

THE UNIVERSE

is on loan from the artist

Nicholas Nicola

PART II

ESSAYS

Catalogue List

A direct link to PART I of the main catalogue can be found on the following webpage:

<http://nicholasnicolaetchings.synthasite.com/leichhardt-2016.php>

The link is via the website of Nicholas Nicola Etchings

Thank You.

ESSAYS

The following pages contain a few essays which as one quickly looks over them again it could be said that they are still somewhat in the draft stage perhaps needing some final work on editing, writing expression etcetera. These essays have mainly been written for the 'private bemusement' of the artist but some readers may find them of interest. All the best. NN.

ESSAYS

some further introductory remarks

'...this god, the river & this river, the cosmos.'

cooks river & the light of god

nature & humanity: from the renaissance to the present

dark matter nebula & jasper johns

a question asked by suzi gablik in 1984: has modernism failed?

marcel duchamp & found objects & seventeenth century dutch art & dada & how the universe doesn't need us (but we certainly need the universe) - followed by related visual

essays: found objects; travel mementoes;

johnny cash & the innate meaningfulness of each individual life in a thousand worlds

(with christmas hats)

& start

CATALOGUE LIST

final image/s



FOUND OBJECT: a covered table tennis racket
discovered at a Surry Hills exhibition

Some Further Introductory Remarks.

Many of the Australian landscape and coastal images which I have produced have been done so in the last few years. Many of the prints have come about from a natural interest in visiting the Australian bush. I am still very much in the process of comprehending the natural elements of this ancient continent. Also I wish to acknowledge that I am depicting a topography that was previously occupied by the 'first Australians' for up to 60,000 years if not longer. Aboriginal artists have a far more mature and astute understanding of a landscape which I can only still dimly perceive; their vision is very clear while I still view it through a 'glass darkly'. Within Aboriginal society there is a strong, very respectful spiritual link to the land which is seen as 'mother' and this I recognize; correspondingly, these days, I also - more often than not - see a 'cosmological link' between land and sky and thus to complete the cyclic notion of our 'parent physical world' I conveniently discern this over-arching boundless realm of night and day as 'father.' In my local environ I am aware that the waterway which runs through it is labelled as Cooks River which obviously reminds one of the English discoverer of the eastern coastline which eventually led to the colonial takeover of the land and near total destruction of Aboriginal society. The actual Aboriginal name is Goolay'yari and if I take this name into account while walking along the river I also hope to take into account the way the original people who lived by its banks related to it. Many years ago in 1992 in Managua while travelling through Latin America I had with me a recent copy of the Melbourne based literary magazine MEANJIN which focused on Aboriginal issues. After my eyes had wandered over the typography of countries such as Guatemala, Colombia and Cuba I was intrigued to read - after putting away my map - an article about the renaming of the Grampian mountains in Victoria to their previous Aboriginal title which is Gariwerd. I read of an Anglo protest and learnt of the importance of geography to a people's identity, shaped by the names given by one race and taken away by another. How lands can be conquered by the stroke of a cartographer's pen. However, blood had also been spilt, tribal blood in Australia and tribal blood in the Americas. I have to always remind myself of this historical reality as I walk along the concrete path that stretches along my local waterway. I have done a series of etchings of Goolay'yari but I must note that I see the river as a European, but hopefully I like to think I do try to take into account of a many thousands of years 'indigenous echo' that one can sometimes perceive while by it. In regards to the river etchings many are of a small squarish size (10cm X 7cm) and involved experimenting with aquatint and sugar lift. I think it is fair to say there is the influence of the renowned Australian painter/printmaker Fred Williams in these smaller pieces. Fred Williams is one of my favourite printmakers. There is an increasing abstraction in my landscape work (which I first became conscious of while doing the Coledale series). With this increasing abstraction and move towards the simple over the complex I should also acknowledge the influence of Aboriginal art on these recent prints; especially the flat forms of Rover Thomas that especially have also had some bearing on various coastal etchings; (an influence that lingers). My most recent etchings mainly look at Wolli Creek, Mougamarra Reserve along the Hawkesbury River in Ku-ring-gai Chase National Park, Botany Bay National Park, the coast in the Royal National Park neighbouring Sydney as well as revisiting Gordons Bay while 'opposite' to this coastal subject matter are six etchings generally titled Alpha and Omega based on aerial shots that I took with my Super 8 while flying in a Cessna to see friends in Amata in Central Australia. There's also a couple of other 'universe' works based on the trees in Sydney's Royal Botanical Gardens and another tree in Blackwattle Bay at Glebe. Overall, I wish to state that what more or less interests me is to perceive the extraordinary (or metaphysical) in the everyday and 'ordinary'. My work also reveals a fascination in such basic design elements as the contrast between light and shade. The interplay between darkness and light continually intrigues me and thus nearly all of my work is monochrome. A 'meditative mood' is often accomplished which I hope easily allows the spectator to mindfully 'move into' the work with his or her imagination. It is only in recent years that the Australian bush has become a major theme and I see this interest as reinforcing a firming belief of how culture to me - on one level - is an artistic expression of a human desire to connect to eternity. (After all, our comprehension of Nature has always had a 'spiritual leaning' - even long before our attempts to 'subordinate' and 'domesticate Nature for our utilitarian

use). Through my landscape and coastal etchings I hope the spectator can ‘connect’ to this underlying universal human preoccupation with ‘the eternal’; which, for me, has become a core interest as I gradually obtain some dim understanding – as a ‘European’ – of the Aboriginal concept of this ancient continent. In relation to many of these Australian landscape and coastal images I wish to reinforce that the influence of the first people’s perception of the land is often very subtle in my work being more on a conceptual rather than on a straight out obvious visual level. (Although – formalistically speaking - in some of my work which shows a use of ‘simple patterning’ I reiterate my acknowledgement of the influence of an Aboriginal artist such as Rover Thomas amongst others). In an appendix I provide some ‘source’ sketches and photographs which more or less relate to the main body of prints. There are also in the appendix a few prints which I have earlier produced going back to the early 80s. As it is I have not kept a record of the exact times when I made them but my first accomplished etching is White Ox followed up by the two Minnamorra Rainforest works; the ones set in Jervis Bay and on the New South Wales north coast respectively as well as Looking into the Future. You may wish to consider the stylistic differences from these earlier works to the later etchings presented. With that said one very early work- a Wolli Creek etching – already brings into play for the really first time in my conscious mind the connection between land and the spiritual/cosmos; after all, is entitled ‘Supernova’.

To look at more images feel free to go to my website <http://nicholasnicolaetchings.synthasite.com/> or by typing into a search engine nicholas nicola etchings which is a lot simpler. You will also see on the website which has quite a few pages that the subject matter is quite varied including topics such as producing quirky humorous images based on suburbia, mythological works as well as many prints based on the international travel which I did from the mid-80s to the early 2000s. As mentioned, it is only in recent times that I have mainly focused on the Australian terrain. In cyberspace I also have more detailed information on the etching process although I have included information at the end of the catalogue. I hope the work you are about to view proves to be an enriching experience. Thank you for taking the time to consider my art. Enjoy. Best regards. Nicholas Nicola.



Cooks River



Prometheus Rocks. Royal National Park.

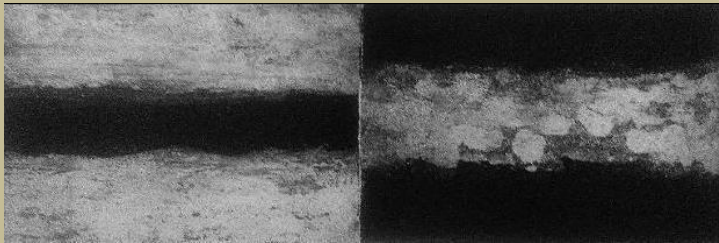


Reeds. Cooks River.

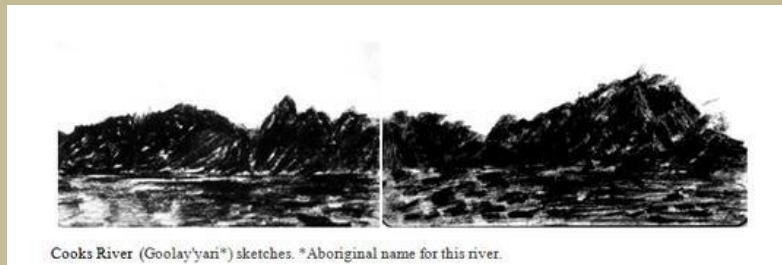
'...this god, the river & this river, the cosmos.'

1

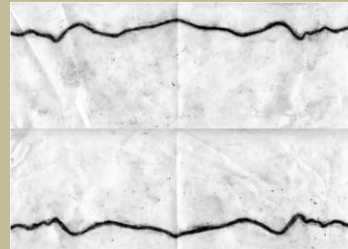
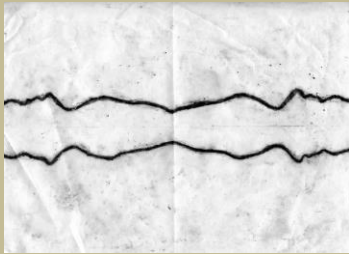
I



The first part of the etching title refers to T.S. Eliot's Four Quadrants poems in which there is a reference to a river as a god. Although, before embarking on the ramifications of the connection of this image to T.S. Eliot's poetry it should be remarked that this print results from the following two sketches of Cooks River riverbanks.



The outside edges of the two sketches were used to form one continuous outline. The outline was duplicated and used as templates in the etching.



The lines mirror each other four ways thus becoming ‘quadrants’ stitched in the mind. The first pattern directly reflects the riverbank sketches. The second pattern is the same outline at the edges so as to be an inverse of the first pattern. Although the final two images coupled in the etching do not directly reflect these lines there was the use of cut out stencils in the shape of these lines when sugar lift was applied on the etching plates with a paintbrush. There is an element of randomness to how the sugar lift spreads on the plate and this is reflected in the final images.

II

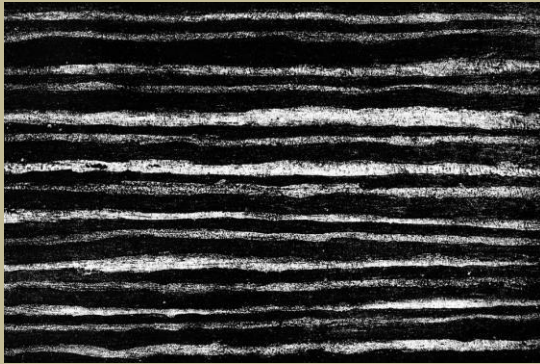
Thus although the notion of ‘four quadrants’ as intimated by T.S. Eliot can be seen as relevant in viewing this etching it is in the following print that there is a direct reference to T.S. Eliot’s four poems.



Its title ‘...this river, a strong brown god...’ references the opening lines of *Dry Salvages* where the river is seen as a ‘strong brown god’. The white lines reference the ripples of the river current.

III

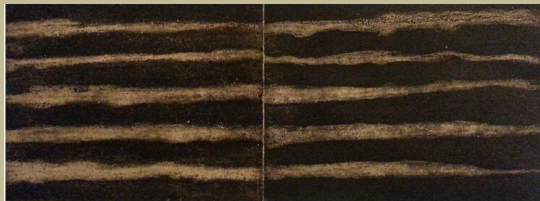
River ripples are also considered in the following four prints:



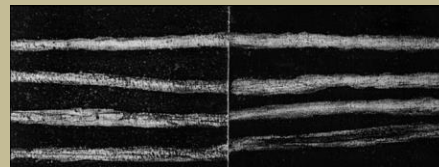
river rhythm



currents of the universe



white matter, dark matter



parallel universe

Thus, along with the first two etchings, this series of prints examines the idea of the universe as a river. A stellar allusion one may wish to overlay in one's mind while meandering back to T.S. Eliot's 'strong brown god'.

In relation to the 'four quartets' it is also a convenient way to highlight notions such as Time, Memory, Perception and Eternity that can be alluded too in any discourse of the cosmos.

IV

To T.S. Eliot the river with its well defined borders is easy to navigate especially if its course has already been chartered and its destination known. Thus, if a life meanders along a way that is already understood then no new knowledge will be obtained. (A pilgrim may encounter a delta with many crisscrossing streams at the mouth of a river but these are diversions to a final destination that is still known).

Thus the poem meditates on the sea which by its vastness opens up the human soul to many ways (unlike a river) leading to a never ending array of delta possibilities for the human soul. The sea can be mysterious to a voyager who does not know where its currents lead too. ...yes...with the sea there is the mystery of not knowing to what end the currents may take us. It is best to gain new knowledge so as to adequately navigate through any unknown territory. If we look above for guidance there are the stars which provide us with the most dependable navigation. There is also the Sun which is also a star.

To what may the human soul ultimately navigate too? It seems, at least, in T.S. Eliot's scheme of things, one can move towards divine enlightenment. Knowledge gained - or even regained - will steer us away from a directionless, meaningless drifting that only lead to rocks, leaving our precious life a 'shipwreck'.

If T.S. Eliot's river is truly a 'small god' our starting point on it - or by its river banks - is our mortality. We may choose to mentally traverse from this narrow confined waterway to go towards that ultimate never ending 'cosmic sea' - the Universe - and consequently to eternity.

As for rivers there is the ancient Oceanus a divine river that circled the known world. Oceanus provided the world with all its fresh water. Rivers do offer life. Yet, there can also be life beyond the riverbank. Human beings need not be static. We need not stay fixated on one point of view in our experience with the world.

The river can be a source of reassurance when stability is required. Yet to be dynamic it can prove valuable to take up the opportunity to explore larger not yet well known waters. The still-born alternative maybe to be marooned in still waters that leave the human spirit stagnated.

Life is organic. We are living beings, not static rocks that will wait for Fate to stealthily chip away at us.

In Ulysses we see an active actor dealing with gods, a Cyclops, Sirens, temptresses and finally with the suitors who were after his wife Penelope during his troubled but finally successful return to Ithaca.

Heraclitus remarks '*character is destiny*'.

We can have ultimate control.

In examining nature (and we too are nature) one may attempt to look beyond the processes of erosion - which duly change physical shape - to see evolution as a grand process of growth. The patterns that exist in nature can help guide us from a sense of feeling entrapped to reaching a deep inner sense of spiritual liberation.

We can laterally negotiate any labyrinth.

To seek *out*, to see life in an open thinking way. Art offers the mind the opportunity to consider what lies beyond the proverbial three dimensions. To apply discovered new 'mental dimensions' to all spheres of life. The artist can be the ferry-person taking other souls not to the underworld but to eternity. Divine enlightenment. To reach 'a spiritual state of being' that is 'one with the eternal'. To have endless possibilities be

possible. To understand everything for all time. To even be outside time. To have no fixed absolutes. To have 'relative absolutes' co-exist. Truths changing in accordance to the relationship to what assumptions or beliefs or premises are around them. Forming 'contextual truths'. A truth maybe what it is but it may be given new meaning if in a changing surrounding. In the *Four Quartets* I have always been intrigued by the issue of Time (such as in the case in *Burnt Norton*) especially with the notion of the cycle of Time. Of Time returning to 'the same place' (as *Little Gidding* states) so a person can see the same place 'for the first time.' Memory. Knowledge. Experience. Lead to a re-evaluation of life.

V

One may wish to look back at '*...this god, the river & this river, the cosmos...*' and perhaps see it again and again in a new way each time; returning to view the interplay between the river and the cosmos - or between the finite and infinite and the unseen 'merging point' between such two opposites - by ever differing convolutions of perception... '*this river, the cosmos*' ...a 'new creature' forever conjuring in the mind, to mentally create a new image, introducing opportunities for other perceptual and thematic interpretations.

VI

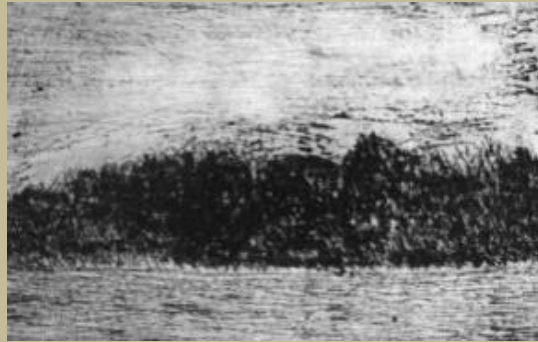
Although there is an obvious interplay between each individual section of the overall print they can also be viewed as separate entities. It is also envisaged the viewer can perceive the image/s in different ways e.g. determining if it is the light or dark areas are either solid or ephemeral. Appearances are in the mind of the beholder. It is a matter of seeing in a particular manner or choosing to view via one or other of the multiple avenues of logic - or instinct - a human brain may wish to take on board - or has been trained by cultural upbringing and social influence to adopt.

VII

It is to be remembered that these so called 'abstractions' are images that are based on sketches of Cooks River riverbanks. Thus a drawing based on the real world is used to create an 'abstract impression'. Thus the river is an appropriate element from nature which - in an universal sense - can often be used as a metaphor relating to life, the universe etc.



'The river is calm.'



‘It Will Pass.’

Walking beside the calm water I imagine the ceaseless flowing river in Herman Hesse’s *Siddhartha* with its ‘thousandfold song’...the river’s voice of experience is full of both sadness & desire; yet the current is always heading towards its goal...thus I silently consider how any personal tribulation can eventually be overcome by entwining - in this finite existence - one’s mental, spiritual and physical self to an over-riding life-enhancing sense of a perfect ‘eternal unity.’

An artist is an archeologist of the mind. He or she can explore human consciousness to see how the human brain determines what reality is. To even then attempt to extend the ability of the cerebral cortex to further understand what is *real*. The ultimate ‘abstract impression’ is of a human mental sense of an ‘unseen or mythical metaphysical’ perceived as ‘truth’. Human comprehension has to go beyond the particularity of a river (as a serpent slithering over the earth’s landscape) to also envisage the boundless dimension of a ‘river beyond’ which we know as the cosmic universe. The cosmos can be identified in its eternal aspect with the boundless dimension of human consciousness. The river is representative not only of one person’s history but of all human history and of the history of the universe. In the case of Heraclitus he uses the river as a way of helping us to understand that everything we perceive is not always as it seems:

‘You could not step twice into the same river; for other waters are ever flowing onto you.’

While the Stoic Roman Emperor Marcus Aurelius makes the following allusion to time as a river:

‘Time is a river, the resistless flow of all created things...’ (*Meditations*. BOOK FOUR: 41).

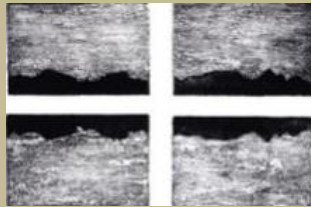
I also may add:

'One thing hastens into being, another hastens out of it. Even while a thing is in the act of coming into existence, some part of it has already ceased to be. Flux and change are for ever renewing the fabric of the universe, just as the ceaseless sweep of time is for ever renewing the face of eternity. In such a running river, where there is no firm foothold, what is there for a man to value among all the many things that are racing past him? It would be like setting the affections on some sparrow flitting by, which in the same selfsame moment are lost to sight....' (Meditations. BOOK SIX: 15).

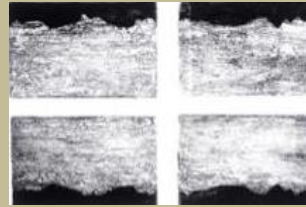
2

VIII

The etching *'this god, the river & this river, the cosmos'* came about from the arrangements of some trial proofs which in an aesthetic sense failed to be satisfactory.



'this god, the river.'



this river, the cosmos.'

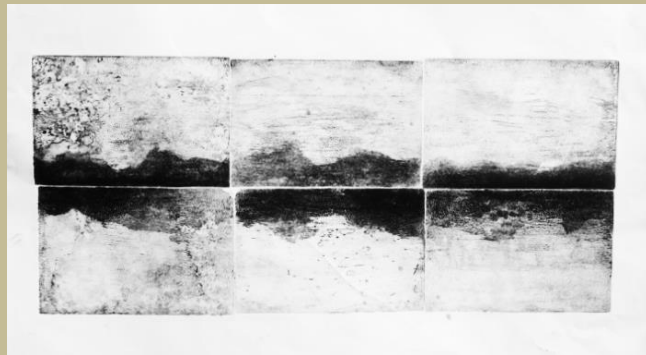
In both sets of etchings each of the four quadrants are B&W. 6" x 4". aquatint. sugarlift. drypoint. zinc plate.

However, the conceptual considerations behind these 'failed states' are still of interest. Firstly, it should be reiterated these two sets of experimental prints are trial proofs. The etchings attempt to represent artistic notions of human perception that I am somewhat attempting to explore. After all, what is personally involved to orienteer - through sight & mind, knowledge & culture - to what one understands is 'real'. Is reality also

a combination of sensory and societal impulses that operate together on each individual? Perhaps, to even want to change or build upon what is 'true'?

The same four plates were used for both sets of etchings.

The first of these two series of four part etchings was originally envisaged with two rows of three etchings each to accentuate the long central dark area.



Trial proof of original six part etching format printed on copper plates using sugarlift & aquatint. A format which may be revisited on a later

However, 'downsizing' to four plates more readily enabled to align the resulting images to T.S. Eliot's 'four quartets.' The plates for each intaglio quadrant were originally meant to match up as one plate. The idea being that this one image was unified by fragments seamed together and which these seams could be undone and strung together again to form new visual combinations with new visual and abstract meanings. However, I was unable to avoid both vertical and horizontal white lines in the printing process which kept making it very clear that the image was made from four separate plates. Although frustrated by this unwanted result, it then finally occurred to me to create an equal amount of narrow white space between each etching which allowed each intaglio work to exist in its own right but still share a relationship with the neighbouring prints. It also occurred to me that the final complete image of a riverbank could be finalised within the imagination of the viewer. The four fragments become one in the human mind. Which leads to a central notion of the two groups of etchings which is that memory, time and so forth – those 'conceptual binds' that connect and relate our human experience to both this exterior physical world and to our inner emotional realms can consist of - or are - many fragments or modulations stitched or entwined together to 'unite' to form a 'uniform' sensation or recollection. This at least seems to be what the past is as we make sense of it when we look back and envisage the undulating panorama of images, memories and experiences that is a human life and the rather temporal nature of life *per se* as each life eventually disappears into the *nothing* 'shadow' of no life - death. Yet, there are many 'mini-deaths' along the way as each day passes by never to return (and which, it may be suggested, we try to metaphorically hold onto and grasp through human culture such as by music, art, writing, photography and so forth. Nevertheless, like Orpheus - who

despite all forewarning - still chooses to turn around to view Eurydice knowing that she would then be lost to him forever; the final annihilation of each individual experience cannot be prevented no matter what 'mortal tactic' we employ to keep a hold on it...).

