Dunlop is interesting when he talks of the act of drawing and painting:

For me, painting is a bit like Method acting. If you want to paint something you have to become virtually what you want to paint. If I want to paint grass, I take my shoes and socks off and walk through it. If you want to paint a sleeve, you have to become the arm, you have to go beneath the surface of the thing.

(That sounds quite like a Stanislavsky approach, which is familiar to Chinese, who have adopted a wholesale Russian system in their performing arts.)

When talking about his huge painting, Dunlop said:

I want my work to be fairly impersonal rather than detached. Detached seems to imply a certain scientific detachment, whereas impersonal is something different; it is an act of love, this is what painting is, what it should be.

SURREALISM: NON-DREAMTIME DREAMERS

In the eyes of the eighties, Surrealism is out of date. But for some artists in Australia, it still serves as a good style. To them, this is still a land of dreams: nudes, demons, gods, heroes. Occasionally dreams turn to be nightmares but mostly they are an ideal theatre, where human creativity is brought into play and the inner world is revealed. However, no matter what their subjects are, be it from consciousness or subconsciousness, these works are attractive only when their deep-hidden personal references--the key to decipher their esoteric connotation--are known. With these difficulties, these works show a certain degree of isolationism that limits their audience. Their manifold pursuit in both content and mannerism makes the works even more complex and therefore, confusing.

SALVATORE ZOFREA

- 1 *Woman's Life, Woman's Love No. 3*, 1977
 183 x 137, oil on canvas
- 2 *Psalm 39*, 1978
 183 x 137, oil on canvas
- 3 *Portrait of my Father*, 1980
 152 x 305, oil on canvas
- 4 *Psalm 22*, 1982
 198 x 243 cm, oil on canvas

The leitmotiv of Salvatore Zofrea, an Italiano-Australian artist, is always his family, especially maternal events. This is probably because of his introverted sensational nature, and an Oedipus-like tendency. This confines his works in a very surrealistic mould. One will be convinced of it if we compare his painting called *Innocenti* (1982, 195 x 240cm, oil on canvas) with René Magritte's *The Menaced Assassin*. The only difference is the former has more expressional colour and richer formal rhythm.

Salvatore Zofrea was ten years old when he was brought to Australia from Borgia, southern Calabria - the 'ankle' of Italy. Being the youngest of ten children of the family, he left school at the age of fifteen and began to study art at North Sydney Technical College, while he had to work in Paddy's Market loading fruit and vegetables. At that time what was harder to overcome was his conviction that no one shared his passion for painting. A year later he met his spiritual and intellectual mentor - the painter and teacher, Henry Justelius, who taught him the means by which the artist's imagination or reaction takes form. While Zofrea was learning to master line, colour, mass, rhythm and planes at the technical college, and, later, at the Julian Ashton School, working at week-ends in his brother's shop and fighting constantly with his father over money spent on art materials, Justelius and Salvatore's mother were the only people who helped.

Zofrea gave his one-man exhibition in 1966, and after that he continued to exhibit in Sydney and Adelaide until 1971, when he travelled in Europe. He spent six months in museums in Spain, England, Holland and France, where he had the chance to see great works of post-impressionists and expressionists. Meanwhile, he was inspired by Greek poetry and even Zen Buddhism.

We don't know what an appearance Zofrea's art would have had if an urgency of personal drama hadn't occurred to him. That year, Zofrea's mother died. His mother, an uneducated, modest and shy woman, but a friend and soulmate, strongly supported with her son's artistic aims. And so a spiritual crisis was brought on. On the other hand, an illness changed his outlook on life completely. Angst of expressionism and the calm of Eastern philosophy now became so far away, and Zofrea rediscovered Christian

religion and the Psalms.

Psalms of Zofrea are an emotional intension expressed in pictorial form, truly imaginative pictures rather than religious illustrations, as they are a visual translation of multiple collision of doubt and distress, caused by his childhood memories - doubt, belief in God as much as in dreams and premonitions, fragments of personal experiences.

Psalm 39 brings together his mother's funeral witnessed by Salvatore as a child and as a grown-up man, with 'mine age is as nothing before thee' and I was dumb with silence...and my sorrow was stirred'. The child smiles understandingly with his back turned to a multitude of people who seem to ignore how transitory is existence and carry on their routine in the cemetery. This painting, in fact, is not only a memory of his mother but also a reflection to his insight of life and death.