The etchings can be viewed independently but - seen interdependently with each other - one may note that our typical linear co-ordinates of orienteering with the world need to adapt and expand to take on a multi-perspective way of viewing; a sort of 'conceptual Cubism' within the mind rather than on the picture plane. 'Top', 'bottom' and other such linguistic mental prepositions overlap for instance in the bottom two etchings whereby the top dark areas also form the bottom of the riverbank when viewed in combination with the two etchings above them – of which the mind has to take into account if mentally 'fulfilling' the river image.

Also if one takes a close look it can be seen that the bottom of each half of the river bank is actually has a mirror outline of the top riverbank area which may lead one to consider is this a 'reflection' of reality in itself rather than reality. Or is reality merely a reflection of what is 'made real' by what is 'trained' to be so in the human mind? Also as a consequence of this mirror representation the quadrant of etchings can be turned around making the top the bottom and the bottom the top.

Thus the images can be viewed in a variety of ways of which one major possibility is that the dark and light areas can simultaneously be viewed as both ephemeral and solid. The dark areas can be viewed as the river banks but also one may choose to view it as 'dark eternal space' if seeing each etching as an independent work; the light area could be envisaged as the clear space of 'sky' or the undulating, fluid space of 'water' but in turn also be viewed as the rough texture of rock.

On a somewhat technical point I found it revelatory that as I burnished away at the areas of the zinc plates to make them lighter I was - in a paradoxical way - leading to a pictorial result where those areas could be viewed as thick and solid on the printed paper if one chose to do so.

(It seems, especially with modern physics in mind, in the artistic pursuit of exploring what is 'real' the more one can give an image a more ethereal quality as if 'depicting nothingness' the more closer one may be with such 'visual apparitions' to what is the 'substance' of what is reality). The possibilities are up to the mind rather than the eyes. It allows the mind to expand to more possibly consider 'eternity' not being directly restricted by the physical senses. It is to be said the way one looks is not to be directly closed in and entangled in what some would call 'modernist' mental confusion but rather to have the mind tend towards and led to open *revelation*.

Such is the case in the second quartet of etchings whereby the nominally dark and empty spaces have been reversed so that the clear areas now in the middle and by which through the title the viewer can speculate that what is in front of him/her is a vast stream of a starry, galactic cosmos filled with the *mass* multitude physical elements of the Universe that can be *seen* e.g. stars, planets, nebulae, galaxies etcetera; white empty space not as sky or water but as fiery cosmic furnace. Pushed to the top and bottom edges are the realms of indefinable dark matter that make up so much of the so called 'empty space' of the Universe. No longer are these dark areas solid river banks (although symbolically this interpretation could still hold). Through the linguistic context of the title the mind must re-examine what it is viewing which has also occurred by the *same* four images being re-positioned with each other. (The different ways of seeing intimated here also harks back to the well-known psychological visual image which one can view as an hour glass or two faces in profile). We also see a 'breathing' in rhythm between the micro realm of the river transformed into the macro realm of the cosmos; a connection between two scales of reality in much the same way as there is a yet to be quantified connection between the paradoxical minuscule world of quantum physics and the grand plane of time, mass and gravity of the theory of

relativity. Flux and stability in relation to each other; (scientifically speaking we have moved from Ptolemy's ancient glassy sphere universe of clean line white light concentric circles to a more unknown and mysterious world made up of twentieth century discovered irregular buzzing atomic apparitions that can on the grandest scale form nebulae). The 'cosmic-world' pattern between these two quadrants of reality could easily be imagined as repeating dynamically and forever; just as there is the dynamic order of DNA strands that entwine together to continue and energise life in an endless variety of ways. (It is Kandinsky who infers that the creative spirit is hidden by *matter* and thus there is the objective to unveil the creative spirit and so it can materialise to then be in touch with the human soul. For him, in the nineteenth century there was a lack of 'inner creation' for there was an emphasis on 'material appearances' which led to a sterile one dimensionality. One may also say that although human intellect can play its part in the creative process it seems it should not be at the expense of human intuition. Do not straightjacket the human spirit, allow our soul to be released into the ether...to be in touch with 'that ultimate ether' that is the cosmos...).

VIII

To try to reach a more neutral understanding of reality – that is without any human preconception - one would perhaps have to consider the Creation before the time of actual human existence; let us say much as what was in place in the first few 'days' of the idealized Garden of Eden. The reality of all existence then only had 'value' by the 'divine' physical laws that constructed it; without the added 'utilitarian functions' and 'aesthetic interpretations' later subjectively placed upon it by the human race – a predator species which attempts to exploit all the elements of Nature with such full dominance as to 'objectify' reality to its own prevailing 'truths'.

3

Thus to humanly examine 'reality' in a 'pure way' is perhaps an impossibility.¹

-
1. Perhaps best then to meditate on natural 'non-human-made' objects rather than on manufactured ones. Although it has to be said that as scientific ideas started to prevail over an ever increasingly archaic theocentric worldview Cezanne's apples and oranges in the nineteenth century - and even with the still life paintings of the Cubists Braque and Picasso - everyday objects were used as actual identifiable 'elements of nature' were used in an artistic discourse that attempted to perceive on a heightened 'neutral' conceptual level notions of reality that would hopefully go beyond the pictorial 'trickery' of Renaissance perspective which - although was a scientific human application - became to be seen as pictorially distorting objects according to the angle from which they were seen; (just as much a 'divine morality' distorted human behavior as being either 'pure' or 'evil'). It was hoped to lay bare the real underlying structural laws of Nature - which one may wish to presume - were 'value free'. One may also wish to consider Giorgi Morandi's deceptively simple domestic bottles the same way but let's meander even further 'off course'

and consider the beer bottles by Jasper Johns. I mark him out due to the recent influence of his ideas on my art - or rather the influence of other people's ideas about his ideas about his art on my art – as it should be said that from what I have read Jasper Johns is rather coy about interpreting his own art. Although neutral objects, it's been said they were done as a sort of in-joke after Willem de Kooning complained that you could give Leo Castelli - the art dealer of Jasper Johns - two beer cans and he could sell them. Yet, when we look at the sculpture *Painted Bronze (Ale Cans. 1960)* we do not think of this 'insider art world story' as the art text books do not so readily mention it but rather on how this artistic readymade (an echo of the found object ideas of Marcel Duchamp who much appreciated the art of Jasper Johns) whereby the subject matter of a still life is now the artwork itself. Yet, apart from this insider challenge to what art *is* that is – two beer cans - or even a light bulb - are made to look like real beer cans (or a light bulb); as a sort of play on what are the underlying aesthetic precepts that lead us to define what a work of art is – cultural perceptions which were first challenged by Duchamp with his in/famous urinal. Yet what interests me more is not so much the cultural context but rather the *political* one. Why are we even bothering considering these two beer cans which even make it into the mainstream art text books? If they were Australian beer cans sculpted by an Australian artist would they be in the art books...or if so...would they be taken so seriously? Probably not. An American light bulb or a target or two beer cans have an 'imperial aura' about them if they are from New York - overarching any other meaning (or lack of meaning) the artist has originally given them (even on a subconscious level) - for a beer can from the centre of the American Empire is more fascinating to study than a can of beer from some global outpost like Australia, even though Australian beer is of a much higher quality. American art not only had a heightened cultural prestige – brought on by the Abstract Expressionism art of Pollock and others - but an elevated political pre-eminence even if works like those of Jasper Johns were not overtly political. Yet, in the case of Johns all his work in the art textbooks resides in the shadow of his politically ambivalent *Flag (1954-5)* with its collage-encaustic painted Stars & Stripes. The American flag is perhaps, the most powerful global symbol of a mass-popularized notion of democratic freedom in the Cold War period. Although the art itself may have not have any 'political essence' to it *per se* a society that elevates an artist who does a sculpture of beer cans or another artist who painted large canvases with all those cosmic whirls was surely a society that allowed every *individual to freely* express their 'individuality' no matter how incongruent such artistic expression maybe to otherwise more mainstream cultural notions. (If you are an 'art insider' you will know I have read *'How New York Stole The Idea of Modern Art. Abstract Expressionism, Freedom & the Cold War'* by Serge Guilbaut). However, good art survives the underhand co-opted political propaganda role it may have imposed on it such is the case of much of the New York art of this period which was not - for all appearances - being produced to support the status quo; unlike the mannerist politically overt Socialist Realism 'worker's art' of the Soviet period which is now seen as having a rather kitsch quality to it these days. (While any truly great art in Russia was created by those who did not share the totalitarian values of the regime; for instance one thinks of writers of the stature of Solzhenitsyn, Pasternak, Vasily Grossman, Bulgakov and, of course, Victor Serge; while there was the film maker Eisenstein and the composer Shostokovich who famously always had his suitcase ready for the midnight KGB knock on the door).

Furthermore, in the present period of art where all the worst excesses of Aldus Huxley's 'happy time'

society have shockingly come to the fore the understated genius of Jasper Johns is magnified. In Australia, one at least sees a particularly rich seam of politically aware Aboriginal art whereby artists such as Gordon Bennett, Tracey Moffat, Judy Watson, Ian Abdulla, Sally Morgan, Vernon Ah Kee, Ricky Maynard, Brook Andrew, Destiny Deacon amongst many, many others who have all incisively touched upon the post-colonial intersection (or vicious 'incision') between Aboriginal society and White Australia.

Beer cans. Light bulbs. Torches. Paint cans and brushes.

Numbers.

Jasper Johns and his equally famous numbers both painted and printed and sometimes on top of each other to be worked out on the same sheet of lithograph paper. Paintings of digits are not still life artworks as such but the following 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 0 are the product of human invention. More interestingly, they are Hindu-Arabic symbols sourced by the West for its own practical economic purposes. Writing is an invention of the 'cradle of civilization' which, according to my primary school education, is the fertile lands between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers - that part of Ancient Mesopotamia which is now mostly encompassed by war torn Iraq.

With the 'miracle appearance' of human beings in the proverbial Garden of Eden – which ironically, on planet Earth, is considered to be in the Mesopotamian region - there eventually came with the human progression to differing agriculturally based societies a need to *record* and *measure* the dimensions of the Earth's *territories* and what such lands *produced* and *provided* for an emerging ever more masterful humankind. Wedge shaped – better known as cruciform – strokes lined into wet clay using a reed pen was

the beginning of a physical recording of a highly sophisticated abstract perception of the world which developed into other uniform written codes that found many alphabet and number systems.

(Time as we personally know it on a day-to-day level is a human invention. The 'timelessness' associated with eternity is something I envisage was a consistent omnipresent Arcadian never ending quality (actually, a quality without beginning or end if you think about it...) of the Garden of Eden before the established intrusion of human civilization. History equals not only recorded time but 'time' itself. 'Prehistory' is and contains the purity of an unrecorded, *unobserved* un/reality).

The human need for the *symbolic measurement* of a human devised reality would, one could argue, subvert the previous human interest in simply pictorially displaying the known real world such as that had already existed for thousands of years with cave painting. In fact, abstract symbols would become to be seen as real as the visible world. Jasper Johns challenges or even undermines the 'symbolic theocracy' of human abstract thought by hopefully having us 'relook' at numbers as 'shapes' in themselves rather than as mathematical linear/curved signs used for the counting and use of objects, temperatures, airliner descent angles, lift floors, apartments, reading glasses, movie lengths, restaurant bills, money currencies, land areas, house sizes, animal stock, nuclear missiles, skyscrapers, eye strengths, drought records, haircuts, art market prices, television screen sizes, centimetres, inches, book pages, utility costs, calories, armies, populations, life expectancy, economic growth, flood levels, heights, credit card debts, widths, pixels, light watts, scratched growing children's heights on the kitchen door, depths, amounts, satellite signals, test patterns, weights, sport scores, intelligence codes, computer languages, mobile phones, stock markets, massacres, birth predictions, drill sizes, clothes, car doors, hats, stockings, machine parts, furniture, kitchens, bathroom sinks, birth death and obesity rates, pie eating competitions, polls, rocket launches, elections, bird migration patterns, melting icebergs, fish sizes, archaeology rulers, television ratings, entertainment guides, tree rings, space travel, product costs, speed, light years, arrivals & departures, interest rates, bank accounts, wages, ages, time etc.

A '9' in a Jasper Johns painting is 'allowed' the freedom to merely be a circle with a downward stroke, as if one is looking at a random pattern swirl on the top of coffee cup froth. Yet, it can involve a major conceptual shift for a human mind so culturally ingrained since the kindergarten age of five to view this '9' none other as a very *real* quantity amount; to actually par away all symbolic association with *this circle with a stroke coming down from the bottom of it*. (So I write while ironically using another symbolic pattern known as letters 'A', 'B', 'C' 'Z' etcetera to communicate to you - the reader - using different combinations my invisible thinking about the symbolic and possible non-symbolic association of the following stroke '9' or for that matter the 'pattern' '999'. The closest we may come to 'seeing' numbers and letters without their symbolic association is maybe with viewing a foreign language that we do not know although even in this case although we don't know what the letter may mean we still 'know' or 'believe' that the letter exists as a symbolic representation not of itself but of a coded meaning which we are yet to 'break.').

Perception itself devises reality not just 'reality itself'. I assume this maybe the matter that Jasper Johns is getting at and which can possibly have *real* consequences in one's life. (This is also whether the circumstance/s has/have to do with numbers/letters or no numbers/letters *per se*).



If I were to consider still life motifs I would consider such ‘found objects’ as the milkshake maker and the milk bar flavour container from my childhood/teens as I grew up in a milk bar. Yet as a child of Greek Cypriot migrant parents even such nominally ‘neutral objects’ (subjectively chosen) are infused on a psychological level with the many societal issues related with such a non-typical upbringing. The old milkshake maker from the 60s is a sort of ‘family totem’ these days and which I keep in my old kitchen. Such an emotional sense of ‘spiritual nostalgia’ is further enhanced by the passing away of my father which brings up on a more universal level human issues of reminiscence and memory fragmentation.

In our beginning is our end infers T.S. Eliot in *Little Gidding* and thankfully we now reach the beginning of this end; and what a cursory look at Jasper Johns and his numbers especially draw us too is to the notion of allegory – of all things.

In the case of still life I have mentioned that a focus on such ‘neutral subject matter’ by the likes of Cezanne who was more interested in the way nature constructed itself e.g. an orange was really a sphere, a mountain was really a cone, a house - a cube, a human arm really a cylinder and so forth – it is certainly a scientific underlying structural appraisal of one’s surrounds; but an apple in a Dutch still life was not merely an apple when it was most probably also meant to be a sign to forewarn the viewer that an apple – the fruit eaten by Adam and Eve – is a reminder of human sin which only leads to human suffering and to eternal damnation if divine repentance is not sought.

Dutch art was littered with other *vanitas* symbols such as a skull on a table which - obviously enough - was a reminder of death. It could be placed on a table which may also have a glass of expensive wine. For the new burgeoning middle class now buying art it could be prompted with the sober thought that the material comforts presently being enjoyed would still all come to a mortal end; one’s life had to still be morally held into account for the Final Judgement.

A Dutch apple may equal human sin while a Cezanne apple may equal a sphere.

Allegory – it is in both. There is an active-interactive-interplay between both eye and mind as the viewer recognises that the object before him/her subtly represents more than just what it is from the real world. Yet, the ‘other subject matter’ that is represented can only come to be conceived in the spectator’s *mind*.

Conceptual art *per se*.

An apple is not an apple in our two examples for it is something else: whether it be a religious-metaphysical proposition such as ‘sin’ or a concrete object like a sphere which more likely is still perceived as an abstract proposition if the viewer is aware of Plato’s Theory of Absolute Forms. *Allegory* I have learnt from reading *‘Figuring Jasper Johns’* by Fred Orton alludes to a Hellenistic idea when around 270 BC a new word *Allegoria* appeared and basically meaning ‘other speaking’; that’s to say talking about something while actually also meaning something else.

In landscape – which, in principle, are what my etchings actually are - allegory is often utilized to allow the world which is presented to often represent something else: such as a beautiful forest scene is really to be seen as valuable economic property for the good of the nation owned by the ‘charitable’ capitalist baron patron who sponsored the picture or the same forest, but in another painting, is to be perceived as an idyllic example of a religious or mythological arcadia by a more intellectually refined cerebral audience. A thirteenth century dynasty Chinese landscape may have a similar forest scene with mountains all covered with mist with much empty space hovering above all sig-

nifying in a Zen like way the mysterious creation of form from a formless void. In other words, landscapes are obvious artistic examples that are often infused with subjective human perceptions involving our ever differing relationship with Nature.

Consider also the haunting mood of a German Romantic forest as well as the momentous musical/astrological/mystical landscapes of the great Lithuanian artist & composer M.K. Ciurlionis (1875-1911). As for American Modernism one cannot go past Georgia O'Keefe's abstracted flowers and grand desert landscapes which - along with the occasional reference to a sort of 'magic realism' (I'm thinking of a cow skull floating in the sky) - also developed a simpler serene Zen quality to her art towards the end of her long life.

In regards to allegory and landscape one painting which is of particular interest is *'The Tempest'* (circa 1506-8) by the extraordinary Venetian artist Giorgione. Although there are many recognisable motifs in this work with its 'eternal aspects' there is the paradox that its overall meaning still remains a mystery. No art commentator I have yet come across seems fully confident as to Giorgione's intention. (If so, there seems to be an ever slight dose of hubris).

A mother and child on the right are in the foreground; along with a young man holding a staff in front of a broken classical column on the other side. These human figures are lost in a tree filled landscape which has a city in the background. What is notable is the lightning strike in the stormy sky in background. One also notes a small bird on the top of a roof. The whole canvas is naturalistically painted with an uncanny accuracy. Its vivid sense of reality is only overarched by the enigmatic mood that is conveyed. All is still. Tranquil.

It is surmised by some art commentators that the woman and man represent Eve (with her babe Cain) & Adam in the Garden of Eden. The coming tempest is apparently a foreboding of God's wrath upon the first human couple.

To others the lightning intimates to Zeus who will strike down the man who is the mortal Iason. As mentioned in Homer's Odyssey this unsuspecting human being had committed the 'crime' of sleeping with Demeter who is the earth mother goddess of plant growth and perhaps more importantly in the context of this image - the sister of Zeus. (In this interpretation the child in the image - who has been conceived by Iason and Demeter - is the god of wealth Ploutos). The broken column which represents a life cut short backs up the idea that the young man standing in front of it is about to be struck down by Zeus's lightning bolt. (Zeus, apparently, would go on to rape his 'dear sister' to produce Persephone).

The bird on the roof is a crane which infers fertility but also displays the need to be vigilant to divine vengeance. This bird stands on one leg with a stone in the other foot; which will be dropped onto the other leg if it falls asleep; thus keeping the bird awake. Yes, we must be wary of what can happen next in this life.

Still others infer we are witnessing the Holy Family resting during their Flight into Egypt. Here are mortals on the way to rescuing the still vulnerable union between Eternity and Mortality (as seen in the babe Son of God).

The woman 'a gypsy'; the male 'a farmer or soldier'...it is unknowable...for me the piercing lightning strike is akin to a rip in the universe with temporality interrupting eternity; not unity between the Eternal and Mortality but disruption; it could be signaling the Fall of Humanity. Nature overcomes us. Death is introduced. (I think of T.S. Eliot's title *'What the Thunder Said'* in the *Wasteland*). Thus the 'sudden movement' of the lightning strike introduces the idea of Time into this still timeless scene.

The Eternal Present is undermined by an earthly notion of yesterday, today and future. (The orbits of the stars and planets now have to be considered). The transience of natural reality interrupts the eternal whose unseen dimensions are infused through the fabric of the Creation. (Circles within circles). Thus this transience is a visible constant to us that separates us from an unseen eternal dimension which can only be re-awakened in the human mind and soul through a dormant spiritual insight which has to be allowed to emerge and grow; to allow for a re-infusion of the Eternal into our humanness to bring about a lasting restoration between what is immortal and mortal.

A modern audience may wish to consider the meeting point between the three dimensionality of this world with the multidimensionality of a quantum universe. (As the poet Frank O'Hara - who Jasper Johns knew and through I have learnt about through my reading of his art - infers in his poem *In Memory of My Feelings* is that - on more a human level - yes, we *grow* which is to realise we are not static beings, that in our lifetime we may change from one self to another and to another and still yet to another and so on. Not just physically, but spiritually within our maturing personality...to never be the same, to always be transforming, like a snake constantly shedding skin to be renewed; to negate the old to have a renewed beginning. To seek an ultimate unity...' We are not stone. Demeter can also cultivate not only the earth but our minds).

Ultimately, Giorgione ingeniously shows us that we must rise above the 'winter of our mortal discontent' within ourselves so as to be in union with Nature; to perhaps reflect on the essential invisibility of life...of moving particles upon moving particles which unite harmoniously on every level...as well as to no longer have a divisive separation between the physical and spiritual...significantly, I think the mastery of Giorgione is that although he has placed in his landscape particular universal symbols with well-

known meanings it is still a work open to multiple readings. It's apparent sense of 'unknowing' and 'ambiguity' which allows for such 'open interpretation' is to me a strength to this work allowing it to remain continually conceptually fresh and visually relevant to a varied audience - even to a twenty-first century audience jaded by the mental conundrums of post-modern aesthetics. (It does somewhat bemuse me that while the flashy art herd congregates at the Venice Biennale this little gem of Renaissance 'conceptual art' stays tucked away at the local *Accademia* when it should be placed at this 'show time' on centre stage for full display and for full artistic consideration – and praise).

I consider Giorgione a genius.

There doesn't always have to be a 'one right way' to perceive an artwork when it seems the artist has not encouraged one particular point-of-view (which raises the question that reading the work in many ways was always the artist's intention anyway. The 'unknowing' actually makes this work more humane).

The Tempest maintains one's faith in an 'open universe' of myriad artistic possibilities; as reflected in this multi-layered artwork which I suspect Jasper Johns would appreciate.

In a way it also confirms Marcel Duchamp's apparently subversive supposition that an artwork only has ultimate meaning from what the spectator who observes it actually *thinks* of it. It takes two to tango in Duchamp's eyes and just does not rely on the artist's reasoning to provide art with its cultural/political/social/spiritual/metaphysical relevance.

I admire Giorgione and keep him and his art 'in mind'.

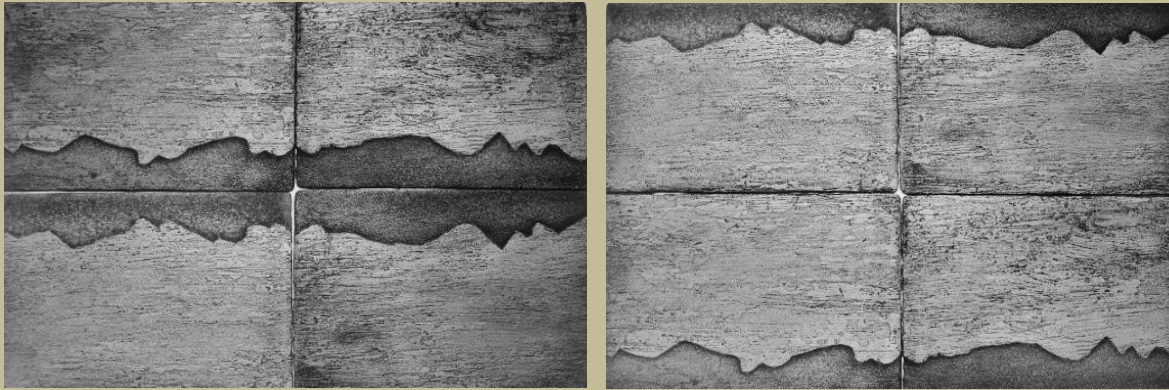
Thus, it has to be said that presently considering issues of human perception by using landscape (although leading to abstraction) as a starting point I am probably adopting a romanticized approach to reality in the sense I express my subjective *feeling* of nature's relevance to me and in a way allegorizing my artistic response through the titles I have chosen. A scientist wants to prove a theory to make it fact. An artist explores and presents ideas to maybe also find what is not so much factual to satisfy the human mind but rather what is revelatory to ultimately enthrall the human spirit. A scientist may wish to do that too but from my dim understanding the onus is still more on 'objective facts' rather than 'subjective ideas' (if such a binary distinction to all 'human exploration' of the world and universe really needs to be made). Quantum physics with its many multidimensional 'physical paradoxes' should never trouble a romantic. (I assume there are also a few 'scientific romantics' as I wish to also make the important and necessary point that any distinction between science and art as well as to all other 'divisions' of human knowledge, insight and endeavour are ultimately false – we are 'whole beings' with 'whole minds' simply expressing different 'partitions' at differing points of our whole lives).

Thus, I must admit I artistically probe into reality somewhat 'blindly' not wanting at first to trust not so much the analytical realm of human thought but rather initially, with a sublime conscious emphasis, on human *instinct*. To respond, rather than to dictate...I am 'simple' in my initial philosophical approach in that at the end of the day I fall back in my thinking to such popularized suppositions such as the eyes are the 'windows of the soul' or the 'doors of perception' as espoused by William Blake.

The two sets of intaglio 'four quadrants' are only an *attempt* to further laterally open us to ways of 'new vision' in which the images maybe perceived by the spectator in a way not at all envisaged by the artist.

Yet, what is hoped – to continue the reference to William Blake is a mindful expansion of the 'Human Imagination' which will allow the human spirit to expressively breathe a little more easier; as I agree with William Blake that 'Human Rationalism' can suffocate the human soul so with that in mind it always seem beneficial to further loosen those cold chains of chilling Aristotelian binary logic that when are too tight seem to limit rather than strengthen the multi-dimensional aspects of human possibility which I dearly desire. (Although, to give Aristotle his due it was he who said: "change in all things is sweet.").

After all is said and done, one is never really wholly 'neutral', such is life and art. For *all* is subject to *growth* (or inversely to decay) and thus subject to *change* and the paradox is that although we may seek to understand what seem to be universal constants in the Universe at the same time nothing seems to stay the same - although a 'single truth' can exist - it is also a matter of trying to perceive the inherent pulsating 'truth/s' that possibly resonate along a 'thin line' where the indefinable matrix between an ever transformative, undulating mortality dynamically connects (and which can also be infused) with a dynamic ever stable (but never stale or fossilizing) mysterious, immeasurable eternity.



The four zinc etching plates formatted in both combinations. The plates are all each 6" X 4"



The two copper plates used for '...this god, the river & this river, the cosmos.' The plates are each 6" X 4".

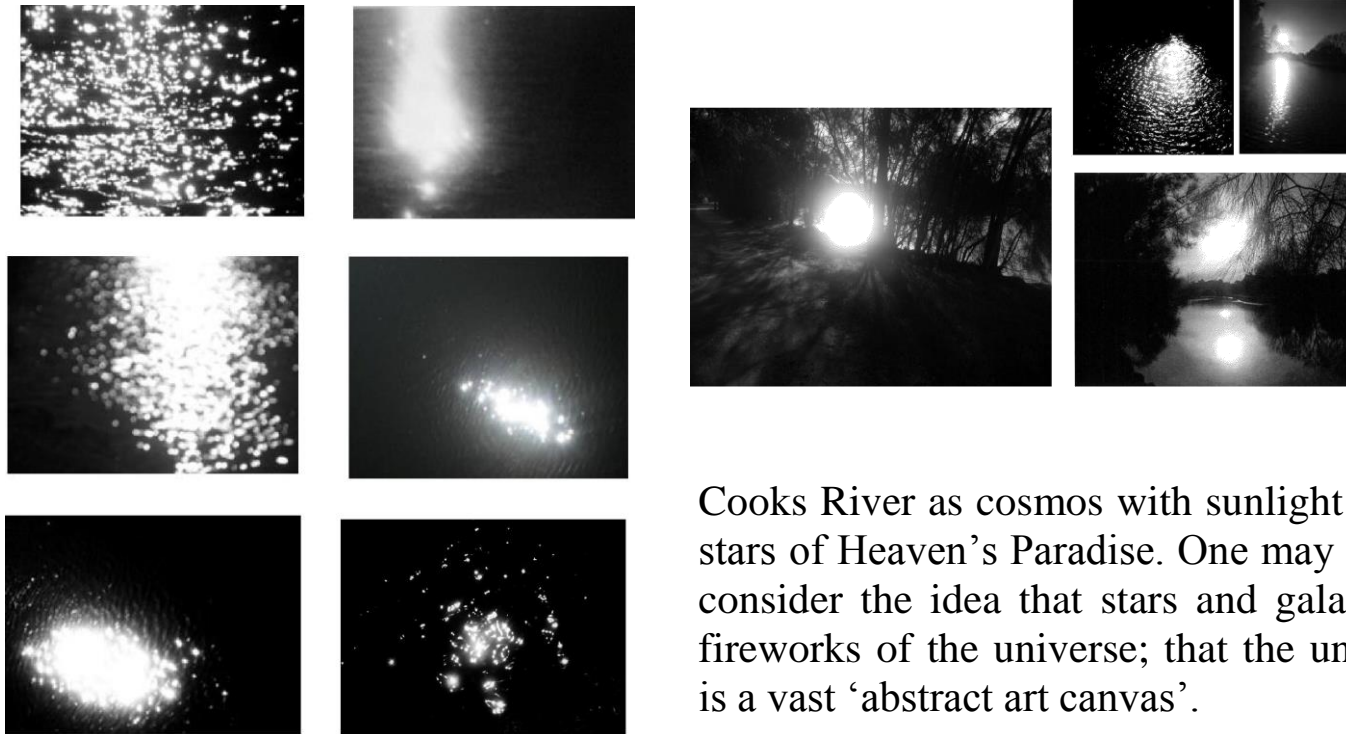
Notes.

For the above text I provide the following references; which, while it is not exhaustive, I have attempted to make acknowledgements whenever possible; but, if it is an issue, I apologize for not being more precise.

1. *'Four Quartets'* by T.S. Eliot. Faber and Faber. *Wikipedia* was useful for providing some general information on T.S. Eliot's Four Quartets along with more particular notes under the heading of each quartet title. Another source of information on the internet was *Spark Notes*. I wish to acknowledge that I have 'woven' some ideas from these websites into my musings.
2. I presume I obtained the Heraclitus quote from the internet but as for Marcus Aurelius please consider *'Meditations'*. Translated by Maxwell Staniforth. Penguin Books. 1964 edition.
3. *'Figuring Jasper Johns'* by Fred Orton. Harvard University Press. 1994. Other books worth considering on Jasper Johns include *Jasper Johns* by Michael Crichton. Harry N.Abrams. Inc. 1977 & *JASPER JOHNS/IN PRESS. The Crosshatch Works and the Logic of Print* by Jennifer L. Roberts. Hatze Cantz. Harvard Art Museums. Jasper Johns. Prints 1970-1977 by Richard S. Field. Wesleyan University, Middletown, Connecticut. 1978. I must also mention that I admire the rough hewn effect of the encaustic quality in Jasper Johns's paintings.
4. *'How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art. Abstract Expressionism, Freedom, and the Cold War.'* Serge Guilbaut. Translated by Arthur Goldhammer. University of Chicago Press. 1983.
5. Information on cuneiforms was actually gleaned from a second hand book for primary/lower high school students titled *Investigate World History*. Paragon. 1999.
6. The reference to Chinese landscape was from *Symbols of Eternity. The Art of Landscape Painting in China*. Michael Sullivan. Clarendon Press. Oxford. 1979. As for Giorgione's *Tempest* unfortunately all I can say is that I had a cursory look at some internet articles/videos after doing a web search on this painting and its artist. As for the likes of Marcel Duchamp, Jackson Pollock and cursory observations of other artists/art movements etcetera several generalist/specific art books/biographies were referred too from my personal library.
7. However, I should make specific mention of the well-known early twentieth century works *Concerning the Spiritual in Art* by Wassily Kandinsky & *The Blue Reiter Almanac* edited by Wassily Kandinsky & Franz Marc (Both 1912. Munich. Although it should be added that *Concerning the Spiritual in Art* was printed in December 1911 although dated 1912). When I mention Kandinsky's ideas I more or less paraphrase him.
8. One other book I also specifically note is *ETCHINGS by Fred Williams*. Introduction: John Brack. Catalogue: James Mollison. Published: Rudy Komon Gallery. Jersey Rd. Woollahra. Sydney. 1968. Flicking through it just now I saw *Plate 51* which is a quartet of grainy textured etchings titled *'Landscape Quartette.'* I wonder if this grouping of four small rectangle etchings had some subliminal influence on me. His long thin Murray River panel etchings are also worth a look and can be found in *Fred Williams An Australian Vision* by Irena Zdanowicz & Stephen Coppel. The British Museum Press 2009.

COOKS RIVER

The Light of God



Cooks River as cosmos with sunlight reflected as stars of Heaven's Paradise. One may also wish to consider the idea that stars and galaxies are the fireworks of the universe; that the universe itself is a vast 'abstract art canvas'.



When I go for a walk by the river it is interesting to see how the sunlight takes on a variety of hues at different times of the day. Its strength or softness seems to have a physical effect on the trees along the riverbank in the way they sometimes look very sharply defined and glisten with a golden hue while on other days the vegetation appears soft and mellow. I am also fascinated with how the water reflects the sunlight on the tree trunks making the solar light dance about in accordance with the river current. It is all very spiritual to me and each day the light is different to make one consider how by the nth degree every moment of the eternity that abounds is essentially the same but also on a miniscule level is very different. Life is unique and the ‘light of God’ ceaselessly reflects such

The River of Heraclitus (*called Reality*).

Our perception of reality is reflected in our art which in turn reinforces our accepted perception. Thus as we continue to represent nature in a certain way then that perception is considered to be true. What is subjective becomes accepted as objective. Thus artistic conventions and traditions ‘cultivate’ what is ‘seen’ as ‘truth’. It could be assumed that

what goes on in my mind re: the conceptual labels that I hold to be valid, significant or important has a direct effect on my visual perception of the world. I walk along the river and can appreciate the elements of for what they are: vegetation, water, grass, sun and so forth; relying on my own physical senses to have some sort of emotional response re: 'enjoying a walk by the river on a sunny day' or I may involve my intellect (or rather my imagination) to perceive my walk in a different way so as to place what I see in a mythological context e.. g I may mindfully make reference to the river as a waterway of an ancient underworld and so forth. I engage my mind to transform within me within it what I see with my eyes. I see the sun and although I know it is a stellar gaseous furnace I may also choose to see it as an instrument of the Christian God to provide life to this world and to reflect a Divine Glory; a rather internal spiritual response in the context of the 21st Century but in the 14th Century this may have been a more common societal vision of the Sun. I may see some validity in this notion and choose to adopt it for my own personal enlightenment although I still also strongly accept the scientist's interpretation of what the Sun really is: a ball of flaming gas. Yet, a theological interpretation aids my mind to 'see' that there are different social, cultural and individual ways by which I can mentally view the world around me. Thus I may choose to see the Sun as the 'light of God' and also adopt the persona of the pilgrim Dante so as to then go on and view my surroundings as if I was on his excursion through the Divine Comedy. Philosophically I may also agree with Heraclitus who said:

'The sun is new everyday.'

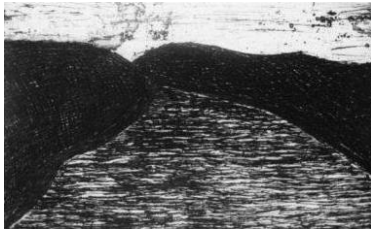
Also as I walk along the river and appreciate the warmth of the Sun on my body I can also consider Heraclitus's popularised remark which is:

'You could not step twice into the same river; for other waters are ever flowing on to you.'

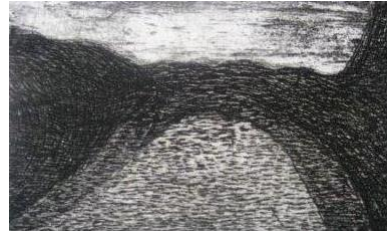
The river looks the same every day but every day the particular body of water of what it *is* is actually different. Thus the truth before me is of a waterway that is nominally a stable thing but I may also see it as a feature of the natural world that has an ever changing contour as well as changing elements. Geography teaches us that the river is in the process of change but in my lifetime the change will be so slight that I can live with the 'absolute idea' that the contours of the river will remain static. Nevertheless, each day is new and the light – or even lack thereof – on the river makes it eternally 'new.' The basic philosophical precept of Heraclitus that everything changes and nothing stays still helps me to understand the world around me especially when that change does not seem very obvious; this 'truth' seems to belie the basis of his Logos which deals with the basic ever transforming structure of the whole universe:

'Everything flows, nothing stands still.'

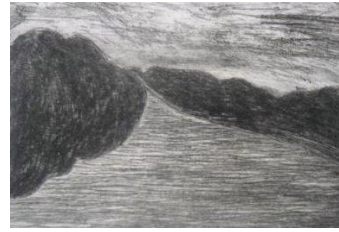
My acceptance of this remark affects the way I *see*, even though what I may see makes me realise that this 'flow' is invisible on a surface level. Yet, I also accept that what appears solid is actually on a microscopic level a buzzing, fluctuating mass of trillions of atoms which according to quantum theory may even be flowing into other micro-dimensions. In much the same way a human being experiences different moods, feelings and emotional states which all affect the essential personality of that human being; although physically staying the same. Nature also displays to us on a daily basis a wide range of 'presentations' – showing itself to us as being peaceful through to being violent. Nature can 'reflect us' in much the same way we see ourselves age over time – for we 'erode' imperceptibly like nature. Nature can be a metaphor of us and through such a conscious identification of nature with ourselves we see another life enhancing value in choosing to view, study and portray it. (An artist as 'shaman' can perhaps culturally influence others in the 'way of seeing' – to coin a phrase by John Berger - the world around them and over time perhaps interact in a different way to it – hopefully positively). Nature can be one of the entry points into our own minds or even into our souls. Though we accept norms or evidence as truth we should be flexible enough to realise that truth can be 'malleable' as we ourselves and nature are also changeable. After all, the 'river of Heraclitus' tells us that - despite appearances - reality doesn't stay the same. We exist; nature exists but at different times we may exist differently.



Hades



Beulah



Paradise

A 'Divine Comedy' triptych of Cooks River. Beulah is in reference to a tranquil nocturnal world as devised by William Blake which I pass off here as an idea of purgatory; like sleep can be for us between night and day.



sketches

humanity & nature: some general comments from the renaissance to the present

Although humanity has always shown a ruthless willingness to control and exploit Nature one could put forward the proposition that for thousands of years there was a sense that Nature always ultimately had the ‘upper hand’; especially in theocratic agricultural societies in which the gods - or God in the case of Medieval Christian Europe – would express blessings or judgements through Nature e.g. drought breaking rain as a thankful sign of divine appeasement; a devastating earthquake as a violent manifestation of divine displeasure. Nature had to be begrudgingly respected, for it recognized Nature provided all sustenance for human life as one worked daily with the very soil to produce food and acquired water from a well or river. However – to restrict my remarks to Europe - in the High Middle Ages, with an ever increasing population, there was an increased need to clear land for mass agricultural production, further urban settlement (which one can imagine led to an escalating ‘political rezoning’ between the endlessly competing and conflicting tribal ‘powers-that-be’. One could also argue a theocratic shift occurred whereby the age-old notion of ‘plenitude’ as a sign of God’s favour was further accentuated by a belief that God would bless those who ‘redesigned’ His Creation to gain maximum benefit from it. Humanity would subordinate Nature in ‘God’s name’ rather than wait for Nature to ‘reveal’ God’s will to humanity. The Church as all powerful as all seeing is reflected within the chasm of each Medieval cathedral which encompasses those inside it from all sides just as nature can also surround an individual; we are within nature, not apart from it and nature even enters into human consciousness just as the natural light enters into the vast space of a medieval religious interior through its large stained glass windows: the lingering visible ‘light of God’ eventually shining into the mind of every pilgrim. God and nature as one. Planted in the village and often beside the castle – the bastion of political power – a medieval cathedral rises ‘naturally’ up from the ground and with its many spires and buttresses organically appears as a ‘holy mount’; to buttress a contradictory belief that humanity has a respectful, harmonious relationship with God’s Creation - while at the same time defacing it for more earthly ends. Incidentally, the pilgrim realises he or she lives within a spiritual maze which is this natural world and so must rely on the Church’s guidance to lead him or her to salvation; as so famously typified by the labyrinth pattern on the floor of Chartres Cathedral. The medieval mind was terrified at being caught in the ‘wheel of fate’ (symbolized on the outside of the church) while on the quest to be enveloped within the bosom of the ‘eternal rose’ (inside the church). The