The rapport Zofrea had with his mother was in a more emotional level, and it is this rapport that made him to create a painting in a triptych called *Woman's Life, Woman's Love, No 3*. As with most of his works, the inspiration for it came from remembering stories of the past - his mother's marriage half a century before, in Borgia. The fact that there is no romance, but a rationally organised and carefully discussed event in which neither the husband nor the wife-to-be have much to say, is translated into a painting. With this painting, Zofrea won the Sulman Prize for 1977.

A remarkable *tour de force* of portrait composition was achieved by Zofrea with the *Portrait of my Father*. In it, his naturally poetic temperament is no longer repressed by formal discipline. The relationship between father and son was always on an emotional, never on a mental level. It became more even so after Salvatore's mother died. The 'old boy' as Zofrea calls his father, never seeing any value in painting, not able to comprehend his son's success, is resentful of him for not having a steady job with him. The only thing that could have brought the father and son closer together, the death of the woman they both loved and respected, pulled them even further apart. This biographical background is necessary for us to understand what Zofrea tried to represent in this portrait: a lonely and desperate man, trapped on a verandah watching the outside world and watching himself

from the outside.

The paint is applied smoothly with a small brush, building areas of light and shade. The face is an almost photo-realist rendition of wrinkles, tight mouth and narrow eyes. The right-hand side of the work is much brighter and more detailed, suggesting close proximity; the left, using the frame-in-frame device, is less worked upon, diagonally projected on the canvas, paler in colour, yet arresting in its stillness and dignity.

Salvatore Zofrea is not a daring man and his art is not made of explosive stuff of which new proposals and discoveries are made. He is a man of unusual imaginative calibre and also of peculiar receptivity. He reacts to things seen with the same emotional intensity as to things felt or imagined. And the continuous pursuit of appearances keeps him a hard-to-label artist in the Australian figurative art of the 1980s.

GARETH SANSOM

1. *He Once Was a Flyer*, 1965
148 x 167cm, mixed media on hardboard, possession of the artist;
2. *Siccolam*, 1976
82 x 102cm, mixed media on cardboard, possession of the artist; .
3. *Figure in the Landscape*, 1975
122 x 183cm, oil and enamel on linen canvas, possession of the artist;
4. *Study for a Painting*, 1978
153 x 183cm, mixed media on canvas, Private collection, Melbourne.

Gareth Sansom (b. 1939) is unique among the contemporary Australian artists whose work has exhibited a high level of eroticism. Influences of Pop, expressionism, assemblage, photo-montage and other international models have all contributed to the development of his large-scale paintings. He often incorporates sociological and satirical references which give complexity to his work. Because of their esoteric and erotic nature, his paintings have not been given great attention by the public.

The origin of his style derives from a combination of his own temperament

and the sexual proclivities that determine his choice of subject-matter.

Sansom is essentially a private and somewhat isolated man with impressive frantic energy and nervous tension. This tension is carried into much of his work, where it transforms objects and aspects of the human figure into potent images.

He Once was a Flyer is a painting done in 1965. The title was meant to draw attention to the disparity between the actual role being enacted before us, by the figure, and the role in expectations that we associate with the idea of the pilot. Sansom's intention was to make the viewer aware that all was not as it seemed, that behind each layer was yet another layer. Each successive layer revealed a new reality that was simultaneously an end and a beginning. Each revelation concealed the next unknown. The judge of 1975 McCaughey Prize refused to hang this painting in the National Gallery of Victoria because of the obvious sexual references.

The figure on the left of the painting confronts the viewer by its trans-sexual appearance. But in his other paintings done eleven years later, this kind of transsexuality proved to be transvestism. *Siccolam* (1976) is a small work collaged from two black-and-white photographs. The first, taken about 1943, shows sitting-around a table a group of three who are in fact Sansom's parents and a woman neighbour. Across this scratchy glimpse of these ghosts from the past, Sansom has superimposed a larger close-up of his own heavily made-up hence feminine-looking face. This present-day self-portrait is thrust forward and dominates the picture. It is a defiant act of independence and self-affirmation, and a most powerful work.

Figure in the Landscape (1975) is a curious work, firstly because of its degree of abstraction and secondly because it attempts to impose upon a disordered and loosely worked ground a series of painted linear construction that acts in opposition to it. This attempt to resolve such contradictory aims was of course doomed to failure.

But his another work *Study for a Painting* (1978) seems better in this regard.,masking tape, a contraption of the time, has been used to segregate the figurative area from the abstract, and sophisticated formal and linear

arrangements brings to the painting a false depth and a visual dilemma. The usage of found objects like the slide mounts collaged onto the picture makes this dilemma stronger by its *bas-relief* effect. This autobiographic painting shows the maturity of Sansom's work in the late 1970s.