Renaissance introduced the visual ploy known as perspective: which led the human eye from an exterior position to a single point in a painted panorama that mainly involved an architectural space - such as a plaza or building - so as to fully utilize this new method of creating three dimensional space. As a consequence there developed a sense of 'separateness' between viewer as an 'outside observer' of the subject matter depicted which often included landscapes as 'background fill-ins' to many secular portraits - as humanity itself became the focus of Renaissance thinking rather than the environment in which humanity dwelled. (Official art often serves a cultural propaganda role and the Renaissance commissioned-portrait certainly helped to reinforce the wealthy, noble status of the merchant class sitter and thus in a subtle way ultimately undermine religious authority; rather ironic considering how masterful the Church has always used culture to reinforce its eminent social position; also with the historical hindsight of several hundred years the incorporation of classical architecture in Renaissance religious scenes such as the birth of Christ or of the Crucifixion could now be perceived as a sort of 'ideological Trojan Horse' displacing Church authority). As to Church design the square and circle became predominant features as a Classical approach became prevalent. One could argue that Nature was kept outside as the pilgrim now found one's self walking into a Neo-Platonic perspectival 'heavenly space' based on mental abstract 'perfect forms' mathematically devised from the human intellect rather than being directly inspired from the Creation. With the rebirth of many of the tenets of Europe's classical past Humanist scholars would proclaim that humanity itself was the 'central keystone' in the 'architecture' of the whole Creation. Consider Leonardo da Vinci's famed Vitruvian Man which took on board the Ancient Greek ideal of 'man as the measure of all things' - everything in nature including the cosmos itself scaled to the proportions of a human being. Renaissance humanity at the foreground of the Creation with Nature at the very best - as many Renaissance portraits imply - marginalized to the background. Adam is no longer a gardener in the service of God but 'landed gentry' mastering a domesticated Eden as if equal to God. (Gainsborough's much later Mr and Mrs Andrews immediately springs to mind; it is ironic this painting is considered such an iconic painting of 'the property class' when one notes Gainsborough's preference for an unfettered landscape painting over portraiture). In the latter half of the nineteenth century Cezanne would 'restore' nature as a conduit through which 'truth' and 'reality' could be worthily revealed by an artistic reductionism which would display oranges, buildings, mountains and human beings as 'structures' internally based on spheres, cubes, pyramids, cylinders etcetera: nature 'verified' by human geometry). Humanism was certainly a positive force for social change freeing people from an enslaving, persecuting religious dogma (to actually encourage true religious freedom); yet with the industrialization and secularization of Europe a total disconnect from Nature was achieved:

humanity revelled in its over-arching ability to fully exploit the whole Earth. John Ruskin in the nineteenth century – looking back to a pre-Renaissance past and who inspired the Pre-Raphaelites - urged that humanity culturally reconnect with Nature but modernism's belief in 'human progress' has remained too strong. Yet the divorce between nature and humanity which occurred when we placed ourselves in the center of the Universe needs to be reconciled. Today Nature ominously shows her ultimate relevance through climate change. Humanism is to be credited for creating a liberating intellectual environment that aided in bringing about scientific, technological, architectural, medical, educational, social and democratic advancements which – despite an ongoing barbarism that ceaselessly inflicts humanity – have vastly improved the quality of life for the majority of individuals living in the West. However, it can also be stated that by the end of the twentieth century humanity is being forced to seriously reconsider its fraught relationship with Nature as the planet signals that humanity's Herculean exploitation of it has to be abruptly scaled down due to the real threat of global warming. The carbon economy that has generated much of the wealth enjoyed in the West – which has been able to pay for humanity's advances – has come at the expense not only of many non-Western populations placed into colonial servitude by many a Great Power but also at the cost of the natural environment in which a vast portion of the Earth has been quarried, de-forested and over-urbanised. The planet is simply desiring that human achievement and ecological sustainability be equally balanced. Despite being scientifically informed by Galileo, Copernicus, Newton, Darwin, Einstein and many others that the human race is not actually at the centre of the universe – but on the mere periphery of a galaxy amongst billions of others - and that it evolved on this Earth as a process of Nature and perhaps as a random accident of it – the modernist human intellect still needs to be budged from a mindset that it can no longer overlord the Earth as if the 'good times' will never end: history shows us how very often utopian aspirations have led to many hells. Yet this time the so called human paradise that is modern civilization will literally erode away at the onset of an ecological 'dark age' that may last for many generations. We will only have ourselves to blame. In regards to the Australian context we should be very grateful to the Aboriginal Land Rights movement which has instilled into the national consciousness that lands other than those listed as national parks should also be left alone. In an age of ravaging economic rationalism the original custodians of this continent lead us to pause and think about something as 'ephemeral' as the vital ecological need to uphold the ongoing spiritual link between nature and humanity. The national park conservation movement started in the U.S. in the nineteenth century and was fermented culturally by artists as well as by writers like Henry David Thoreau and Ralph Waldo Emerson. Emerson was a Transcendalist - being inspired by German Romanticism, which in a repost to the rationalism of the Enlightenment encouraged a

mystical reverence of Nature (what also comes to my mind from earlier art periods is the enigmatic landscape *The Tempest* by the High Renaissance Venetian artist Giorgione and the evocative pastoral works of the French landscape painter Claude Lorraine. One also thinks of Turner's swirling skies such as in *'Storm at Sea'*. In 1816 the Examiner William Hazlitt wrote of Turner's work: "They are pictures of the elements of air, earth and water. The artist delights to go back to the first chaos of the world." Reuben Wheeler remarks in his book *Man, Nature and Art* that Turner's *'Snow Storm – Steamboat off a Harbour's Mouth'* that he captures some of the 'cosmic energy' of nature so as... '...to experience something of the power and energy of the cosmos itself.' It may be of interest to know that the volcanic explosion in 1815 on the Indonesian island of Sumbawa - which killed 12,000 people and led to the starvation of another 44,000 people who died in the ensuing famine - inspired Turner's formless nirvana worlds; for the atmospheric conditions in the northern hemisphere were very much changed; it said that in 1816 there was no summer; it impresses me how in Turner's orange-yellow skies both time and space have seemed to dissolve. As for the United States - which had the world's first national park at Yellowstone - there is Ansel Adams the American naturalist photographer who inspired his compatriots to appreciate the awesome beauty of their country through his magnificent work. In Australia – which had the world's second national park - Royal National Park neighbouring Sydney - the photographic images of the Tasmanian wilderness by Olegas Truchanas have also played a valuable conservation role in inspiring environmental activism. Bob Brown leader of the Greens certainly holds him in high esteem). It was certainly a progressive idea - well ahead of its time - that natural wildernesses deserved to be secured in their pristine condition and not be valued for purely utilitarian and economic reasons. Labelling land as a national park as well as agitating that regions like Kakadu and the Franklin River be put on the World Heritage List do valuably contribute to saving such wildernesses; the paradox being that in regards to Australia all 'Crown Land' outside the protected borders still faces the danger of being seen as 'unworthy' of salvation due to it not being a part of the 'elect' – to use a theological expression. In regards to Australia the Aboriginal Land Movement has - in essence – also shown how most of this continent's land mass has to be perceived beyond its mere resource value. After all, one has to be reminded of the appalling fact of how up to ninety per cent of rainforest has already been cut down since the establishment of the First Settlement in 1788. It is pitifully ironic that mining multinationals will have large canvases of the Aboriginal dreamtime decorating their boardrooms while at the same time digging up the very landscape reverentially portrayed in these indigenous paintings. Although Aboriginals have also used sacred lands appropriated back to them for an economic return – the pros and cons of which can be argued ad infinitum – it has also given back to them in the 'white fella's way'

the chance for a self-sustained self-determination. Aboriginal contemporary art with its conceptual appreciation mainly on the 'mythical quality' of the land is a mature aspect that should be taken up by non-indigenous Australians. It is in this overall sociohistorical context in which I 'position' my own prints which dwell on the natural realm; thus my conscious decision to take into account how Aboriginal artists have portrayed the Australian landscape. I wish to qualify this remark by sincerely stating not to steal from them – in the manner that the Chiapas Indians of southern Mexico feared that their very souls would be stolen when photographed - but to hopefully learn in the manner of recognizing that a forty thousand year old 'cultural stamp' on this continent must not be conveniently ignored by those who are only here in this land due to its relatively recent alien conquest. In regards to a broader artistic context I am intrigued to discover while doing some rudimentary research for this rather generalized commentary to find myself identifying in the Western tradition with aspects of both the Pre-Raphaelites and the Romantics as well as to the 'cosmic Turner'; with that said I am entranced by Ian Fairweather's painterly natural rhythms influenced by Chinese calligraphy which in turn fascinates me; I am also very much attracted to the depiction of nature by such twentieth century greats as Georgia O'Keefe, and Fred Williams as well as to a rhythmic abstracted /ethnographic 'universal spirituality' in Kandinsky. Jackson Pollock's abstractions identifying a 'universal rhythm' also intrigue me. One should also express appreciation to the artistic legacy of the Heidelberg School - a group of Australian Impressionists who in the nineteenth century took the audacious step to depict the Australian environment true to its own unique character – capturing for instance the bright Australian light - rather than rendering it in the formalist painterly tradition of the European northern hemisphere. All in all it should be lastly stated that in the inevitable ongoing process of humanity constantly redefining its relationship with nature – not only as envisaged on earth but also in regards to the whole universe - our universal 'cultural dialogue' can play a vital role.

Dark Matter Nebula & Jasper Johns



'Dark Matter Nebula.'

6" X 4". sepia. aquatint. sugarlift. zinc plate

The art of Jasper Johns is noted for challenging the viewer's perception of reality such as diffusing the reality between 'high art' and the 'everyday object' which echoes the Duchampian concept of the readymade; yet what interests me more so about the art of this intriguing American artist is a far deeper philosophical questioning of trusting our physical senses to perceive what is physically 'actual' or real through his disorienting/decontextualizing use of everyday subject matter to make the eye 'work' at trying to 'realize' what exactly the eye is looking at as there is an ambiguity to his paintings and prints which leads the viewer to uncomfortably realize all is not what it seems; his art echoes Magritte (who Jasper Johns admires) to some extent but I feel there is a clarity to Magritte's visual manipulations which can be eventually sorted but not so readily with Jasper Johns. Yet, what Jasper Johns aims for is to extend the viewer's mind beyond what is 'real' - that is: the usual illusionary trickery of perspective which is the standard bearer of much that is considered as normal art practice since the time of the Renaissance.

However, perspective is actually a 'mirage on the eyes' making the viewer believe in a three dimensional representative space which does not really exist; which in reality is actually impossible to exist on the two dimensional 'window' plane of the canvas. Modern physics with, for example, the formulation of quantum physics as intimated by Max Planks, comes into play for we now know that what appears stable to us in the physical world is merely different combinations of buzzing particles that create in contradictory ways different aspects of matter from gas plumes to liquids to so called 'solid' steel. Perspective merely deceives the eye to convince the brain that what is being viewed is as real as the 'real world.' Yet neither the scene painted nor the actual scene that is being copied by the artist can be viewed as being what they truly are. Our five senses more or less convince us that what is around us is real in much the same way that Renaissance perspective convinces us what we see on the picture plane is real; yet we are learning that our five senses are merely filtering to us a 'reality' that our minds can cope with as other aspects of reality such as the multi-dimensional reality of a microscopic quantum universe - which helps to create what we see - is held back from our daily conscious perception of everyday matter. Perhaps, just as well, for it is a micro-universe difficult for us to conceptually comprehend. However, if human consciousness is to reach full fruition - so as to reach a fuller humanness - what Jasper Johns confronts our senses with in his art - that disrupts our present conditioned way of looking at the world - is to be very welcomed.

The unconscious could be equated with the nether world of quantum physics while the 'high conscious' Neo-Platonic realm of Ideal Forms advocated from the time of Aristotle all the way up to the time of Plotinus in the early foundation centuries of Christianity is more akin to the Theory of Relativity. It seems even that for the last few hundred years the matter of the Universe has been seen as a uniform substance as it has become accepted theory that the same star particles that form the Earth and the living things on it – including human beings – and that have formed (and continue to form) the furthest celestial fires from us are essentially the same; it is in the process of cooling and local cosmic variations that different molecular structures form different materials as varied as living cells to rock to blood to water. The universe as uniform equates to a universe that is a stable entity yet we know quantum theory defies that 'secure' evaluation and there is much effort these days to resolve what is in state of pre- ordained uniformity with what is in constant inconsistent

unpredictable flux. Thus, one may put forward the artistic challenge that in much the same way science is seeking an overall unified theory of everything connecting quantum theory with relative theory art can delve towards a unity between the perceived unified 3-D illusionism of western linear perspective and the metaphysical conceptual explorations into an art quantum 'fourth dimension' that Marcel Duchamp pursued and which the likes of Jasper Johns considers.

Michael Cricton in his book 'JASPER JOHNS' states how Cezanne noted that for painter the eye and the brain had to work together with the eye revealing what nature beholds while the brain could logically organize every visual sensation so as enable the painter to personally express his or her response to nature; what Michael Cricton asserts from Cezanne's opinion is that in art history although the eye and brain are two poles which complement each other the twentieth century was a time when the brain had the upper hand so to speak over the eye. Certainly, a case in point is Marcel Duchamp's conceptual art which is aimed at stimulating the mind rather than further exciting the eyes with 'retinal art'. Visually speaking however it is to be noted that the emergence of Cubism with its emphasis of a multi- perspective fragmented analysis of its subject matter led to a breakdown of the tradition of linear perspective in European art. The mind involves deeper engagement and the viewer is no longer passive and must become more active in comprehending what is before him or her or as Duchamp had surmised it is ultimately the spectator which provides supreme meaning to a work of art and correspondingly it is us – as artist, as medical practitioner, as physicist, as astronomer, as musician, as historian, as ruler, as ordinary person-on-the-street and so forth that ultimately provides both social and empirical meaning to the world; to the universe in which we live. It could be said that 'mind art' one is no longer simply 'presented' with a 'window' through which to view a particular reality but one is invited to become involved in shaping what reality may actually be - allowing art to become a catalyst for the mind to consider new conceptual possibilities rather than displaying - or reinforcing - present perceptions. A more interactive dialogue may also be opened up between creator and spectator. All of us may eventually become increasingly aware of the manner in which we give meaning to our existence and to which we can mis/trust that our meaning is 'true' or 'real' or 'absolute' or 'social' or relative' or 'scientific' or 'objective' or 'subjective' or 'binary' or 'un/changing' and so forth...thus our organic brain by way of that ephemeral

mystery 'within it' – the mind – can lead to heightened thought processes that allow the synapses – those cerebral connectors – to evolve once more to see with 'new vision'.

In the new age of cyberspace it seems the conceptual experimentations of forward thinking artists such as Marcel Duchamp and Jasper Johns can lead to greater human in/sight especially when on a cultural and psychological level there are may come a redefinition of time – a keystone of our everyday perception of reality – in the same way that Einstein exposed that time itself is relative to the speed of an object in relation to mass and gravity diminishing its former Newtonian absolute quality. As the darkest recesses of the human mind links up more consciously with its ever awakened consciousness to arrive at a higher perception of 'quantum time' which may become as familiar to us as our present understanding of time in relation to the theory of relativity. Furthermore, there are also the social conditions of present day reality that art can also explore and which also play a major role in our definition and redefinition of reality *per se*. (After all, art has always played the dual role of both serving a propaganda purpose for the status quo as well as to initiate an ideological breakdown of the prevailing beliefs of the day to herald in a new status quo that in turn will need to be challenged by new ideas and so on and so on...such is the general cyclic nature of much human activity continually oscillating between tradition and innovation).

It is time to remark on the etching *Dark Matter Nebula* which is a deliberately very simple work that involves a grainy textured area surrounding a 'pitch black' shape whose outline originates from the 'shell nebula' of the etching with this title. Yet what appears as a straight forward negative space contains 'dark matter' which although invisible to the 'naked eye' may also be viewed as solid and yet what one may really be seeing (through a celestial 'window') is the immeasurable dark space of the universe; the grainy rock like texture surrounding it could be seen as the uncountable mass of billions of stars that leads to an impenetrable 'solid look' but is truly an ephemeral gaseous cosmic expanse. In other words one may view this image two ways much like the well known hour glass outline that can also be viewed as the profiles of two human faces. (Truth or deception: which is it or is it both at the same time undermining the Aristotlian binary view of reality and matter so prevelant in the West's thought processes). What is considered as accepted reality can often be a case of one's point of view for it was commonly though the Sun revolved around the Earth as a material

‘reflection’ of a theological idea that redemptive ‘Man’ (as women were excluded, as Eve who was conveniently *first* deceived by Satan was ‘temptress’ leading to Adam’s sinful downfall) as God’s ultimate representative was at the centre of the universe until it was scientifically ‘seen’ that it was rather the Earth that revolved around the sun. It is not how we *actually* see the world but rely on an Enlightenment understanding of a cosmic reality that it is us who are actually moving and not the Sun. (We are still but we are moving). Thus this etching can be viewed conceptually two ways as a representation of a conceptual appreciation of the dynamism of human perception which still needs to be very much explored as intimated by Jasper Johns as well as by – perhaps the one truly great ‘art visionary’ of the twentieth century – Marcel Duchamp.

In conclusión Dark Matter Nebula along with Ghost Nebula can be twinned together as a diptych both looking at the underlying theme of human/physical perception and reality.



Dark Matter Nebula and the etching which follows *Ghost Nebula* which can be viewed together as a diptych as both look at the underlying theme of human/physical perception and reality.



'Ghost Nebula.'

6" X 4". B&W. aquatint. sugarlift. zinc plate.

Something that we can see that is no longer there...astronomers tell us that when we look at the stars some of those that we see no longer exist. Thus one way of looking at this etching is to state that we are viewing is light released from such now extinguished fiery furnaces. It is simply the case that the light waves have taken uncountable years to reach Earth. What we are seeing with our eyes are 'light ghosts' and raise questions about the natural laws of the Universe affecting our physical perception of it. Light photons that are real registering an object that is no longer in physical present.



Caves Beach. NSW. South Coast. (A rock womb).



From this etching emerged the two latter works Dark Matter Nebula & Ghost Nebula.

‘Shell Nebula.’ Gordons Bay.

9.5 ” X 7”. B&W. aquatint. sugarlift. zinc plate.

A nebula is gaseous and results after the death of a galaxy. However, I envisage it as a hard shell and this concept results from my understanding that Georgia O’Keefe saw shells as typifying eternity due to their long lasting hardness. (In turn flowers were seen by her as expressing the fragility and mortality of life seeing their very beauty was transient). A nebula will pass away but compared to the miniscule life span of an individual – or even of the whole human race – this glowing cosmic cloud exists for an eternity. Thus the duality of the thought of something ephemeral as hard and stable resides comfortably in my mind without any semblance of inward conflict with this metaphysical contradiction: ‘reality’ is sometimes more applicably suited to exist within the mental realm. I think I had worked with some original contours on the plate but it is obvious that this is a much more finished, less randomly abstract work but I include it in this series as it was worked at while doing the other etchings.



sepia version

A QUESTION ASKED BY SUZI GABLIK IN 1984: *HAS MODERNISM FAILED?*

Having very recently, in late 2015, re-visited this book - acquired so many years ago with its ideas now well submerged in one's subconscious - one was struck by how much of what it says is still very relevant; (especially in regards to remarks made about Western modern art & culture in the appraisal of Marcel Duchamp). The following cursory observations (as there could have been so more) are the 'resurfacing' of some individual thoughts that have once more come to the very fore of one's artistic consciousness:

Suzi Gablik starts her book with the thought that after a hundred years the art and culture of Western modernism was coming to an end emphasising her point by referencing a remark by the American critic Irving Howe who spoke of the 'decline of the new'. Art as it was presently known had come to a sort of 'end of history' whereby it was difficult to envisage some new innovation to add to the breakthrough 'isms' from Impressionism through to Abstract Expressionism and beyond. There would now only be a streamlined commercial regurgitation of what had come before be presented as 'new'. Thus one may perceive some contemporary art as fraudulent when the marketing claim is made the old is new.

In the modern education system Suzi Gablik points out that in the U.S there is as many art graduates being produced every five years as there were *people* in fifteenth century Florence. However, the rise in quantity of artists has not led to an equivalent rise in quality. Mediocrity abounds.

Flicking through Gablik's revelatory book one sights the heading of chapter four: BUREACRIZATION The Death of the Avant-Garde. Perusing this chapter one sees in one passage the observation that museums have become addicted to the corporate sponsorship dollar which - for the corporation - is a cultural image builder. It seems the 'managerial elite' is continually infiltrating the 'social order' and artists will skew their 'goals' so that they correspond with those with whoever administers the official culture so as to gain acceptance into the mass cultural spaces they control. The avant-garde artist who realises that in the wilderness no one can hear you scream may also seek admission into 'the Academy' so as to more effectively transmit revolutionary ideas to a wide audience and - so if the opportunity arises - may 'pragmatically' co-opt into a collusion with the system to only then discover that once digested by it the 'new idea' leads not to any revolution in cultural thinking but is simply worked over so as to become 'culturally empty' in order to promote a false veneer that the

system is 'progressive' in its cultural outlook when, in fact, cultural power still remains corporatized - meaning that any official culture continues to serve the corporate state which these days always places neoliberal economic imperatives ahead of 'societal cultural aesthetics'. An 'unofficial culture' which exists outside 'valid cultural spaces' is 'illegitimate' and not to be taken seriously until it too is potentially co-opted and seen as the 'new idea' to be cynically utilized for the organizational purposes of cultural administrators who make sure that they stay as the gatekeepers of real cultural power. If per chance there was to be a real 'cultural revolution' a profit must still be made from it.

The so called 'outcast artist' may continue to culturally resist and even find alternative cultural spaces in which to do so but with a raising of his or her profile the system may eventually 'reward' him or her so that such true 'avant-gardism' may dissolve or simply be consumed by the cultural apparatus of the state. After all, Judas did not signal his betrayal of Christ with any outward display of hostility - but with a kiss.

Suzi Gablik points out: 'Affluence is the great social tranquilizer.'

What is at stake is that there are not sufficient non-corporate independent cultural spaces viable for artists that truly allow for beneficial widespread transformations of cultural power to become possible; so as to further democratize human thinking so as to continually *democratize* democracies instead of corporatizing them; whereby it is feared there can only be an 'internalized self-censorship' so as to survive in a 'groupthink society' which has as its social lynchpin a 'corporate bureaucracy'. Individual intellectual nourishment provides one with the moral stamina to resist any totalitarian reflex but without an authentic avant-garde working as society's self-correcting conscious on both a philosophical, ideological and cultural level then one is cast adrift in a demoralized state of soulless lonely alienation; individual non-conformity which can hopefully lead to *en masse* revitalization will not flourish but die. One discerns from reading Suzi Gablik that in late capitalism all that matters is that objects are produced and sold to make a profit and any human activity outside this 'value' system is to be discounted; the artist is to be yet just another 'cog' in this dehumanizing economic 'mechanism'. Suzi Gablik references Max Weber who was deeply concerned that human beings would become such cogs who only aimed in life from moving from 'little jobs' to 'bigger ones':

"It is horrible to think that the world could one day be filled with nothing but those little cogs, little men clinging to little jobs and striving towards bigger ones – a state of affairs which is to be seen once more, as in the Egyptian records, playing an ever-increasing part in the spirit of our present administrative system, and especially of its offspring, the students. This passion for bureaucracy...is enough to drive one to despair. It is as if in politics...we were deliberately to become men who

need 'order' and nothing but order, become nervous and cowardly if for one moment this order wavers, and helpless if they are torn away from their total incorporation in it. That the world should know no men but these: it is such an evolution that we are already caught up, and the great question is, therefore, not how we can promote and hasten it, but what can we oppose to this machinery in order to keep a portion of mankind free from this parcelling-out of the soul, from this supreme mastery of the bureaucratic life."¹

[Max Weber (1864-1920)]may

To quarantine the human spirit from such 'establishment dehumanization' and to even overcome it was – in the modernist sense – the role of a self-sacrificing forward thinking avant-garde but when that is gone – what then? Worse still, when the only 'cultural question' that remains to be asked is: if one cannot make a profit from one's art – what then is its worth? To reinforce Weber Suzi Gablik invokes Herbert Marcuse who wrote *One Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advance Industrial Society* (1966) who states how a corporate totalitarianism is reached when individual aspirations are transfigured into 'bureaucratic conformism' that is offset by personal 'economic rewards'. Gablik also infers that the human cog takes on within his or herself the desires of the organisation as one's own needs which must be met for one's life to be satisfactory. Every object that is made and is then to be found and bought by the worker/consumer has its value in the profit that will productively be granted to the managers of Moloch. Art it seems can become just another consumer good and it is perhaps why so much 'pretty, clean' contemporary art would look to be a much better fit to be sold in an IKEA mega-store rather than in an art gallery. Otherwise the art that is produced and considered worthy is that which validates a consumer society and it is thus no small wonder that Andy Warhol who took upon himself to give an ironic twist to popular culture was a gifted commercial artist. The ultimate twentieth century 'ironist' is Marcel Duchamp who makes the following comment about his famed urinal: *"I threw the urinal into their faces as a challenge, and now they come and admire it as an art object for its aesthetic beauty."*

In the concluding chapter eight of her book - which is entitled *Has Modernism Failed?* – Gablik reiterates the point that while capitalism can produce affluence it cannot produce an accompanying human sense of community; while any oppositional modernist tendency lost its independence whilst succumbing to a 'mass-consumption ethic' whereby an artist's creative aesthetic autonomy can be disenfranchised when that artist allows him or herself to comply to the mere professional demands of an increasingly commercialized art world.

On the whole a spiritually valueless art is more easily produced in a secular world and Gablik states that for the West the twentieth century has been a wholly secular one. In today's art market notions such as 'morality' or 'ethics' as an artistic motivational force is not an issue to seriously consider. The New York art critic Clement Greenberg who championed the colour field painters had apparently pointed out that the sole purpose of art is to be 'aesthetically good'. Art as pure neutral void. Nothing. Devoid even of human spirit. Yet Gablik in chapter two: INDIVIDUALISM Art for Art's Sake, or Art for Society's Sake? she notes that the likes of Kandinsky and Malevich resorted to a transcendent spiritual art without objects as an 'unconscious protest' against the material age and the advent of totalitarianism. Malevich is quoted:

*'Art no longer cares to serve the state and religion. It no longer wishes to illustrate the history of manners; it wants to have nothing to do with the object as such, and believes that it can exist, in and for itself, without things.'*²

There is a spiritual impulse that looks inwardly into the human spirit to provide human meaning and even human freedom in a inhumane world of human cogs. An Abstract Expressionist such as Mark Rothko felt he was continuing a subversive spiritual role as outlined by Kandinsky and Malevich. Thus seemingly less apparent- than say the more apparent political art of George Grosz or Kathe Kollwitz - abstract art from Kandinsky to Rothko was still carrying out modernism's role as an opposing artistic force to a Kafkaesque technocrat world. Suzi Gablik mentions Robert Motherwell concluding that:

*"So long as modern society is dominated by the love of property the artist has no alternative to formalism. Until there is a radical revolution in the values of modern society, we may look for a highly formal art to continue...Modern artists have had to replace other social values with the strictly aesthetic."*³

Marxist art theorists may think disagree that modernism had to retreat to a purely aesthetic realm and could still play out a probing protest role what is worse that once an art without content was emptied of any perceived notion of human emotion or reflection and became purely formal – to be a 'pure commodity' – it had lost all together even its last tenuous link to any communicative social relevance except as to serve a monetary investment purpose. Take away the human spirit and you are only left with human alienation (which when this bleak psychological state is 'portrayed' in modern art does somewhat suit the atomized human stage of late capitalist society). Technique without philosophy is a dead art. Yet what Suzi Gablik hopes for at the very least in the modern secular world that some artists may still choose to be agents of 'moral transformation.' It is what Gablik states in chapter six: SECULARISM The Disenchantment of Art (Julian Schnabel Paints

a Portrait of God). Art today serves a mainly monetary function in order to obtain any 'human value' while in the past art always had a pre-ordained social or religious role that even if it was to only serve the elites was still a transmitter of ideas. (Yes, art can still communicate ideas today but if one wants to be the complete cynic it can be said it is not what interests the art market - as any 'ephemeral idea' perhaps doesn't sell as well as a material object; unless an idea can be used as a selling point to make an art object more appealing to a buyer). In essence art originally was a cultural tool for the human imagination to be expressed; its shamanistic role was to responsibly work for the good of the tribe or community with a connection to higher ethical values which in earlier times would relate to a spirit world; Suzi Gablik speaks of its 'moral ideal' which is what has given art its authority. Art must not work in a moral vacuum with a disinterest in the affairs of the world. In Australia contemporary Aboriginal art has much moral authority due to the social-political context in which it exists and when it deals with issues involving Aboriginal society's interaction with the dominant white culture.⁴ In modern times one artist who still had a shamanistic role was Joseph Beuys. A German artist who spoke of a 'social sculpture' with art not merely embodied in the creation of objects but embodying ideas which can help to actually re-shape society itself. As for Joseph Beuys himself there is the famous story that after being shot down over the Crimea he was kept alive by Tatar tribesmen who wrapped his body in fat and felt to keep him warm.

Regeneration.

Joseph Beuys developed an ecological interest and was profoundly concerned with the notion of transformation which has always been an interest of art. As for Beuys consider the following:

*"It is the transformation of substance that is my concern in art, rather than the traditional aesthetic understanding of beautiful appearances."*⁵

Suzi Gablik eloquently explains how the shaman is involved in balancing and providing a centre for the community and to restore equilibrium when harmony is lost being a conductor of forces being in touch with the cosmos and it can be through the shaman that society's relationship to 'higher forces' can be defined. Gablik argues that Beuys provides modern society and the art world a model through which human alienation can be worked through by the artist looking outside him or herself towards a 'new externality' tapping into moral and social forces that go beyond the present negative bureaucratic entanglements of modern society.

NOTES

1. quote can be found via the following link: <http://www.goodreads.com/quotes/828158-it-is-horrible-to-think-that-the-world-could-one> (One also thinks with neoliberalism the corporate state wishes to have us all ‘upgraded’ like cybermen to be the perfect working drones).
2. Page 21. Has Modernism Failed? by Suzi Gablik.
3. Page 22. Ibid.
4. The Annandale Galleries Sydney has been one notable gallery which has championed Aboriginal art over many years. <http://www.annandalegalleries.com.au/>
5. Page 125.

Suzi Gablik. HAS MODERNISM FAILED? Thames & Hudson. 1984.

Suzi Gablik’s book which was seen as a literary hand grenade thrown into the smug, cosy world of the contemporary art market was reprinted with an extra two chapters in the early 2000s. The following link is a review of this reprinted book:

<http://melaniemross.blogspot.com.au/2009/06/gabliks-book-has-modernism-failed.html>

Suzi Gablik also references Hannah Arendt’s concept of authority and the following essay by Hanah Arendt looks at the issue of authority titled: What is Authority? <http://la.utexas.edu/users/hcleaver/330T/350kPEEArendtWhatIsAuthorityTable.pdf>

One may also consider Hannah Arendt’s remark about the consumer society (in which the modern art market exists): ‘...*our whole economy has become a waste economy, in which things must be almost as quickly devoured and discarded as they have appeared in the world, if the process itself is not to come to a sudden catastrophic end. But if the ideal were already in existence and we were truly nothing but members of a consumers’ society, we would no longer live in a world at all but simply be driven by a process in whose ever-recurring cycles things appear and disappear, manifest themselves and vanish, never to last long enough to surround the life process in their midst...*’

- Hannah Arendt. The Human Condition, Second Edition. (See [goodreads.com](http://www.goodreads.com) and search for Hannah Arendt quotes).

The following link goes to an interesting power point link that will need to be downloaded – hopefully without too many technical issues as it provides a good brief summary & overview of Gablik’s arguments about modernism which have not all been touched upon in the above ‘essay’. There is the question of the paradox of freedom for instance whereby freedom needs rules to measure itself against for the existence of virtues. There is also the supposition by another art theorist Shiner that fine art came into existence in the 18th century with the rise of a new middle class and so it goes...

<https://t.co/nGwijSDMCs>

Interestingly, Suzi Gablik also talks about a law of history which Heraclitus termed *enantiodromia* which is when a principle when it reaches the zenith of its power it falls down to become its opposite. However, the last word goes to Suzi Gablik: “*For art to be relevant, artists must address the social and spiritual issues of our time.*”

Canadian totem pole. Sydney.



OPEN CULTURE Twitter screen shot. When one thinks of the modern bureaucratic nightmare one thinks of the masses of synchronized workers in Fritz Lang’s METROPOLIS. (1927).

'...we have made laws for our survival which restrict our freedom. We equate freedom with power. There are legal and moral codes which are stillborn. They do not rectify our selfishness, mistrust or envy. This hard system demands us to repress our positive feelings. We have been hammered and polished down to become unthinking but smooth working mechanical pieces entrapped into serving our cold, unfeeling machine. Our emotional needs have been tossed aside. The law does not serve us but we must serve the law. We should go the other way and aspire to our full living potential. Otherwise our automatic lives will only dehumanize us. We go one step lower and say a human life only has value if it helps our moving but dead machine. This is selfish. The system is uncaring. It will turn its back on you at any moment and you will miss out...the most crushing blow is to wake up one morning and discover that you are no longer needed... '

- From Darkness & Light. NN.



THE PRIVATISATION OF HEAVEN. A found warehouse door signs on Cockatoo Island (with added text underneath by the artist). Discovered during a visit to the Sydney Biennale taking advantage of when it was possible to travel for free on the ferry. It should be noted that it was very heartening to see artists boycott the most recent Sydney Biennale due to a dispute over sponsorship funding coming from a company which had contracts associated with off-shore detention. What was appalling was the public outcry against these artists. One such artist was Gabrielle de Vietri whose installation THE GARDEN OF BAD FLOWERS was presented for a while at Earlwood Farm which the artist went along to see and which consisted of flowers in many wooden garden beds and involved viewing the flowers and their names in association with a wider social and political context. If interested see link:

<http://earlwoodfarm.com/?s=garden+of+bad+flowers>

why the west values individualism

the more freedom people have the more opportunity they will have to BUY what they need to fulfil their desires



Some of The Garden of Bad Flowers & home-made backyard pizza oven. It was interesting to discover that marigold is associated with death and thus its use on the Day of the Dead.

A link to issue of artist Sydney Biennale boycott including original open letter:

<http://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/booksandarts/sydney-biennale-transfield-sponsorship/5272808>

It's important to note 'people seeking asylum' is becoming a preferable term for human beings desiring political refuge.

marcel duchamp and found objects and seventeenth century dutch art and dada and how the universe doesn't need us (but we certainly need the universe)

Marcel Duchamp's ready-mades are the found objects of everyday life through which any lost meaning of our lives can also be found.

Art is life. Life is art. It is said Marcel Duchamp led his life as if it was an artwork. Thus it shouldn't be a surprise that everyday domestic things once gravitating into the presence of Duchamp's original centrifugal mind would be transformed – literally by the stroke of his 'artistic autograph' on them – into celebrated art objects. A bottle rack; a shovel; a urinal; mass-produced artefacts of the modern industrial age not even made by human hands; unlike the oil painting – which is both unique and involving much intricate 'hands on' human skill - could be perceived as the 'flag bearer' of European 'high art'. Also, of course, signed by its producer. An oil painting is not randomly found by 'fate' or 'chance' but - by conscious 'human method' - is elegantly designed.

One era in European history in which the oil canvas's high art status gained enormous traction was during the so called Dutch Golden Age of painting at the time of seventeenth century Holland. An abundance of oil painting for a new burgeoning middle class corresponded at a time of heightened economic growth for this Protestant nation. A prosperity that was based not so much by being born into wealth but on one's individual ability to obtain it. An acquisition of material goods justified as 'God's blessing' and which conversely meant that those 'lowly' who were not 'blessed' (including those in 'uncivilized, heathen' regions of the world who Europeans were able to exploit) 'deserved' the social and legal disdain of their privileged peers. One could suggest there was a sort of 'Social Darwinian' approach to morality to rationalize how some had the right to be superior over many others. Obviously, Calvin's notion of the 'elect' – those who will go to heaven – had its advantages for those who considered themselves amongst a materially well-off elect while still very much here on earth.

Nevertheless, a modern-day visual reading of the domestic and tavern scenes of 17th century Dutch art can find it a source of encouragement that such subject matter dealt with the everyday lives of people. Such 'down-to-earth' paintings contrast sharply with the mythological/biblical paintings far more common in Catholic Europe which can be more readily perceived as propaganda narratives for the ruling elites.

Yet, one may wish to also consider the broad social context in which many of these everyday Dutch paintings were produced. Firstly, it is said there were many thousands of these paintings as the demand was great and it reminds one of today's world whereby nearly every member of our society has a photographic record of his or her world. It seems to be a basic universal emotional need for human beings to record their lives; from today's online albums to all the way back to painted hunting scenes on cave walls.

Individual need. Social need. Art can serve both purposes. For art – or rather the possession of it as well as even being the subject matter of it – can serve the social function of endearing an individual with status. For the rising wealthy middle classes traditional oil painting in 17th century Dutch society served the social function of providing pictorial representations of their self-made prosperity which could help to bolster, depict and identify with an ever heightened social status in a new material society.

There was also a dramatic rise of an open market which made the production of art more of a business enterprise than ever before. As to the art of the middle classes R.H. Wilenski comments in Dutch Painting:

Dutch popular art at the beginning of the seventeenth century was produced for and bought by the Dutch middle classes. After the Dutch Revolution all classes in Holland-except the lowest-became rich and grew steadily richer as the century advanced. In particular there arose large well-to-do middle classes who prospered in trade, commerce and speculation. The Dutch self-made man in these classes, if exceptionally rich and snobbish, bought the same pictures as the aristocrats and dilettanti the pictures, that is to say, which I have hitherto discussed. But the average self-made man was, of moderate means, and he was also an average Philistine who demanded pictures depicting a world with which he was himself familiar-a world in which he could move at ease and in which he himself and his familiar experience would appear of cardinal importance; and the Dutch portraits of Mijnheer, his wife, his house, his meadow and his dog were the response to this demand.

Also, it must be noted, the average Dutch bourgeois wanted his pictures to be cheap. The exceptionally rich merchant might indulge in the luxury of a painting by Poelenburgh, Berchem or Wouwerman, even perhaps by Honthorst, Lastman or Van der Werff; but the average Dutch bourgeois preferred something that made less demands on his imagination, something more directly flattering to his vanity, and also something which cost less money. The old popular art of the woodcut and engraving had always been cheap; and when that art was widely translated into oil paint it was also offered at low prices. It was not, in fact, till the nineteenth century that popular artists anywhere began to demand high prices-for their works, and they were only enabled to do this because

institutions like the Royal Academy invested them with official honours and thus gave them a status which they had never attained or aspired to before.

The pictures painted in Holland to please the middle classes had thus certain fixed characteristics. They were small, because middle class houses in town or country, compared with noblemen's mansions, were not large; they were descriptive of some aspect of everyday life, because the middle classes only reacted then-as they only react now-to art depicting life within their own familiar experience; they were naturalistic in technique, because this technique is the record of the automatic vision of the normal human eye, and works painted in this technique can be apprehended by the patron's eye without the exercise of any imagination or other mental activity; and, above all, they were cheap.

As already noted in discussing the development of chiaroscuro painting and baroque tactility, the system of naturalistic painting from the model, which began in the Carracci art school, soon arrived in Holland. Early 'in the seventeenth century, any Dutch boy could acquire in a few months a considerable degree of efficiency in the new system of copying the lights and shadows on a posed model, which was so much easier than the old system of representation by symbolic line; and the Dutch artists soon discovered that to paint small descriptive pictures of everyday life in the naturalistic technique was a relatively easy and not unpleasant way to make a modest living. Hence the enormous number of these Dutch popular painters of the period.

It is sometimes thought strange that whole families of these Dutchmen for several generations were painters. But this was really no more strange than that whole families for several generations should have been shoemakers or carpenters. The production of the Dutch popular picture was a trade, and one quite quickly learned; and the son who left a trade which had supported his father to run after some other was regarded quite naturally as a fool until he justified his bohemian excursion by results.

*At first, the demand for this popular art was larger than the supply, but as the production was so easy, over-production soon inevitably arrived. From being cheap, the pictures soon became cheaper, and finally so cheap that all classes, except the very poor, could afford to buy them. In Holland in the middle of the seventeenth century there were oil paintings everywhere-in all the rooms of the houses of the middle classes, in the taverns, in the back rooms of shops, and in cottages. They were hung up everywhere, just as photogravures of *The Sailor's Return* or *The Dancing Dog* were hung up everywhere at the end of the nineteenth century in England.¹*

Yet, what should intrigue us is the social 'hidden agenda' of such inexpensive populist art. John Berger in his famous *Ways of Seeing* sums it up well:

The so-called 'genre' picture - the picture of 'low life' - was thought of as the opposite of the mythological picture. It was vulgar instead of noble. The purpose of the 'genre' picture was to prove - either positively or negatively - that virtue in this world was rewarded by social and financial success. Thus, those who could afford to buy these pictures - cheap as they were - had their own virtue confirmed. Such pictures were particularly popular with the newly arrived bourgeoisie who identified themselves not with the characters painted but with the moral which the scene illustrated. Again, the faculty of oil paint to create the illusion of substantiality lent plausibility to a sentimental lie: namely that it was the honest and hard-working who prospered, and that the good-for-nothings deservedly had nothing. ²

What appears to be an innocuous painting can still express a particular moral undertone or ideological view of the world that in the case of Dutch painting comes in one way by the use of *vanitas* symbols. A *vanitas* symbol is an object incorporated into a painting that prompts the viewer to realize that this life is an illusion - as an inescapable death awaits us all.

Mortality.

Life is ephemeral and the skull in a still life is a reminder of this; a watch at the bottom of a vase of flowers lets the spectator know that time – an element of this mortal world (for eternity is timeless) – leads to decay; the beautiful flowers in a still life will wither just as humanity's vain sense of 'human glory' will also pass away. Consider the following remark:

'These paintings are paradoxical, in that they depend upon the enjoyment of beautiful objects in a fine painting while simultaneously admonishing the viewer to beware of material preoccupations.' ³

One may wish to be a harsh judge and state that it can be seen as morally hypocritical to have reminders of earthly vanity placed in artworks that will be viewed and bought by those who choose to live only by monetary values that will materially 'reproduce' heaven on earth. To review how a still life may be far more than just a decorative work but also rather a 'container' of ideas there is the following observation:

Willem Kalf (1619-1693)...another very famous Baroque still life painter, who within his works records social, historical and economic statements. These social, economic and historical messages refer directly to the trade routes to the East and to the Americas. It shows the wealth gained from trading due to the inclusion of many luxurious objects within the arrangements he painted. A statement about society is made due to one's desire to have these precious goods, and the ability of the wealthy to afford these goods. It also makes a historical statement by telling the viewer that these goods were gained due to the trade routes, and a reference that makes one today think of the very famous trading company the Dutch East India Company. These luxury items such as Turkish carpets, porcelain, and rare fruits make a direct reference to the prosperity of the Dutch trading ships and merchants. In the painting Still-Life with a Late Ming Ginger Jar, one can see Kalf's desire to show off these worldly goods that had been brought back to Holland via the trade route. This painting makes a nationalistic statement of the prosperity, wealth and power of Holland. ⁴

Oil painting was a predominant 'host' in European art to carry the 'convenient' imperious idea that those in power were best suited to bring into play the necessary social controls that would disallow the social progress of any other class to undermine the status quo.

In relation to Marcel Duchamp who rejected 'retinal art' (which is what he saw oil painting to be) it may be worthwhile to conjecture if Duchamp was really rejecting the material ideas that found validation through such a predominant art form in European culture. Perhaps Marcel Duchamp would have been of the opinion that to seek new cultural values new cultural spaces needed to be devised. Duchamp was not fond of the 'habit' of producing art the way it had always been done and it was certainly time at the start of the 20th century to break with centuries of a suffocating regime of 'cultural habit.' In a way Marcel Duchamp is not so much a champion of an art of ideas but rather an art of the right ideas (for much art purely expresses ideas). Marcel Duchamp would probably have agreed with Leo Tolstoy's remarks if he had ever read them:

'Art, in our society, has been so perverted that not only has bad art come to be considered good, but even the very perception of what art really is has been lost. In order to be able to speak about the art of our society, it is, therefore, first of all necessary to distinguish art from counterfeit art.' ⁵

To make the necessary artistic distinction that Tolstoy intimates it seems that according to Marcel Duchamp it was essential that the mind predominate over the eyes to again 'see' and 'understand' what is real. It may be of some

value to consider the philosophical ideas of Rene Descartes who placed more importance on the mind to deduce what is true rather than on merely trusting the physical senses. In essence Cartesian thinking (the word Cartesian comes from the second part of Descartes name) entails doubting what we 'know' and then through the reliable process of logical deduction learning what is actually true. The world of the unseen in which our mind 'resides' is to be trusted over our physical senses which there is more scope for error e.g. In The First Meditation Descartes sites how our eyes can be deceived when a straight branch in a river appears bent by the water. Rene Descartes states the only thing in which he can ultimately believe in is in his ongoing ability to think and to think is to know that he exists. "I think therefore I am." (*Cogito, ergo sum* in Latin or as he stated originally in French: "*Je pense donc je suis*," in Discourse on Method published in 1637). This notion of the mind's pre-eminence over the body's senses to deduce reality is of relevance to an understanding of Marcel Duchamp for his new approach to aesthetics chooses to 'strip away' what is seen on the canvas – in fact, do away with the canvas all together - to initiate a response from his audience that 'directs' it to see as more important what can be perceived as 'art' or 'truth' or 'reality' or an 'idea' and so forth in the human mind. A 'canvas of & on the mind' is what Marcel Duchamp left European aesthetics with when he chose to reject the oil canvas - which has and perhaps remains the main cultural 'totem' of Western art. (For despite all that Marcel Duchamp has attempted to 'mindfully show' the canvas picture still remains the most manageable, transportable product of the international art market. After all, one can now go to an office supply chain store and have one's favorite family or holiday photo printed up on canvas – even to a size of one's choice). Nevertheless, taking on board Marcel Duchamp's wit and ultimately his noble sense of human culture, a deductive Cartesian mental approach may help one to at least 'test' the 'humane validity' of any new artistic idea.