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THE WORK AND ITS CONTEXT

The Salamanca Buskers

Bloody Raspberry

Untitled

PAINTING PROPOSAL (20 May 1989)

As part of my MFA course, seven portraits in oils will be finished by the end of May, 1990. This choice has been made from my personal experience and visual impression in the past six months, and all paintings will be based on the life of the Greater Hobart Area. These seven portraits, according to their contents, will be automatically inducted into two series, namely *Salamanca - Portrait of a City* (5 in number) and *Bloody Raspberry*.

The former will describe the lonely mood of islanders who have long been confined by an insular circumstance. As a rule, the Saturday Salamanca is regarded as a chance to bring people into contact. Although multifarious activities such as commercial, artistic, recreational, religious and even political interlock and continue all the morning, when one scrutinizes them it will be found that they are but discrete phenomena, and people are never concerned whatsoever their result will be. Participants of these activities sometimes come merely for a sort of psychic satisfaction - they are actually isolated individuals. In the Salamanca series, I will portray some "nobodies" of the city - buskers and artisans, who are always so engrossed in their humble performance that they become oblivious of their surroundings. Under a sombre sky in Sulivans Cove, their inattentive eyes tell people just how solitary their hearts are. Week after week, and year after year they have become a fossil symbol and an indispensable ingredient of the bazaar.

There will be two Portraits in the series *Bloody Raspberry*, derived from my three-day experience on a fruit farm beyond Mt Wellington. Although aware of being paid harshly for their tedious work, more wanderers, some of them homeless, are coming simply because they can get in the harvest season a free camping - a tinsplate hut with a wood-burning fireplace in it. I know some of these raspberry pickers, as I was once one of them, paid not a penny after a long day of labour. *Bloody Raspberry* - that's the saddest sound from the depth of those squeezed and down-trodden souls.

Fundamentally a realistic painter, I like to lay stress on the description of the inner world of my figures, on their reactions to external excitations and on the visual extension of their conflicting thoughts. In these works I will endeavor to vest my figures with such touching force that the onlookers'

sympathy might be roused through a mutual feeling which belongs to all human beings. Humanity factors in these works will possess much greater importance, in comparison with the events depicted.

Technically, the seven paintings will be treated in different tones respectively. For each piece in the Salamanca series the identity of tone is the first consideration. Whereas in the *Bloody Raspberry*, the figures are segregated from their backgrounds, so as to make a strong shock with sharp contrast of colour. All paintings will have an approximate size of some 60" x 60", assuming material is sufficient.

THE SALAMANCA BUSKERS

When the proposal was written in early 1989, I was a bit worried because since my arrival in Australia from China, I found the two peoples knew too little about each other. In my home country, the knowledge of Australian art was in fact a void, only the best-informed artist could tell the name of Heidelberg School; while to the Australians the contemporary Chinese art was nothing but political posters published in the Cultural Revolution twenty years ago.

I met Paul Miller, a masters student from Canada. He told me he had a feeling of cultural dislocation. I didn't know how to describe my situation: everything had to be re-evaluated by new criteria. Surely I was not totally incapable. The problem was, you just needed some time to work things out. To a figurative painter this adjustment or adaptation would take even a longer time.

I didn't choose an exotic Chinoiserie--it was easy for me-- to baffle friendly Australians, nor did I plan an ode to the Sino-Austro friendship albeit a good theme to please everyone. I was apolitical, even cynical by nature. so very carefully I picked up a hard nut from the bottom of life--the buskers in Salamanca Place.

The motif came from my first impression of the market, where I found that West was poorer than I had been thinking of. Similar passions had been expressed in the works of some refugee artists of 1940s like Danila Vassilief (*Street Scene with Graffiti*) and Yosl Bergner (*Pumpkins*). I regarded it as a tradition.

No doubt the Australian society had progressed greatly in the past 50 years. But somehow in this insular marketplace the ghost of the past was still haunting and sometimes incarnated, keeping the perpetual nostalgia going on and on. Green sleeves, though worn out, were evergreen and always in fashion.

Living in the same destitution, I seemed to know them better. Once in China my teacher told me that only with hungry eyes could one see the true

colour of the world. He was right. My task was tough: I had to find something acceptable in both countries so that I could get a degree here in Australia and get a job back in China. I had to keep a good documentary.

At first these paintings were considered as portraits but soon I found it impossible to paint a good portrait from poorly-exposed photographs and gave up the idea. I expanded the paintings into a set of genre paintings.