Humanity...to return to seventeenth century Holland as a monumental cultural counterpoint to the material preoccupations of the Dutch *bourgeoisie* - which all consumer obsessed societies invest themselves in - there was Rembrandt. It seems Rembrandt's art became unfashionable as he lent towards bringing an art into existence which on his own terms became personal and spiritual reflections of his own sense of what it was to be a human being. Rembrandt's main concern was to express 'eternity' (one somewhat stumbles around to find a truly suitable term...); not a nation's aspirations.

R.H. Wilenski:

If we examine Rembrandt's compositions we find that they were never excuses for the display of natural facility or acquired tricks, or the enlargement of purely architectural experience. No work by Rembrandt is primarily architectural art like the classical works by Raphael or Vermeer or Poussin or the modern Cubists and their successors. With the classical artists the form of the picture is the real subject and the nominal subject is incidental. With Rembrandt the form of the picture comes after his concept of the subject as human drama and derives from it. Motifs from twenty sources may be exploited in a Rembrandt composition at different stages, but the first stage-as we see it in his drawings or in the first states of his etchings-is Rembrandt's concept of a dramatic subject, which has aroused his sympathy and interest and which he has set out to illustrate. With Rembrandt the form is the expression of his attitude to his subject, and to the universe as a whole.

Rembrandt's compositions have no relation to the descriptive illustrations in popular art where the artist's concept is limited by his familiar experience of everyday life and where his aim is contact with the familiar experience of spectators. Rembrandt was not concerned in his compositions with the little everyday appearances of the Dutch life around him, or with little national characteristics like the Dutch popular painters whose works I shall discuss later. His concepts were the opposite of popular, that is to say, they were essentially original; they were not descriptive but imaginative; and Rembrandt's imagination was of the romantic kind.

In The Modern Movement in Art I referred to Rembrandt as the herald of the nineteenth century Romantic Movement. As I pointed out there the artists of that movement substituted the recording of unusual emotive fragments for the attempt to create a formal harmony and unity symbolizing a formal harmony and unity in the universe, which is and always has been the classical architectural idea of art; the nineteenth-century romantics also entertained the notion that fragments remote in time or space were more emotive than those near at hand; and the foundation of their procedure was the stressing of the aspect of their subject to which they had emotionally reacted, and the form of their pictures was dictated by that stress. At the same time in discussing the typical classical-architectural artist's activity, I described it as deriving from an instinct towards order, and I described the typical work of classical-architectural art as a finite ordering of architectural experience in a form comprehensible to the human mind, To achieve this synthesis a man must conceive the universe as a finite entity in space, with bounds and a definite shape (a cube for example or a sphere), and functioning within its boundaries as an organization in accordance with a system of laws which man as such, and the formal artist in particular, is instinctively impelled to attempt to discover. Such a concept of the universe was entirely foreign to the mind of Rembrandt, and it was because it had also been foreign to the mind of Elsheimer (as already noted) that

Elsheimer's pictures meant so much to him. For Rembrandt the universe was essentially boundless, not only in space but in time. He could not contemplate the use of geometric symbols to synthesize what he divined as infinite. For him the universe was not a miraculously functioning geometric organization, but a boundless and eternal mystery, and the fragments in it were emotive in relation to that mystery. It is this attitude of mind which explains the difference between Rembrandt's dramatic illustrations and those by his historical antecedents. If we realize the attitude, we understand his reluctance to define physical forms, we understand his reaction to the remote in place—the turbans, the parasols and other exotic frippery which must seem otherwise no more than the Wardour Street 'Orientalism' of the nineteenth-century Romantic Movement; we understand the crazy buildings of no time, place or recognizable style taken from the Elsheimer tradition which derive from his reaction to the remote in time; and we understand, too, those backgrounds in which we not only 'stagger from one abyss of obscurity to another' to the delight of Hazlitt and the horror of Ruskin, but in which we can also travel freely from undefined light to undefined darkness, and from undefined darkness to undefined light, in a universe without bounds or geometric shape. The form of Rembrandt's pictures, in a word, is the logical expression of his attitude of mind.⁶

An 'attitude' of mind that perhaps considers St. Paul's advice: 'Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things.' Colossians 3: 2 (NIV). It is not an attitude of a petty-bourgeoisie mind that has a painter simply 'photograph' a visible reality but one that seeks to perceive what cannot be seen in much the same way that Marcel Duchamp desires to do. More so, to desire to see in the mind a preferred world view that supersedes a present day social reality that may be essentially unacceptable to the human spirit.

R.H. Wilenski continues:

By the process of rejecting pictorial architecture as he knew it from his studies, he arrived at the creation of a new architecture of his own which was based on Elsheimer's; and though this architecture is not the subject of his works or his main preoccupation, it is none the less an essential part of them. In works where his hand failed him or in works ascribed to him but really by one of his pupils, this becomes an affair of a theatrical spot-light scarcely more impressive than a spot-light effect by Honthorst. But in the works where his hand obeyed him his whole attitude is expressed in the relations of massed light and shade which have poise and balance though none can say where the light begins or the shadow ends.

It is this attitude also which explains his treatment of religious subjects. Once he had worked through the rhetoric of a plate like the large Raising of Lazarus which he etched at the age of twenty-six, to the small plate of the same subject done the year after Saskia died, his religious paintings, ~etchings and drawings developed the character of the religious paintings by Elsheimer. They are not religious art in the sense of art called forth by the service of the Church. They are so palpably unecclesiastic that he is believed by some to have been a Jew or of Jewish extraction, though nominally a member of the Protestant Faith.' But these works can be explained without this hypothesis. To the conventional mind religion is dogma which satisfies because it claims to provide a finite explanation of the universe. To the original mind, on the other hand, religion stands for the unknown; its function is to keep the unknown continually in human consciousness. The architectural religious mind conceives one definite after-life for good men and another definite after-life for bad men. The romantic religious mind conceives a disembodied spirit disappearing after death into infinite space and infinite time. To Rembrandt's romantic mind Christianity was not the Roman Church or the Protestant Church or Christian dogma; it was not even a symbol of a divine order; it was a symbol of the mystery of life. To Rembrandt the life of Jesus was the life of man and the life of every man was the life of Jesus. In the same spirit he conceived the figures in the Old Testament and the Apocrypha. He is generally said to have thought of the Bible stories in terms of daily life. But it is more accurate to say that he thought of life in terms of the Bible; for he conceived the simplest aspects of the life around him in relation to a boundless past and a boundless future and the Bible stories as symbols of that relation...Rembrandt...conceives the universe as formless and seeks the indefinite in time and space... there again he, is great by reason of another quality which permeates the finest examples of his art.

This other quality is his human sympathy which was wide and deep. Without this quality much of his work would be 'the effect of rottenness' that it appeared to Gerard de Lairese, the 'vulgarity, dullness and impiety' that it appeared to Ruskin, and the 'mess of rhetoric, romance and chiaroscuro' referred to by a modern critic. On the strength of it Rembrandt triumphs over the rhetoric of his historical artistic background, over the handicap of his romantic attitude, and over an artistic language which dissolves form to the point where it escapes the formless by a miracle and reduces colour to a point where it is always without gaiety and often almost without life. When we look at Rembrandt's paintings of the character of the Entombment and The Return of the Prodigal at a sketch like The Two Negroes at etchings like The Angel Departing from the Family of Tobias, the small Raising of Lazarus, Christ carried to the Tomb, The Adoration of the Shepherds, and hundreds of the moving drawings, we

*know that the greatness of his art lies in the fact that he was not only a great artist but also, and still more, a great interpreter of man's spirit.*⁸

John Berger seems to echo R.H. Wilenski's observations on Rembrandt. In *Ways of Seeing* he compares an early work 'Rembrandt and Saskia' with Rembrandt as a cheerful young man with his new young wife and a much later self-portrait of Rembrandt as an elderly man with furrowed face and surrounded only by darkness:

The first painting occupies a special place in, as it were, the film of Rembrandt's life. He painted it in the year of his first marriage. In it he is showing off Saskia his bride. Within six years she will be dead. The painting is cited to sum up the so-called happy period of the artist's life. Yet if one approaches it now without sentimentality, one sees that its happiness is both formal and unfelt: Rembrandt is here using the traditional methods for their traditional purposes. His individual style may be becoming recognizable. But it is no more than the style of a new performer playing a traditional role. The painting as a whole remains an advertisement for the sitter's good fortune, prestige and wealth. (In this case Rembrandt's own.) And like all such advertisements it is heartless.

*In the later painting he has turned the tradition against itself. He has wrested its language away from it. He is an old man. All has gone except a sense of the question of existence, of existence as a question. And the painter in him - who is both more and less than the old man - has found the means to express just that, using a medium which had been traditionally developed to exclude any such question.*⁹

Vermeer is also mentioned by R.H. Wilenski who comes into play in regards to the effect of technology on the development of European painting. In Vermeer's case the depiction of material reality was refined by the use of *camera obscura* - by which this is another way whereby humanity imposes its will on 'framing' reality on its terms building on the discovery and use of perspective in Renaissance Italy. With *camera obscura* Vermeer could paint precise interiors of the *bourgeoisie* world he was representing. Vermeer moves beyond nature by displacing it 'out the window'; portraying an intimate interior world with the architecture of a reality that is wholly human made and only concerned with human affairs. Thus Vermeer's art is above the simple task of painting everyday life but on a profound level reviews - and to a major extent confirms - humanity's place in the world in the 'centre'; on another level though the sheer accuracy of Vermeer's artwork and the technical skill involved almost reduces the artist to the level of a machine being a 'human camera.'

Technology is used to enhance human reality but in a subtle way leads to a process of dehumanization which Marcel Duchamp will pick up on several centuries later; as seen when he paints a chocolate grinder in a sheer mechanistic, unfeeling architectural style which in a way undermines the tenets of classical, formal painting.

In the seventeenth century one can even note the first impulse or intimation of an 'interactive art'. Still Life with Chessboard (The Five Senses) by Baugin a French artist (1610-1663) refers the viewers to five senses by sighting the flowers which deals with smell; a musical instrument and book dealing with one's hearing and so forth until a myriad of objects in such paintings make reference to touch, sight, taste, smell and hearing so that through memory and the imagination there can be a 'mental inter-action' between the Baroque still life and the viewer. One may argue that on a one-dimensional level the physical senses are attuned without really involving any real critical faculty of the mind; only a sort of intellectual mimicry takes place in much the same way modern computer systems can also dull human thinking - rather than accentuate or expand it if no proper 'equal' interface between machine and human takes place. HAL the malfunctioning spaceship computer from Stanley Kubrik's 2001 that literally kills the humans still remains a 'techno warning' to the danger of automaton thinking that humans may be further encouraged to adopt over lateral thought.

In Vermeer's time as European society became increasingly confident that it could control nature – this arrogant notion leads to the 'natural idea' that human beings can exploit its resources; an advantageous outlook when the scale of this control would reach never-imagined levels with the massive escalation of capital in the Industrial Revolution; a so called technological 'miracle' which would maximize the luxury lifestyle of the elites as well as maximize the suffering of the masses who worked in the 'Satanic mills'. (These days as living conditions have generally improved in the first world for many the Satanic mills have simply been moved 'offshore' to the third world where the suffering continues while the present global environmental crisis brought on by human-manufactured climate change shows how nature ultimately has the upper hand over the human race).

One may see how Marcel Duchamp's 'personal' bottle rack philosophically questions the basic cultural assumptions in play in the operation and perception of so called 'human progress.' In the second decade of the twentieth century Marcel Duchamp can at least in general terms be identified with the anti-art movement DADA whose so called absurdist outcries were a denouncement of a Europe - who after centuries of presumed economic, cultural and scientific advancement - nonsensically embarked on an industrial 'great war' in which nothing of any real consequence could be gained to justify the murderous expense of several million lost lives. The Dadaists were denounced as juvenile by a *bourgeoisie* world who failed to admit or recognize its own moral bankruptcy; yet if

nothing else it was up to the primal ‘cultural shock therapy’ as initiated by Zurich Dada and like-minded others such as Marcel Duchamp in New York to try revive the artistic soul of a seemingly dying modern civilization. Thus there was the ‘human contradiction’ that as much of Europe fell into a totalitarian & fascist genocidal abyss after four years of mass slaughter (WWI) and a major capitalist crisis (the Great Depression) it is also argued that:

*...Between 1900 and 1937 Europe experienced an extraordinary cultural rebirth and interchange of ideas, comparable to the Renaissance and the Enlightenment.¹⁰ This optimistic observation continues as such: If the precise causes of this phenomenon are unclear, what is clear is that it coincided with an economic surge or Kondratiev wave (a term invented in 1925), resulting from developments in communications, increased industrialization, the rise of the automobile, the importance of oil and conventional paper money which is inconvertible (as opposed, for example, to the gold standard). These obviously had an impact on political and cultural institutions, and the concomitant challenge to these institutions is associated with the avant-garde. Avant-garde (literally ‘vanguard’) denotes a band of soldiers preparing the way for a general advance. In the early nineteenth century, the term came to be used in utopian politics, appearing in Henri de Saint-Simon's Literary, Philosophical and Industrial Opinions (1825). His view was that, working together, artists, scientists and manufacturers could lead mankind out of the alienation created by modern industrial society: “Let us unite. To achieve our one single goal, a separate task will fall to each of us. We, the artists, will serve as the avant-garde: for amongst all the arms at our disposal, the power of the Arts is the swiftest and most expeditious. When, we wish to spread new ideas amongst men, we use in turn the lyre, ode or song, story or novel ...we aim for the heart and imagination, and hence our effect is the most vivid and the most decisive.” This was perhaps the first manifesto, and the beginning of the association of the avant-garde with the printed format. Later in the nineteenth century, the term came to be applied to art. It was more complex than this simple trajectory would suggest, and the art avant-garde could move seamlessly into radical politics, as Dada did in Berlin and the Constructivists did in the USSR in order to achieve a new socialist utopia...*¹¹

Berlin Dada would introduce the innovative art practice of photomontage – said to be initiated by Hannah Hoch and definitely popularized by John Heartfield’s strikingly radical political pictures which along with George Grosz’s savage satirical images of war profiteers; disabled soldiers; prostitutes - reflecting the social turmoil of post-war Berlin - shows there was no utopia in Europe – only more bloodletting: by the likes of the Bolsheviks

under Lenin and then by Stalin and his odious counter-revolutionary lackeys in Russia (read Victor Serge's *The Case of Comrade Tulayev* as well as *A People's Tragedy. The Russian Revolution 1891-1924* by Orlando Figes); by Mussolini's black shirts in Italy; by Franco's costly mutiny against an elected Republic in Spain; by Hitler's murderous National Socialists in Germany. (Only in the German Revolution 1918/19 with Rosa Luxembourg's input did there seem to be some semblance of a true democratic transforming spirit; but it was betrayed by the 'reformist socialist' Ebert allowing for the official formation of the *Freikorps* who murdered Luxembourg along with Karl Liebknecht. This counter-revolutionary force would 'devolve' into Nazism. In Russia, Constructivism would be superseded by 'Socialist Realism' although it would find a spiritual home for its innovative internationalist ideas by way of Walter Gropius's Bauhaus school in Munich).

Yet amidst such *realpolitik* is Marcel Duchamp and his bottle rack which in exclusive cultural terms is posing the question: what is art? (Or perhaps the full question is: what *really* is art? After all, is an art denuded of any spiritual force with its 'true value' having more to do with it being a form of financial investment as determined by the art market – can this object truly be continued to be called a 'work of art'?).

The 'correct art' brings along to whoever owns it a higher 'correct status' – such is the conventional social role of any well-established 'acceptable art'. Yet, it is an illusion and Duchamp's bottle rack exposes this ideological trick. To support such a claim – which is ideological in itself - one particular line of argument can go along like this: it could be said that the values extolled by 'high art' are partly dependent on the technical skills of 'recognized artists' who paint 'real pictures' of the 'real world'; which, in social terms, is to portray traditional autocratic structures in such a way that the spectator may never envisage as being 'not real.' Historically speaking, this sort of cultural validation of a particular ideological framework is a common feature of all societies – both ancient and modern (consider the tradition of an obvious higher order monumental 'spiritual art' from say the time of the Great Pyramids through to say the Sistine Ceiling which politically helped to verify a 'natural order' based on a rigid class system by which the priests and the aristocrats could control society) – which is important to note once more especially when one also considers how in 17th century Holland how art - even on a popular/populist level – served to cultivate a predominant ideal that those with wealth were sort of 'higher beings' being above those who were 'obviously not worthy' due to their lack of wealth. It is a common feature of those in power to always censure the notion that there could be other ways to organize society; especially in a way where power may shift to another social group other than themselves. Any notion of another social system is always seen as a 'threat' that goes against the 'natural order' of the 'real way' society must function.

Wars are fought for the social entity or a revolution happens so as to have another social combination. A war fought for economic reasons is often clothed by nationalistic, racial, security, ideological or religious pretexts – or to use a more brutal word – lies. Propaganda is needed to organize large groups of human beings to automatically lift up their rifles to kill other human beings - and without a moment's hesitation.

As for the Dadaists they were appalled by the bloody consequences of what were clearly to them irrational nationalist, imperialist impulses motivating a useless bloodthirsty war; they chose to mock the hypocrisy and 'untruths' of the so called refined European mind that could blithely doom a whole continent to such a monumental catastrophe: was this wide scale war the true representation of European 'civilization'?

A new order had to be produced to save humanity from itself – not one based on any 'achievement' on the battlefield – but one that would need a whole revolution of the mind. One could argue that at the very least Dada gave the human mind the intellectual space to magnify thinking in a multi-dimensional, lateral way to overcome any one-dimensional mental straight-jacket that was constantly trying to restrict it. Like modern day prophets the Dadaists echoed the words of Christ who said you shall know his true followers by 'their fruits'. It was obvious to see that the 'fruits presently being produced by a so called modernizing 'Christian Europe' were very rotten. The war was a reflection of a world whereby the underpinning values of its elites were wholly debased by Moloch; willing to sacrifice its 'first born' to appease his barbaric lust.

God is absent.

However, politically incapable of actually throwing the moneylenders out of the Temple the Dadaists could at least mock them but better still undermine and question the symbols used to create 'culture' such as art and language. It made no sense to produce 'serious art' – even if it was critical of the status quo – for what was the point of any art at all? What, after all, is 'art'- or even what could be art - in this world of total war? Paradoxically, in a world with its well-oiled regimented wheels of mass destruction twirling at the fastest revolutions and in perfect time there was only sheer anarchy being produced along a well-defined trench line from Belgium to Switzerland.

An artist can be a shaman or a prophet who can help lead the human mind out of the spiritual wilderness. Yet why keep throwing pearls of truth at a deluded world that wants to keep believing that is better to lustfully build up one's earthly wealth rather than be concerned with the growth or destiny – eternal or otherwise – of one's sacred soul? These prophets revolted in the only way they could – to refuse the cultural tools of their world: poetry is replaced by gibberish; painting is replaced by paper cut-outs. Human action brought about by the supposed mental

discipline of human 'reason' is replaced by the realization of art by chance such as in randomly pulling out words from a hat and linking them together; to now even entertain the possibility that life itself is chance and living life as a series of chance events with nothing 'real.'

What is truth? The question may no longer need to be asked for there didn't seem to be any point in finding the answer - for who now would want to know it? Yet in Dada's relentless negation of the catastrophic nightmare 'reality' around them some positive artistic avenues did seem to ultimately open up for a bruised human spirit. Much like quantum theory shows us how particles can behave in bizarre ways to turn over our stratified view of a three-dimensional world the Dadaists showed there can be other emerging cultural possibilities for the human soul. As for Marcel Duchamp he gravitated towards the notion of a 'fourth dimension' remarking:

"If a shadow is a two-dimensional projection of the three-dimensional world then the three-dimensional world as we know it is the projection of the four dimensional universe." ¹¹

The unseen is also a reality. A move away from pictorial representation – to abandon painting – seems to allow the concept normally 'behind' an artwork gain greater prominence. Allowing the *idea* - itself - to come to the foreground to be more fully realized on that 'mental canvas': the human mind. Strip away the artifice of an artificial image on a piece of material and the 'viewer' is left to focus on the origin of the artifice that is conceived in the artist's consciousness – a consciousness that is responding to the 'shadow' that is the world. Thus Marcel Duchamp freed his mind from the limits of a four sided, two-dimensional flat piece of canvas to a world of ideas that could occupy many sides and many dimensions – a quantum approach to culture which can be viewed as his everlasting legacy.

One can also envisage the ongoing possibility of moving away from a *bourgeoisie* pretense as to what reality should be to validate a certain social construction that suits one's advantageous place in the world to what reality maybe – or even to positively construct a new reality – or realities. It would be presumptuous to wonder about all of Marcel Duchamp's motivations behind his art practice – enigmatic as he was – but from the overall 'evidence' of what he left to the world one could argue the case that Marcel Duchamp is the artistic version of Luther or Galileo or Darwin or Marx who in various monumental ways have reconfigured our former static view of the relationships that have existed between humans and of the relationship between humanity and the world as well as with that ultimate found object - the universe.