The first of the series was about a didgeridoo player, with a woman standing in the background, selling day-old loaves. When the painting was brought into being I got some critical comments. Some people were annoyed to see a female painted nude, alongside a dressed man, to say nothing about the rather phallic Frenchstick in front of her. More than a hundred years ago when Manet showed his *Déjeuner sur l'Herbe* he met the same trouble. But this time I would rather give in: I covered her body with a copy of Saturday Mercury she was reading. It was safer to be a discoverer than a challenger.

The finished painting seems a paradox consisting of two different aspects: an aboriginal instrument played by a Caucasian busker, and a mother-like figure standing among fetishistic and phallic objects. The context, however, is neither Marxian nor Freudian but something verging on cultural issues. Although from an early observation I saw a culture imbued with hybridization and eroticism, I felt that behind them was lying a phlegmaticism *per se*, which in this painting is embodied by the self-denial of the cross-legged didgeridoo man and the self-abandonment of the standing woman. In the dazzling sun of the high noon, the two figures (as described in my proposal, they are "isolated individuals"), looking a bit tired but having different reactions to fatigue (the former passive while the latter impatient), compose a contradiction between pictorial inconsonance and logical coherence. In the time to come, this kind of contradiction proved to be the gist running through the paintings in this series.

The pictorial inconsonance appears even more evident in the second painting, about a singer-guitarist and a clarinet player, who are busking beside a parking-meter. One is shouting his hoarse, and the other is engaged in his performance with his body leaning backward to an opisthotonos. There is no audience at all. The only soul to be seen in the background is a

man, hurriedly passing by, carrying on his shoulder a pair of somehow sloppy legs removed from a mannequin. Further beyond, on the historical sandstone walls, hollow-eyed shop windows are watching the odd happenings on the otherwise empty street.

The curious coincidence seems to have left a rebus linking with the cryptic figure in the background.

In modern times, as it were, mannequin has become a strong image standing for a new fetishism relating to femininity and vogue, a commercialized art. As long as the man carries a dismembered dummy, he symbolizes the iconoclastic antagonism to modern fetishism. As a response, on the other side of the painting the two buskers are deridingly chanting and blaring by the parking-meter, an official coin-collector that is left disfunctional due to the Saturday market activities. That is a rare instant when the world is freed from the annoyance of money problems.

It seems all of a sudden, in the third painting, that the market is swarming with people. Some are flocking around a bagpiper who has seated himself on a soap box. The Scotsman's raree-show has always been attractive but this time there is something eerie among the audience: men and women have turned their eyes away from the busker and are staring out at "you"-- the viewer. Tension is building up. It's not just a "Chuck 'em in", of course.

This picture was painted in 1989, an unusual time during which I was having an emotional crisis connected with a nightmarish event in my home country. The social anomie in Northern Hemisphere had something to do with my psychological state, and for some time I had a weird feeling about Salamanca Place. It was a bit like agoraphobia. The inner man of the bagpiper has a resemblance with me of that peculiar period. In the painting he is actually isolated, ignored and abandoned by the large crowd.

The tragic event had another impact on me. Although far from the vortex, I couldn't retain an equilibrium needed for a cool and less emotional continuum and after having finished this painting I began contemplating a new subject, which turned to be a large painting called *Untitled*.

When the Salamanca series was resumed a month later, I found I needed a simple subject as an interlude. I remembered old Edward the harmonica player. So "enter mouth-organist, *solus*", and he was there. On an evacuated marketplace the purpose of his performance was quite doubtful, but no one would disagree that he should appear in the painting. He was a man of weight--after many years devoted to busking, he had become a symbol (an anti-hero) of the Salamanca Place, just like the silos behind him. A dim metaphor is hiding between the monolithic mammoth and the corpulent cobbler: both are eye-catchers that change their surroundings significantly. Somehow when I painted this picture I often thought of some works by Jeffrey Smart, especially the heap of concrete at the airport of Madrid.

As an antithesis of the second painting of the series (i.e., the singer-guitarist and the clarinet-player), two musicians appear in the fifth painting. Instead of an overstated *allegretto* in the former, this duet seems more like an understated *moderato*, which represents the solitude in the hearts of the duetists. The vacancy in their mood can be recognized through their emotionless eyes and passive poise, surrounded by a thin market. Some distance away, like a counterpart of the man with mannequin legs, a woman standing with her arms akimbo, is staring at a small flock of people who are retiring into the depth of the street. The linear perspective of the cobble stones enhances the background group by guiding the viewers' eyes onto the focus, and alienates the main figures in the foreground. In this way, a pictorial inconsonance is composed. If we regard a painting as a symphony, the audience then will hear a faint string duet backgrounded with a continuing inharmonious noise, just like the small piece of blue overwhelmed by a neutral gray in the sky.

In the sixth painting (the harpist), the market looks like it is in real life. It is late fall or early winter, when the market activities are cooling down. The trees are bare and the ground is covered with fallen leaves. With his instrument the harper is telling an old story about Nature. Everything seems in perfect harmony but for the one figure in the black robe, who is emerging from behind the harp, walking toward us. Calm and quiet is her pace, cautious and cold is her face. Her appearance seems ominous. (The prototype of this figure is a "mentalist" who usually reads palms and tarots

in the market. To some people she is one of the Fates.)

In the picture there is an interplay of tranquility and disturbance between the harpist and the fortuneteller. All paintings in this series are double-focussed (or multi-focussed). This picture is not an exception. To make a psychological impact, this kind of inconsonance is necessary.

The last painting in the Salamanca Series, is about a drummer. The setting is unique: the Dutch fountain and monument to Abel Tasman. The drummer is my drawing and painting model David. Two years ago when I met him in the market, he was selling some small pieces of local minerals. There is no doubt that this painting is another example of pictorial inconsonance and double-focussing. On the right-hand side the upper part of Tasman is cut off by the edge of the picture and therefore cannot be seen, while on the left-hand side an aborigine is holding a watermelon, his legs blocked by the watercourse. It seems that the discoverer is hugging the globe while the native is embracing a watermelon -- a fair miracle appears before the eyes of a new arrival, a figure resembling myself. He is peeping out from behind the fleet. In that moment, a strange question came to his mind: in this confusing world, is there a coordinate for him, or like the Flying Dutchman, is he doomed to be drifting all his life?

BLOODY RASPBERRY

I have spent three days on a small farm of Southern Tasmania, picking raspberry. I didn't earn any money but, instead, I got some first-hand material of Australian countryside--an unexpected acquisition. Before I came to Australia, I had been studying English for many years. This had enabled me to know something about the Southern Continent. But the painstaking "participant observation" proved my knowledge out of date.

If, comparing the works of Frederick McCubbin and his contemporary Henry Lawson who wrote *The Drover's Wife*, we can find a similarity in a low-key sentiment and a tragic sense of beauty that has effectively and successfully represented the hardship of rural Australia during the turn of 19th and 20th centuries. However, since I came what has appeared to me is an industrialized late-20th-century Australia where traditional values has been

depreciated. Athur Streeton has been replaced by Sydney Nolan, and Murray Bail (b. 1941) has written an utterly different *The Drover's Wife* to challenge the forerunning Lawson tradition.

The namesake by Bail, though not a very significant story, was written in an extraordinary way, which began with a painting by Russell Drysdale. The modern "drover's wife" Hazel, wrote Bail, "had a small pretty face". But, he questioned, "how long it must have lasted up in the drought conditions is anybody's guess."

It is the same drought conditions that has brought an austere style to contemporary art of Australia, where "economy of statement" is a favourite commendatory phrase often used by artists and critics.

From any point of view this economy is necessary, especially when artists have to cope with precarious working conditions. Although in many places minimalism is losing ground, a rather extravagant maximalism can hardly grow on this infertile soil. Through more than a year's practice I was quite aware of this. After the Sisyphean job in the Salamanca paintings the new series of *Bloody Raspberry* came as a refresher.

As my approach to a Postmodernist style, in this series images from other art works have been appropriated or quoted to serve a new idea, while historical events and actual life have been cynically montaged to make a deliberate anachronism.

In the first painting *G'morning Mate*, the raspberry pickers are relieving themselves by a farm fence. One of them is facing the background landscape which can be recognized to be a replica of Streeton's *Still Glides the Stream and Shall For Ever Glide*; and the other is sitting behind a makeshift "shithouse" made of galvanized iron, a common object in today's Australian art. By using the confrontation of a contemporary style to the diminishing romanticism, I suggest the cold irony of circumstances of the pickers.

The second painting *Reverie* consists of a frustrated picker and a "reconstructed" remnant wall in a photograph about Tasmanian

countryside taken by Geoff Parr. In the painting, illusions began to emerge in the drunken raspberry-picker's head and the graffiti on the wall tells the wild disorder of his thought, from a long-forgotten ballad *Five Bob to Four* to some malicious remarks. Lying on the bottom of life, and in the reverie, he sees an up-side-down world.

The third painting is dominated by the image of the Spanish Royalist soldier who was killed before the camera of Robert Capa, the war photographer. This painting, *Bloody Raspberry*, has nothing to do with the Spanish Civil War, however. If it is a war, it'll belong to a different kind: a war against one's own fate. The comically resurrected soldier has now become a raspberry-picker, or the forward-charging raspberry-picker in the next instant is to be tragically shot through the guts by a berry-shaped bullet, is the question. But for me one thing is quite sure: with the completion of this painting (hence this series), an old style is over, and new direction is found.