Marcel Duchamp objectified art by giving a machine made 'readymade' the same status as a hand-made object and this 'objectivity' seems to intimate to a truth that exists outside 'normal' expectations of what reality is in our 'human space.' (One may speculate what can also be considered is an invisible universal morality that can be made visible through judging what a moral or immoral action is by raising human awareness beyond the normally social relativist contextual norms that are usually applied to human behavior and attitudes; so as to also think 'outside time' – especially 'social time' - in ever new extraordinary ways. One may even wish to view Marcel Duchamp's ready-mades as sort of *vanitas* symbols – to remind humanity it is mortal in its thinking; that the 'absolute values' it may prescribe too are actually only subjective which are applied in relation to the social context and social meanings that lead the way that present-day values are defined). A heightening of human consciousness is desired – hopefully by the heightening of human culture – and this by way of a maturation of human perception of everything around and within us. The universe does not depend on us – or even need us – not, at least, to validate its existence but rather human life needs it which in all due respect we could not exist except for its presence. We are *not* the center of the universe which is a view contrary to Renaissance thinking that has suffused through the centuries of recent European history to this day. A view that has only been recently re-examined by our increasing knowledge of the very vastness of the universe in which the Earth is a mere 'atom' ; and by the manner in which nature on this Earth can display its awesome power over humankind as in the case of global climate change. Paradoxically, humanity must perceive reality from the standpoint of its 'smallness' in order to maturely arrive at any truly astounding future level of human grandeur. (The first shall be last and the last shall be first – so to speak). In the first decade of the twentieth century before the 'Great War' were the Cubists who introduced the possibility of multi-dimensional viewpoints and even stuck cut out newspaper pieces onto the canvas but it was all still 'tricks' on a two-dimensional plane. Marcel Duchamp – the painter of *The Nude Descending the Staircase* and other similar 'futurist-cubist' works – eventually moved beyond Cubism to throw out the canvas and if there was a 'trick' to his art it was to point out - through intellectual subterfuge – the cultural deceptions that went on in the human mind and how these subjective 'impossibilities' needed to be dispensed with so 'truth' could be purely embraced by the human soul. Humanity can lie to itself with the 'social truths' it constantly constructs but it has to move away from any predictable, subjective human reasoning to perceive a more authentic reality based on artistic observations that may entertain some objective reality (yet for what human mind is truly impartial?) that at least allows a person to cautiously trust what he or she is thinking; after all, to discover the Earth revolving around the

Sun – and truly believe it – meant doing away with the cultural tools that people had been relying on since cave people painted their cave walls.

Marcel Duchamp drops three threads onto the ground and so purely by chance with the curved lines that were formed totally changed our conception of what a ‘metre’ is to what it could be (as against – one may presuppose - what it should be); to enable us to realize that there can be – or even are – endless versions of measurement which can even not have to rely on human reason. The Renaissance has us believe that humanity is the measure of all things but surely it is nature that is eminent. In the documentary *This Is Civilization* the commentator Mark Collings points out how John Ruskin made the astute observation that medieval society chose to live in balance with God and Nature. Although one has to remember that a huge level of deforestation did occur in the Middle Ages one can nevertheless take on board Ruskin’s remark when one realizes that in the Renaissance there was a marked cultural-ideological shift whereby European humanity cast adrift its relationship with the world to state itself as a ‘higher being’ that could control the natural realm. Yet, as earlier inferred, in a monolith carbon industrial age global humanity may yet fall into an ecological abyss where any human presumptiveness of a ‘post-God’ ascendancy will seem to be false. Paradise Lost before it could even be truly gained.

We need to ‘rebalance’ – with ourselves and with nature.

In hindsight it is somewhat ironic that Marcel Duchamp instinctively chose industrial mass produced objects to question the prevailing cultural norms of the West. The readymade takes away the notion of an object being uniquely produced by an individual human mind with particular artistic skills out of the picture (so to speak...) to reveal only a de-personal thing now given ‘artistic prestige’ merely by the procurement of an individual signature by a ‘recognized artist’; to ‘personalize’ the object merely by the illusion of ‘artistic persona’; illusion being the operative word – for the ‘cultural premises’ of the art world are delusional. One may be allowed to argue that there is no ‘higher truth’ being represented; only a banal social norm that advocates a ‘superior’ view of the world so as to justify a social elitism that can extend to the art market itself where – unfortunately – the ‘spiritual ethos’ of any art object – especially including anything whose creator was only sincerely interested in the spiritual dimension for artistic motivation - can be grossly subverted by its ‘investment value’. It is obscene. (Yet in what is a complex issue it has to be said that there are private collectors who through a strong sense of ‘social philanthropy’ have helped art that would otherwise be neglected; take the case of Aboriginal art which spent decades literally in the wilderness before becoming appreciated by a wide ‘white fella’ audience including internationally; ‘landing on its feet’ so to speak by both enlightened ‘private funds’ and major public galleries. Unfortunately there are still

unscrupulous dealers who exploit *indigenous* artists although it is hoped such art malpractice is now diminishing). Consider the following comment referring to the art of Duchamp's time:

*Art had become a debased currency, just a matter for the connoisseur, whose taste was merely dependent on habit.*¹²

The war of the imperial powers is glibly positioned as a struggle over 'higher truths' - such as democracy and freedom - when a closer truth would suggest that it was just a primal 'turf war' between reptilian elites needlessly sacrificing their 'helots' to bloat their macabre sense of privilege and prestige – or to solace any immature sense of hurt pride. A truly illogical war with not even much really acquired in resources and land at the end of it all by the 'victorious' Allies with Alsace-Lorraine for France and the Allied occupation of the Ruhr and the harsh reparations inflicted on Germany coming about far more from an over-inflated Great Power impulse for revenge than from any impartial sense of international justice; as it is all that the Versailles Treaty 'achieved' was to sow the bitter seeds for the next far worse European 'Great War'. In such a hierarchal context 'ego' is a dirty word. Four years of official mass murder brought on by 'petulant children' smashing their 'toy soldiers' to get their way. Thus somewhat ironically Dada with its 'nonsense antics' very closely mirrored the childish mindset of the political masters of Europe; this brief so called 'anti-art movement' was thus genuinely portraying how insane and perverse Europe had really become. Marcel Duchamp's lasting 'contribution' to European culture was to merely point out with his ready-mades how the supposed high lofty principles of European civilization had in reality been so lowered that he felt allowed in his mind to raise a bottle rack to the level of 'high art.' With that 'in mind' it is also true to say – as already stated – Marcel Duchamp wanted to go further than what he called 'retinal art' by seeking after an art for the mind (to emphasize the 'ephemeral' over what appeared to be visually 'solid'). Marcel Duchamp was his own individual and has been loosely connected with Dadaists but he along with them positively contributed to widen the 'field of the mind' albeit in a paradoxical way when – to make a simple statement - it seemed that though they seemed to be attempting to 'destroy art' rather than to improve it a proverbial art Phoenix did arise from the ashes of the trenches by which new cultural possibilities have gradually permeated by way of a 'low intensity' cultural revolution (a 'cultural guerilla war' of sorts as Jed Rasula puts it¹³) - which can be marked alongside high intensity revolutions of ideas such as the Italian Renaissance and the Enlightenment; thus to make it incredulously possible for a bottle rack to stand alongside the Sistine Ceiling as an emblem of new thought.

The Enlightenment – this Age of Reason – as Goya noted - also produced nightmares - as so hauntingly portrayed in Goya's etching of likewise name¹⁴ and in other disturbing artworks such as Saturn Devouring His Children and the Disasters of Wars etchings series which all serve as dark 'human warnings' to the terrible spectre of what can happen to humanity when it loses its 'humanness'. Although Marcel Duchamp would have also recognized the wretchedness of such morally corrupted human reason and although he adopted chance as an important creative principle so as to negate sterile human logic one suspects - so as to 'round out' his probable artistic motivations - that on a deeper level Marcel Duchamp was surely interested in exploring the possibility of other more positive avenues of human reason which perhaps led him to tinge his move towards a conceptual art with a Cartesian sensibility. After all, it is culture that can lead a lost humanity out of the Minotaur's labyrinth. Thus Marcel Duchamp reminds one to see again that an artist can be a shaman and not as a mere decorator. (A 'spiritual position' the artist has had to take as official religion has become less influential in an increasingly secularized West - as Nietzsche had inferred with his startling remark: 'God is dead.').

To cut through the pretensions of 'high art' by orientating human awareness back to the everyday; it is an interesting approach.

Domestic objects.

Art derives its human meaning from the social context in which it is produced. Consider the difference between the witty utilization of domestic objects by Marcel Duchamp for an ironic impetus versus the depiction of domestic life by seventeenth century Dutch artists which helped - for those with a somewhat worldly Philistine inclination – to validate their point of view that the acquisition of money and the materials one gains by an accumulation of wealth is the central premise for one's burgeoning life; thus on one's living room wall was the 'cultural validation' for one's narrow view of existence. There is nothing wrong with raising one's standard of living – and it is to be welcomed that everyone have the opportunity to do so - but it should be the means by which other fruitful dimensions of life may also be explored - not as an end itself. In these modernist times Marcel Duchamp helps to lead the way on such an important life principle or to at least help us examine the question: what is life really about? Whose possible answers – one admits - would be as myriad as the number of people on this Earth.

Dutch domestic paintings are appreciated as they provide some insight to the 'human quality' of the subject matter touching upon the universality of human nature by which a modern spectator can identify. Yet, at the time many domestic scenes were painted – by painters who were more like tradespeople by the way – it was to verify the world as it was without question it or considering how the world could be and so forth – in other words a

conservative art. It was an art genius like Rembrandt who rose above his socially acceptable role of ‘gifted portrait painter’ to also do biblical paintings as well that along with his more somber portraiture provide genuine spiritual insight into the nature of the human soul; and which still enlighten a modern secular audience with the same moral force as an Elizabethan tragedy by William Shakespeare.

Nevertheless, so called Dutch ‘low art’ did at least show that the everyday world is valid subject matter – it was not just aristocrats, prophets and angels that were both painting – and the use of *vanitas* symbols would at least give Dutch art some moral impetus; in a positive sense it was an art whereby so called ‘ordinary people’ could enjoy seeing a world on canvas which they could identify with; without the overt pretensions of a lofty ideological schema. Moving on to more modern times such as with the French Realists – most notably Courbet - and then with the Impressionists and Post Impressionists one sees perhaps a more insightful exploration in the ‘here and now’; with the likes of a Pissarro who with his egalitarian socialist outlook was very conscious of painting rural workers as a political statement – so as to authenticate the humanity of the ‘lower classes’. (Of course one also thinks of Courbet who famously said he would only paint an angel if he saw one! An art based on an observable world rather than an imaginary one would eventually find more meaning to people no matter their social class. Although with that said there was even an interest in recording the world empirically in European art which even pre-dates the illusionism of Renaissance perspective in an artist such as Jan van Eyck who in wishing to depict as is truthful seems to have an apparent interest in what would now be termed a ‘scientific positivist’ examination of the world and has him in his famed Ghent altarpiece of 1432 casting a dark shading onto a part of the throne on which the central figure of the Almighty is majestically sitting on; which gives an earthly dimension to this celestial sanctuary of heaven. One wonders how theologically legitimate the Church would have thought – if it had crossed the minds of the clergy looking at this magnificent altarpiece - of the notion that shadow could exist in God’s ideal of Paradise?). Following after Cezanne would emerge the Cubist art of Braque and Picasso which would challenge the basic tenets of illusionism in painting since the Renaissance by shifting away from a holistic perspectival view of reality to a more fragmented multi-point view of the everyday world. Yet, also at the time Impressionism was being formulated there was a preoccupation by these ‘*plein air*’ to not only capture the ‘fleeting moment’ in a fully naturalistic way but to also respond to the new technology of photography which also was involved in capturing the immediate moment. The interface in influence between new emerging and traditional art forms such as that which existed between photography and painting was something that Marcel Duchamp was also very aware of as his ‘watershed work’ *Nude Descending a Staircase* was apparently influenced by chronophotographs which show

multiple movement in the one image. One thinks of Edward Muybridge's famous multiple motion photos such as those that famously proved that a racehorse really does have all four hoofs off the ground at one stage of its gallop. While John Golding in his book *The Bride Stripped Bare By Her Bachelors* makes the following perceptive point:

*Chronophotography had played an important role in the first sketches for the King and Queen and in the Munich Bride Stripped Bare drawing, but here there is no hint of the earlier cinematic technique and the idea of motion in terms of physical energy has been replaced by the concept of motion as the change from one psychological state of being to another, or to use a phrase employed by the painter Matta, Duchamp's art is now about the 'process of becoming.'*¹⁵

Marcel Duchamp can be considered to be ahead of his time at the start of the twentieth century who not only went one step forward by questioning the whole expectation of what art should be but also by throwing out the canvas to virtually leave only empty space for the human mind to meditate on (an 'artistic Buddhism' as some may suggest...); this radical shift in 'cultural space' can be seen as becoming increasingly relevant in this day of cyberspace. Art has to re-orientate itself again to a new way of 'seeing.' Cyberspace provides an electronic eternity which provides a never ending multitude of 'found objects' almost akin to discovering new dimensions that may take humanity to involve itself in another shift of human consciousness. Like so often in the past artists will have to yet again respond to yet another new technological leap which with the rise of social media is also leading to a new social evolution in the ways human beings relate to each other.

Yet through the avenue of the 'ordinary' i.e. using the known world as a starting point by which the 'here and now' can be re-contextualized within an awareness of a multi-dimensional universe the mental friction that can occur through such a conceptual juxtaposition between the known and the possibilities of yet emerging 'new knowns' can perhaps lead to new far reaching human and eternal visions arising. Marcel Duchamp's concept of conceptually enabling - as well as culturally validating - the human mind to become prepared to 'see' the unseen, should help humanity to intellectually process the visions that are yet to come; whether they be before humanity in this 'hands on world' or in a 'cyber world'. Or just in our mind; for humanity to define and understand reality in what are presently still yet unfathomable ways.

During the twentieth century the line between 'elitist' high and 'populist' low art became blurred especially with the arrival of Andy Warhol's Pop Art paintings of Campbells Soup Cans. One may say the so called 'art divide'

has finally disappeared (and it was Warhol who suggested that the supermarket - with its rows of goods in packets designed by graphic designers - was the new 'art museum space' of the twentieth century). In a mish mash of converging and diverging cultural sensibilities that seemed to preoccupy the post-war/cold war art stream one may argue viewing contemporary art became an alienating experience for many people with the rise of Abstract Expressionism. Consider in Australia the public controversy over the Whitlam government's 'extravagant' acquisition of Blue Poles painted by Jackson Pollock the so called wild 'cowboy artist' of American abstraction. It is argued that Abstract Expressionism served the Cold War propaganda purpose of extolling the notion that an individual's artistic freedom was still guaranteed in the Free World as against the totalitarian censorship that occurred against artists and writers behind the Iron Wall. Artistic freedom equated with political freedom. Thus Washington can claim that a not very well understood non-figurative style such as Abstract Expressionism can flourish in the West due to its 'ideological openness' (never mind McCarthyism) while the Soviet Union would not tolerate a 'drunkard outsider' such as Jackson Pollock painting his 'scribblings'; an individual no matter his faults or maverick inclinations (in Pollock's time the achievements of women were still yet to be regularly recognized) did not have to fear the censure of the state. It could be argued an art with no obvious or very little recognizable subject matter; that is perhaps dealing with '...inner mental states...' or with '...artistic form...' etcetera is somehow an 'apolitical art' and so 'safe' for Washington to cynically encourage for its own political purposes in a global 'culture war' with the Soviet Union. (One may wish to read How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art. Abstract Expressionism, Freedom and the Cold War by Siegfried Gieddion). Pop Art which partly came about as a reaction to Abstract Expressionism had in its early days an artwork such as Flag by Jasper Johns (1954-55) which in an oblique, somewhat ambivalent way could be seen as a criticism of the so called 'democratic' 'American project' although Jasper Johns would neither 'confirm nor deny' if that was truly the case with this artwork which is an encaustic painting of the Stars & Stripes. A nationally recognized 'found object' - which symbolizes the United States - reverentially 'transformed' to be a 'high art painting'; amongst the many questions this painting raises may even include: so what has actually been painted? Is it 'just a flag' or, perhaps, is it a representation of a symbol of the actual *idea* that lies behind a symbol which in itself is a representation of national identity which in turn affects individual identity etcetera? (What does it really mean to be an American in the post-war world?). It is an artwork which along with other early 'culturally ironic' artworks by artists such as Jasper Johns that has given credence to the idea that Pop Art is 'neo-Dada' (or as Thomas McEvilly remarks in Art & Discontent that: '*Dada vulgarized the iconic and Pop [as Neo-Dada] iconized the vulgar.* '); especially when one learns that Jasper Johns

admired Marcel Duchamp who - in turn – had an admiration of the art of Jasper Johns. Instead of portraying a bottle rack what one has in the sixties is an artistic use of the everyday especially of popular culture iconography: there are Roy Lichtenstein's iconoclast comic book 'machine dot' paintings as well as Andy Warhol's silkscreen celebrity prints (a mass produced art for a mass produced age although these screen-prints were often made deliberately imperfect with their off-registered colours - as a sort of critique against an idealized perfection sought by an advertising industry for a consumer society although at the same time – such was the 'cultural paradox' that was Andy Warhol he very much escalated the production of his screenprints to match the escalation in demand for them to escalate his ever increasing art income. *"Making money is art and working is art and good business is the best art..."* ... so said this 'deeply superficial' person who also remarked that: *"Art is what you can get away with."* (A book on Andy Warhol to consider reading is: *Andy Warhol and the Can that Sold the World* by Gary Indiana. As for Warhol's screenprints one also thinks of Toulouse Lautrec's magnificent Moulin Rouge graphic posters) ; as an aside it is interesting to note that one of the lesser known facts about Andy Warhol is - that being a practicing Rutherian Catholic - he would regularly volunteer to help out at homeless shelters in New York.

Looking back at an art movement such as Pop Art - which was re-questioning art as well as examining the material consumer society in which it was produced – that it seems that the final irony is that as the as the dealers, critics and curators took an interest in the likes of Warhol, Lichtenstein, Johns that 'high art' co-opted the features of 'low art' for the art market. The art establishment still determines what is to be financially and artistically venerated in much the same way as the Paris Academy did in the nineteenth century. One may also conclude that what appears to be 'avant-garde' these days is merely a marketing tool or as Mathew Collings puts it:

"...In terms of avant-gardism – well, avant-gardism doesn't work now, because the avant-garde we have is an official one and therefore a pseudo one. You can't be against the system if you are the system." Mathew Collings had also previously stated: *"I think the only hope for anything creative or genuinely expressive, is that there has to be some sort of cultural underground."*

While Marcel Duchamp who was critical of a 'counterfeit' art market selling out any semblance of 'artistic soul' to mammon made the wry comment that:

"The great artist of tomorrow will go underground."

In an individualistic orientated society it is said a divisive alienation can occur so there is also a need for a communal approach to art with an emphasis on a societal level to bring about a maturation of human consciousness; such an aim, no matter how esoteric it may appear at first glance, is essential and needs to be encouraged; this is especially so when neoliberalism with its seemingly philosophical underpinning of encouraging unregulated 'unfettered capitalism' has become globally far reaching in its social divisiveness in the decades since the cold war victory of the 'free world' at the end of the eighties. Thus one must not dismiss or overlook the vitally important role of subterfuge that art can play against any status quo that constantly aims to subordinate human beings. This is the 'active legacy' that Dada (formed by artistic political refugees ensconced in Zurich in 1916) has left; which seeks out real human meaning in an ever ongoing 'under-minding' cultural-social-anti-authoritarian-political-discourse; it is something that can be perceived by the more politically active aspects of a resurgent contemporary Aboriginal art movement as this continent's *indigenous* reconfirm an authentic cultural voice that White Australia had murderously attempted to silence from 1788; and from the cultural resistance to such stark oppression has come a vital exploration of fresh artistic impulses that can only but enhance Aboriginal culture. In the post-cold war years of Lithuania in the late 1990s one could visit the Museum of Contemporary Art in the capital Vilnius to see thought provoking installation art that was genuinely dealing with a society's transition from an oppressive state-controlled perception of reality to a liberal democratic viewpoint while still having to possibly deal with the social pitfalls of global capitalism. It seemed that for much of Eastern Europe having been occupied by Russia for forty years World War Two only ended when the Soviet Union was finally dissolved). One may also appreciate the art of South African artist William Kentridge which is imbued with an underlying instinctive moral legitimacy by way of poetically critiquing apartheid in a sometimes ambiguous, contradictory manner with a sense of uncertainty which one feels the Dadaists would have appreciated; an art sometimes filled with juxtapositions of uncaring privilege and needless human suffering that perhaps echoes a politically brutal and calamitous period criminally filled by state sanctioned '*...accidental judgments, casual slaughters, Of deaths put on by cunning and forced cause...*' – to quote Hamlet. This former theatre and television director - whose parents were lawyers that had defended victims of his country's oppressive racist system - has been compared to Goya and Kathe Kollwitz; yet Kentridge's prints, animation films, sculptures and his other art are much more than just 'political treatises' being also imbued with a modernist aesthetic that can be 'read' on many levels that – as already intimated - would have certainly been positively appreciated by the Dadaists. In progressive modern Chinese art as exemplified by the high profile Chinese artist Ai Weiwei one sees art practitioners bravely willing to be critical of the 'new China'

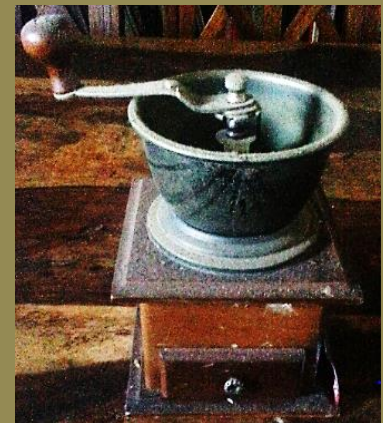
which despite much material prosperity for those who have been able to socially access into this ever growing economy there is still a corrosive mixture of capitalist zeal, authoritarian rule and political corruption which still thwarts the social progress of many hundreds of millions of Chinese people as well as the many ethnic minorities such as the Tibetans and Uyghurs. It is extraordinary to see Ai Weiwei reference Marcel Duchamp's controversial urinal readymade with his social media photo of lego pieces in a toilet and R.MUTT written on the toilet seat. It is heartening to see that many people throughout the world are willing to donate lego pieces to Ai Weiwei after his order for lego parts was rejected by this globally famous Danish company - who has just established a major office in Shanghai. Community in resistant action so that it will still remain possible for Ai Weiwei to produce a lego art piece - which will now be far more interesting with the 'people's input' - to correspond with the NGV's Andy Warhol exhibition. As for Marcel Duchamp and his use of the clandestine pseudonym R.MUTT 1917 for his urinal titled Fountain – it was rejected for a New York exhibition by the Society of Independent Artists. Marcel Duchamp was on the committee (which had no idea that Fountain was by him) and who promptly resigned as the exhibition was meant to democratically allow any art piece to be exhibited. Fountain was judged (when there was supposed to be no judgment) not to be 'real art'; an infantile, immature 'joke' not 'worthy' of the exhibition.