UNTITLED

The emerging picture of the world in its 1980s-and 90s, is one of many changes in the areas of politics, economics and the environment. Among the factors which affect the world's social life a very enduring and hence decisive one is culture.

Derived from their roots of ancient civilizations, cultures of different types confine the ways of human thinking and behaviour. If a society is culturally less equipped to cope with the rougher and tougher world towards the end of the century, and also when one culture is grafted in with a heterogen from another, a social cataclysm is inevitable. That's what's happening in many countries like China, Russia, Rumania and perhaps, Australia whose culture is barely holding together. In the face of accelerating changes, the most vulnerable and worst affected are those who have no social positions, and are thus left powerless and helpless.

The painting *Untitled* took shape during the turn of 80s and 90s, when East Europe was in turmoil and chaos. I owed the changes to the cultural disorder. (If a man is changed economically, the change will involve an

alteration in diet; if he is changed socially, it could bring about a variation of hairstyle or denture; but if he is to change his culture, it's almost as though the man is to have his central nerve system removed and replaced with a new one.)

In *Untitled* there is the fantasy of Dali's nightmare, and Delvaux's sleepwalkers' nudity, but it is neither symbolic nor surrealistic. Style is a product of the time in which it is developed: it cannot be revived. I respond to Postmodernism, which relates largely to human history.

Nowadays people are talking more and more about Postmodernism, and works of Peter Booth and Mark Tansey which appeared in the recent Venice Bienniales have triggered great interest. I hadn't known of Tansey before, but when I saw his works on the slides brought back from Europe by Professor Geoff Parr, I felt a kind of affinity. but most of Tansey's works related to the history of late modernism, due to the fact that he was born to a family of art critics. I am more sensitive to cultural terms, probably because I came from a non-European cultural background and am living in a multi-cultural environment.

In *Untitled I* painted about a dozen naked figures. They are standing in the same pose and stupefied by the sudden appearance of an unknown light hinting a vague agnosticism. Behind the figures some relics of a mumbo jumbo are lying on a wasteland scattered with trash.

In both Eastern and Western genesis, man was created naked. I would like to think that on the day when mankind are judged (given that the doomsday will come), they will be as nude as they were created. In 1976 an earthquake, one of the worst in 20th century, killed a third of a million people in north China. My home town, only a hundred kilometres from the epicentre, was also devastated. It happened during the small hours as men and women were awakened by the sudden cataclysm. They fled into the streets, some of them having not a stitch on. Flashes of lightning from the horizon illuminated hundreds who were struck dumb with fear, or laughing unreasonably, leaving a terrific picture which would not fade out in many years to come. Nakedness, is thus the way to remind me of such a horror, a human instinct that can never be overcome by their own power.

I didn't want to go very far along a narrative way. To guide the viewer to stand off from the "story", I put a white rectangular "plaque" on the centre of the painting and wrote "UNTITLED" on it. It seems a rude intrusion to the eye. So, apart from the painter and the painted, a third factor is introduced into the painting. It is an *alter ego*, who mockingly labeled my figures as *the* untitled , while he majestically plaqued the title (a non-title which is most frequently used as a title, and right on the centre of the painting!) I regard him as my more critical and literal self, instead of a doublet in a split personality. That was not only a change of meaning, but also a change of concept--the painting was no longer one by traditional means, and the artist was liberated from a mould made by himself. It was a small step, but it had taken almost a year's deliberation to achieve. I also owe this progress to Geoff, who first recommended me books about Delvaux and Tansey and then gave me a suggestion on the "plaque" (my first thought of the plaque was with a stand). My painting supervisor Paul Zika has given me many good suggestions on this painting (the background and the description of the figures that once had a Norman Lindsay style).

LIST OF WORK

- 1 **Salamanca Buskers No. 1 (Didgeridoo Player) 1989**
130 x 130cm, oil on canvas
- 2 **Salamanca Buskers No. 2 (Guitarist and Clarinet Player) 1989**
130 x 130cm, oil on canvas
- 3 **Salamanca Buskers No. 3 (Bagpipe Player) 1989**
130 x 130cm, oil on canvas
- 4 **Salamanca Buskers No. 4 (Harmonica Player) 1989**
130 x 130cm, oil on canvas
- 5 **Salamanca Buskers No. 5 (String Duet) 1990**
130 x 130cm, oil on canvas
- 6 **Salamanca Buskers No. 6 (Harper) 1990**
130 x 130cm, oil on canvas
- 7 **Salamanca Buskers No. 7 (Drummer) 1990**
130 x 130cm, oil on canvas
- 8 **G'morning Mate 1990**
130 x 143cm, oil on canvas
- 9 **Reverie 1990**
143 x 130cm, oil on canvas
- 10 **Bloody Raspberry 1990**
130 x 143cm, oil on canvas
- 11 **Untitled 1989-90**
182 x 240cm, oil on canvas



Salamanca Buskers
No. 1 (Didgeridoo Player)
1989
130 x 130cm, oil on canvas



Salamanca Buskers
No. 2 (Guitarist and Clarinet
Player) 1989
130 x 130cm, oil on canvas



Salamanca Buskers
No. 3 (Bagpipe Player)
1989
130 x 130cm, oil on canvas



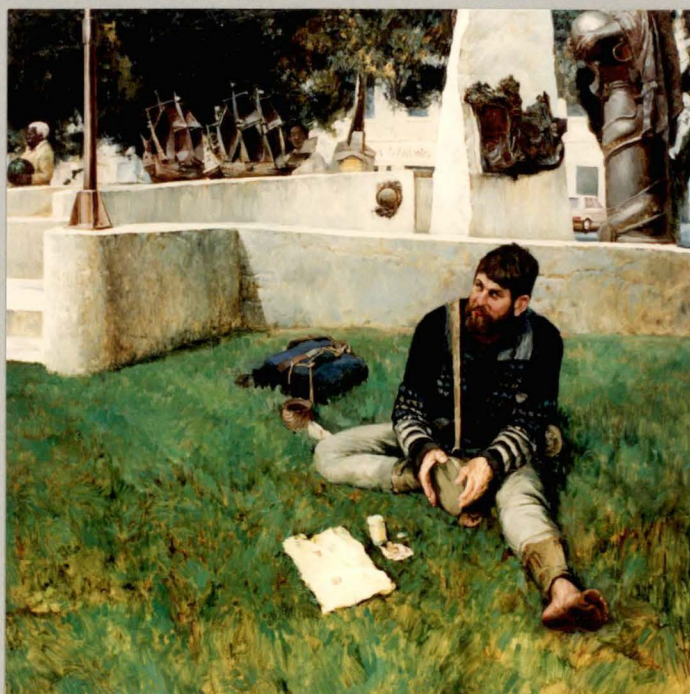
Salamanca Buskers
No. 4 (Harmonica Player)
1989
130 x 130cm, oil on canvas



Salamanca Buskers
No. 5 (String Duet) 1990
130 x 130cm, oil on canvas



Salamanca Buskers
No. 6 (Harper) 1990
130 x 130cm, oil on canvas



Salamanca Buskers
No. 7 (Drummer) 1990
130 x 130cm, oil on canvas



G'morning Mate 1990
130 x 143cm, oil on canvas



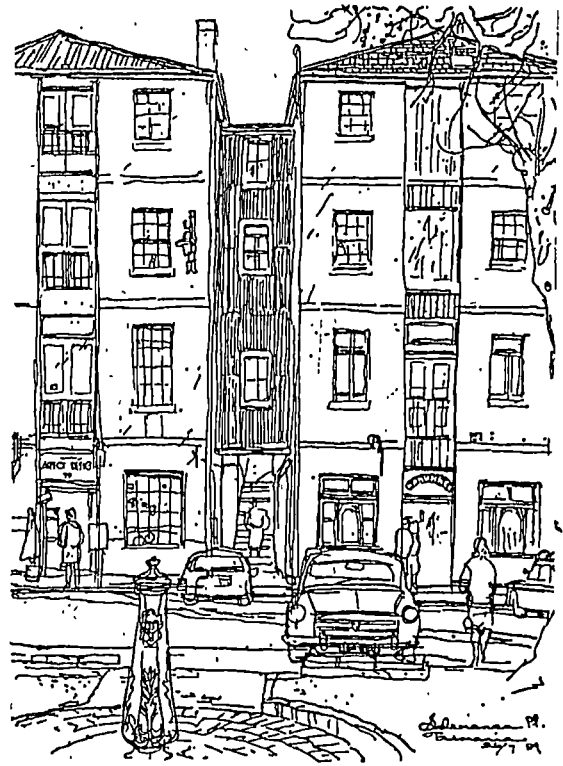
Reverie 1990
143 x 130cm, oil on canvas



Bloody Raspberry 1990
130 x 143cm, oil on canvas



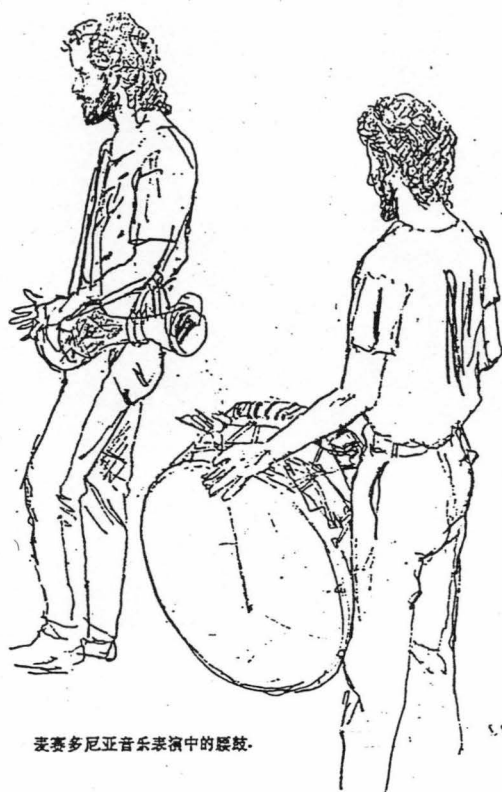
Untitled 1989-90
182 x 240cm, oil on canvas



Working sketches



竖琴演奏者在四月一日(愚人节)萨拉曼卡市场上的表演。
乔治·卡拉汉是本地有名的工匠,所演奏的乐器是他自己制作的。



麦赛多尼亚音乐表演中的腰鼓。



风笛

这种乐器叫bagpipe, 中文叫风笛, 是由一个人演奏的。挤压腋下气鼓, 空气进入气囊, 按动笛子上的键和孔, 簧片就会发出声音。一个乐器上有四五根笛子, 所以效果就象一支喇叭乐队, 非常热闹。这种乐器产生于苏格兰, 在霍巴特有一支由警察组成的风笛队, 每到节日出来为市民演奏, 图中的这个人是我在萨拉曼卡市场见到的。

木管 (didgeridoo)

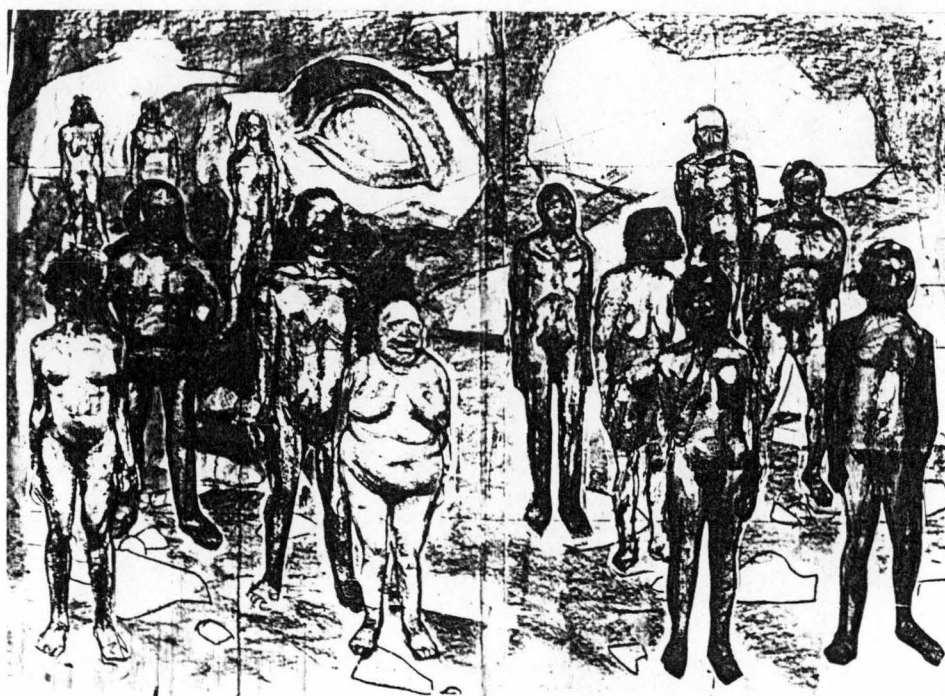
这种乐器是澳洲的原始民族使用的。可别小看这根简单的管子, 它发出的声音变化多端, 低沉浑厚, 有如千军万马, 狮滚虎豹, 风雷雨电, 回荡不已, 给人以美妙的遐想。特别令人不可思议的是, 演奏者竟能连续吹半个小时而声音不断, 换气不留一点痕迹, 堪称一绝。



记忆中的算命女郎的素描肖像。



Working sketches



Working drawing for *Untitled*