Culture does involve bringing people together as communicative beings so as to be involved in meaningful discourse to overcome any societal barriers that otherwise may make people feel apart as separate 'atoms'. One must always ask if a work of art is serving a shamanistic role which provides both contemporary explanation as well as provide far reaching insight to this world or is simply serving a mundane decorative role; (which in itself is not an issue unless such 'beautiful art' is trumped up as a philosophical masterpiece for the purposes of monetary gain. One could find equivalent 'insight' in the rows of colour charts at a discount paint shop; yet one can find human meaning in the paint shop too and Duchamp would probably remind of us and through his re-contextualization of found objects and of our relationship between them and the rest of our world there is the foundation of what it does mean to be a human being and the purpose of what the discovery of such meaning is to our 'mortal selves'. God as a 'spiritual reference' within us can exist as a mystery in much the same way there is the primal mystery of Duchamp's whirring bicycle wheel which endlessly fascinated Duchamp like the flickering flames in a fireplace - whirls of flaming light - like the centrifugal whirring perfect circles of light in Dante's perfect Paradise:

*'Dante cast his eyes on a Celestial Wheel of a perfect cosmos. To meditate on the very essence of life in a state of ecstatic harmony that goes beyond all human meaning, to a wordless divine realm of heartfelt fulfilment. Duchamp spun a bicycle wheel to obtain the same sense of tranquility that Dante achieved with his Celestial Rose.'*¹⁶

Fire lighting up the darkness has fascinated humanity since the dawn of time; light overcoming darkness - a hopeful 'primitive' universal symbol in which humanity can still imaginatively trust to 'fire' a still spontaneous, instinctive human soul. To take note of Hamlet again: *"There are more things in Heaven and Earth, Horatio, than are dreamt of in your philosophy."* 'Amen.'

NN. November. 2015.



Marcel Duchamp's Bicycle Wheel with stool. Sydney Biennale 2008.AGNSW In lieu of Duchamp's chocolate grinder – a coffee one

NOTES

1. 1. Page 128. *DUTCH PAINTING* by R.H. WILENSKI. FABER AND FABER. First printed in MCMXXIX.
2. Page 103. *Ways of Seeing* by John Berger. BBC and Penguin Books. First printed in 1972.
3. *Still Life Painting in the Baroque* at: <http://www.students.sbc.edu/albanis03/Stilllife.htm>
4. Ibid
5. *What is Art* by Leo Tolstoy. Search on the web for What is Art by Leo Tolstoy or try:
<http://www.csulb.edu/~jvancamp/361r14.html> (See also further down at the end after Further Reading other remarks about 'cultural habit'). *
6. Page 95-96. *DUTCH PAINTING* by R.H. WILENSKI. FABER AND FABER. First printed in MCMXXIX.
7. Page 98. Ibid.
8. Page 112. *Ways of Seeing* by John Berger. BBC and Penguin Books. First printed in 1972.
9. Page 6. *Breaking the Rules. The Printed Face of the European Avant Garde 1900-1937*. Edited by Stephen Bury. THE British Library. 2007.
10. Ibid.
11. Along with photomontage there would also be the MERZ collage work of Kurt Schwitters in Hanover .He was not part of Berlin Dada or was invited to join this cabal but in many ways his art has provided one of the lingering cultural legacies of the Dada spirit.
12. Source lost but this quote attributed to Marcel Duchamp possibly in *The Complete Works of Marcel Duchamp* by Arturo Schwarz. Delano Greenidge Editions New York. 2000.
13. Page 6. *DADA AND SURREALISM* by Dawn Ades. Thames and Hudson. 1974.
14. Page 43. Golding, John. *Duchamp The Bride Stripped Bare by her Bachelors, Even* Art in Context. Edited by John Fleming and Hugh Honour. Allen Lane The Penguin Press. 1973.
15. *Mary Adam Review of This is Modern Art* by Matthew Collings.mht at:
<http://maryadamart.com/collings.htm>
16. A quote from artist's manuscript. *LISA*.

FURTHER READING

There are many books and websites on Marcel Duchamp and DADA which the reader may wish to consider and even Wikipedia - which is as source of knowledge that would have bemused Marcel Duchamp - is a quick source for most topics mentioned here such as looking at Cartesian theory, installation art through to *vanitas*. The reader may also wish to consider googling websites dealing with modern cultural theory and popular culture. A book I briefly perused that maybe of interest to the reader is *Art & Discontent Theory at the Millenium* by Thomas McEvelley. DOCUMENTEXT. McPherson and Company. 1991. However an excellent easily comprehensible introduction to Marcel Duchamp is the following website: *Making Sense of Marcel Duchamp* at: <http://www.understandingduchamp.com/>

Also here are a handful of books that maybe considered as a starting point to looking at Marcel Duchamp and DADA as well as considering modernism etcetera. (I do not repeat the books mentioned in the Notes but they are also very much worth a look; and just for something a bit left-of-centre Joseph Heller's novel *Picture This* is also worth a look which deals with Rembrandt's time and the Ancient Greeks; it is an excellent read. Furthermore, onpedia on the web has an adequate article Marcel Duchamp and it is also worth having a look at the Philadelphia's Museum of Art website which houses Marcel Duchamp's *The Large Glass*. One may also consider Robert Rauschenberg whose extraordinary Combines in particular somewhat remind one of Schwitters's MERZ. Bailly, Jean-Christophe. *DUCHAMP*. Fernand Hazan Paris. 1984.

Biggsby, C.W.E. Dada and Surrealism. The Critical Idiom. General Editor: John D. Jump. Methuen & Co Ltd. 1972.

Blythe S.A & Powers, E.D. Looking at DADA. Museum of Modern Art. 2006.

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Dickerman, Leah with essays by Brigid Doherty; Dorothea Dietrich; Sabine T. Kriebel; Michael R. Taylor; Janine Mileaf. Matthew S. Witkovsky. DADA Zurich. Berlin. Hannover. Cologne. New York. Paris. National Gallery of Art. Washington. 2006.

Gablik Suzi. Has Modernism Failed? Thames and Hudson. 1984.

Lemone, Serge DADA. Art Dada. 1987.

Mink, Janis. DUCHAMP. Taschen. www.taschen.com

MARCEL DUCHAMP. The Museum of Modern Art (MOMA) and Philadelphia Museum of Art. Edited by Anne D'Harnoncourt and Kynaston McShine. 1975.

Artifacts dada exhibition catalogue. The University of Iowa Museum of Art. Iowa City Iowa. March 31-May 7. 1978.

Rethinking Popular Culture Contemporary Perspectives in Cultural Studies. Chandra Mukerji and Michael Schudson, editors. University of California Press. July 1991.

The Story of Painting 1. Michael Cavendish Ltd Learning System. Cultural Heritage. 1970.

Segy, Ladislav. African Sculpture Dover Publications. NY. 1958. The comment is made about African art confirming Cubist multi=perspective experimentation.

*A last minute addition: Rasula Jed. DESTRUCTION WAS MY BEATRICE. Dada and the Unmaking of the Twentieth Century. Basic Books. New York. 2015. It makes some very interesting remarks about Kurt Schwitters's MERZ as a reaction against cultural habit which well explains what I have instinctively sensed. What is written below is a somewhat awkward paraphrasing – with some personal commentary thrown in - of some of what Jed Rasula writes so eloquently about on pages 106-107 in the MERZ chapter:

'...Schwitters was building on the work of the Dadaists by creating art that didn't fit in with artistic convention. Jed Rasula notes that that there was an enforced 'preordained message or emotional stimulus' that led to a predictable way a spectator responded to art or literature such as 'how extraordinary', 'a delight for the eyes', 'what great skill' etcetera. This could even occur to a politically charged Grosz image with remarks like 'how appalling' so Dada art although trying to be unconventional or different could still on the whole be recognized as an art form. However, Schwitters as an artist worked beyond in a realm of 'sensory experiment' that went beyond routine expectations and to overcome one's 'perceptual habit'. As the Russian theorist Viktor Shlovsky has implied that the role of art should not dull the senses but perhaps to slow down or even disrupt one's perception so as to actually reawaken human sense so as to eventually achieve a 'full perceptual potential.' Digestible images are not desirable, for art should actually visually stimulate the mind (not just decorate it). Schwitters recognized that instead of just imitating the world which seemed to be all that conventional art was doing his collage 'Merz' was offering pieces the world itself as art. All of the world including its 'rough edges' was welcome as art without the usual controlling narrow 'high art' ideological and conceptual filters....

POWER PLANT. Installation Art. Chinese Gardens. Sydney Festival. 2011.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M49Zmg70qKw&sns=tw>

Black Fez Poetry Nights

In the spirit of the Cabaret Voltaire was the Black Fez Poetry Nights in Sydney during the 90s which were anarchic in organization allowing for the spontaneity of the human spirit.

<http://nicholasnicolaetchings.synthasite.com/black-fez.php>



Curiosity Café. Balmain.

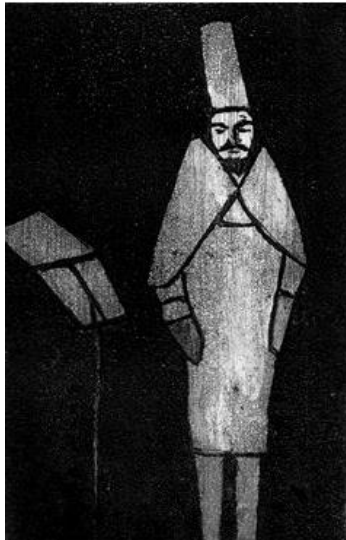


Found musicians at Glebe where the minds behind the Black Fez would go for pizza.

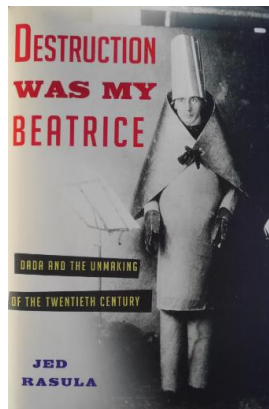


The main founders of the Black Fez Poetry Nights Doug as well as Fenwick performing at various cafes. Original Black Fez Poetry Night invitation by the artist.

DADA LENIN



Dada Lenin
B&W. 6" X 4" aquatint. zinc plate.



Comrade Plato
B&W. 6" X 4" aquatint. zinc plate.

Apparently Lenin lived in the same street as the Cabaret Voltaire so there may have been a good chance that he went to it while in exile. I have mockingly dressed up Lenin in the same absurdist 'magic bishop' outfit worn by Hugo Ball as seen in the book cover. This etching was done after reading A People's Tragedy. The Russian Revolution 1891-1924. Written by Orlano Figes. While after reading Plato's Republic I have done this etching which has a bust of Plato on a Social Realist statue to formulate a 'Great Leader.' Although many of Plato's philosophical ideas are to be appreciated what one may wish to question is his political notion of social engineering which borders on modern day fascism. I have also intimated to Plato's Republic in an earlier etching Neo-Platonic Form which references the Stolen Generation.

Dada's negative critique of the West questioned its apparent illusionary notions of morality in a time of war which a century later - having to face renewed existential threats – there is still a cultural need to critique the West's official response to any ongoing terror in a post-Cold War world when it is perceived that understood moral values possibly appear to also be facing an undemocratic erosion.

the new bottom line for our democracy

SECRET
RENDITION

an R rating war

t wis t e d i c o
h a f m u a e e n l
is r o a r u n s y
R L O O A I
M A Y R G P C
O L P N R H

an apologist talks about *realpolitik*

THERE
ARE
ALWAYS

ATR
OCIT
IES

torture school

someone in the out these
administration has torture
been teaching and techniqu
authorising these es
people how to carry

the white house spokesman says sorry half a dozen times with pictures

S O R R Y
S O R R Y
S O R R Y
S O R R Y
S O R R Y
S O R R Y

NAURU WHAT WAS TAKEN AND WHAT WAS GIVEN by Kelvin Skewes. This found object is a magazine photo essay which looks at Nauru's colonial history as a phosphate mine and as offshore detention gulag.



kelvinskewes.com is a web address with full photo essay and next to photo of front cover of the magazine are barcode links to relevant articles and other items about Nauru provided by the magazine. It should be possible to scan the links with appropriate smartphone app to access links.

WHEN DEMOCRACY HAS BECOME AN OPERATIONAL MATTER: the government has refused to comment on the refugee boat that was turned back by the navy just off christmas island no one knows what has happened to those who were on it they have simply 'disappeared' without media trace over the far horizon out of sight out of mind out of morality

In contemporary terms one also wonders about the economic rise of Moloch with the ideological emergence of neoliberalism.

the leading brand in the world today

MOLOCH!

An Epitaph to Some Old Men

Out from the rain
Come the reflections of a happy moment
Masterpieces of some past distant age
Now all useless
For the delusions of old men
Came the moral judgements and their friends But
none could they release them
So the party went on without them
And in the gutter did they lie
Death was upon them
As indifference went by
There was no more living left
All going to die in a nightmare scene
The world ignoring all their pleas
Does this make sense?
And in remembrance to these old men
Was this awful alcoholic stench

A homeless man's response to the new society. Central Railway Station. Sydney.



Vilnius, 'Victory' 1988.

IN THIS FADED TRAVEL SHOT THE ONLY
THING MISSING FROM THE STALINIST
STATUE WHICH WILL TURN IT INTO
CAPITALIST REALISM ART IS AN OLIGOPY
SUPERMARKET SHOPPING BAG.



supermarket zombie society

no matter what we do we
have to end up at the
supermarket to continue

the gold standard for society

GROUPTHINK

the end of the world

the world was gone and everyone laughed
they killed their mothers while death was dying in the dark
scream...

so much for the answer
it was never set free
and parading down the backyard of their brains
was the godot of their dreams
no sense was there in thee?

irrational man
smiles blindly in the sand
engulfs him

and parading down the backyards of their brains
was the godot of their dreams
the result was life in another existence

and someone asked again:
was this the 'creation' of their impersonality?
the sun rose and nothing left for breakfast

the only law that empires respect

LAW 303



A Surrealist Poem

Down from the sky come the four legged arms
To land in a field of yellow machine guns.
Hour by hour come the four legged arms...
To praise and worship the cerebrum of a Broken Doll
Which stands silhouetted upon a prole
Only to be hidden by the epochal second of an echoing atom bomb.
And so the four legged arms come and go
Still praising the cerebrum of a Broken Doll...
But up above the planet Venus
The moon still hides the sun
Chained by a reference to the plectrums drum
And so the four legged arms come and go
Still praising the cerebrum of a Broken Doll
Come...
For in the seventh second of a disgusting pun
Emerges a hand without no existence
To simply become a pestilence...
And so the four legged arms come and go
Still praising the cerebrum of a Broken Doll
From which are cast a thousand knives
From which are cast into the rock like surface
Of some unclarifiable, unusable thing...
Alas the embodiment
Alas... ..the four legged arms which come and go
WHIZ! BANG! POP! goes the cerebrum of a Broken Doll
Oh...
Alas...the four legged arms and a broken doll
A baby crying from her soul
What of machine guns?
What of the BOMB?
AND WHAT OF ECLIPSES UNFINISHED BY GOD?
And so...a baby crying from her soul Unfinished? POEM
And so the four legged arms still come and go
Still praising the cerebrum of a Broken Doll.



paper bag

**DADA SAYS
FOUND
OBJECTS ARE
EVERYWHERE!**



FOUND OBJECTS - as well as a last word on the etching process.

In the 'deadly serious light-hearted' humane spirit of Marcel Duchamp (& perhaps also Kurt Schwitter's MERZ) the following is a series of some of the found objects that one has come across in the discourse of everyday life as well as other observations which have been included on the 'chance' realization that the exhibition is to be coincidentally held 100 years and - in the same month - since the first performance of the Dadaists at the Cabaret Voltaire in Zurich. The production and random acquisition of found objects fuels the free market capitalist economy which is akin to a cargo cult. It should also be mentioned that much of the subject matter chosen for the etchings are 'found objects' which have been discovered in the Australian bush and elsewhere. One should not have to entertain the notion that a found object need always be a human made thing although in many of the images this is what is presented. It should also be noted that the etchings also involve an element of chance in their creation in the manner that a high level of randomness is allowed to have an opportunity to be included in the production of the final image. With this in mind one feels the best advice ever given about etching was over twenty five years ago by a wizened printmaker who had a café art shop in Bangalow (now in Brunswick Heads although he may be gone now...) who said he would just leave the etching plate in the acid bath and go off and have a beer before bothering to check on it. Thus involving a very human element in his artwork rather than following a strict technocrat procedure fraught in turning one into a mere 'human machine'. One would hope that spontaneity, chance, instinct and human emotion still remain as basic motivations and 'skills' for art - alongside analytical thought, rather than 'submerged' by it. Furthermore one considers the greatest skill in etching is actually patience.



The found object of this orange typewriter which was used to type up the original exhibition list.



Brunswick Heads bus shelter mural found object.



Found Annandale domestic space with art deco leadlight.



Wheels Of Fate.

Video clip of moving wheels.
<http://nicholasnicolaetchings.synthasite.com/videos.php>



A bedpan in lieu of Duchamp's urinal. Surry Hills market shirts and finally a Surry Hills market bra



Surry Hills markets retro kitchenware. Along with a dress and a now rather antique film projector.



Surry Hills markets. Surry Hills 'robot' and a red rocket in Surry Hills.

ROZELLE MARKETS



gypsy fortune teller tent



market researchers

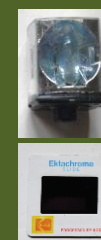


photo album



busking band

Domestic objects such as a 50s juice squeezer fully operated by hand; an antique Chinese juice squeezer; bakelite teapot; plate; a vinyl records backyard totem; retro salt shakers and lastly Gumby. Retro tables, film camera & old payphone.



old flash cube & slide



FOUND OBJECT PARTICULARS

(A) FOUND OBJECT: JAPANESE TEAPOT



1. JAPANESE TEA POT

Origin: Japan.

Period: circa mid-Twentieth Century.

Materials: ceramic.

Artist: unknown

Height: 8 cm

Diameter: 8 cm

History: Local Market Purchase.

(Surry Hills; Sydney).

Functional.

Private Collection of the Artist.

(B) FOUND OBJECT: HAND GERMAN COFFEE MAKER



2. HAND COFFEE FILTER SET

Origin: Germany.

Period: circa 1950s Twentieth Century.

Materials: ceramic.

Artist: unknown

a. Coffee Filter Height: 9 cm

b. Coffee Filter Diameter: 12.5 cm

c. Filter Holder Height: 16 cm

d. Filter Holder Depth: 8 cm

History: Local Market Purchase.

(Rozelle. Sydney).

Functional.

Private Collection of the Artist.

FOUND OBJECT RAMBA



FOUND OBJECT: Cougar Man

Additional Notes: Cougar Man every woman's dream hunk.



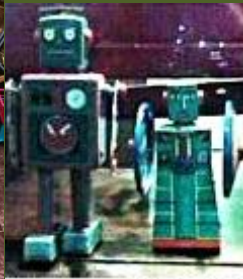
FOUND OBJECT: Easter Island

ADDITIONAL NOTES: Commonly referred to as Cockatoo Island. (Sydney).



FOUND OBJECT: Marrickville R.S.L.

Additional Notes: interior eating area.



Zig Zag bbq & joyride cup. Reverse Garbage. Shop window robots. Gold party microphone. Chair at Dave Warner concert. Django Bar. Marrickville. Dave Warner at the Petersham Bowling Club
https://youtu.be/rXI-g_i3X58

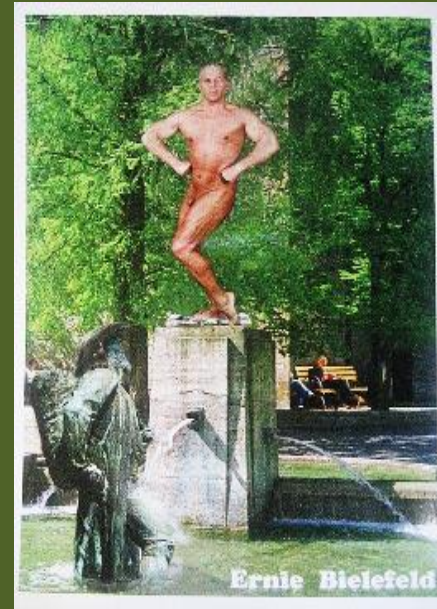
A place that doesn't rely on pokies. A great cultural space. & BOMBORA!

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_E-CVdaZCEk&feature=youtu.be



Various Home brew beer labels by foremost contemporary artist 'Ica'. Mishka with talking toy bear. Toast Jesus . Leichhardt footpath. Wooden sculptures. Glebe. Dante with scarf. The Forum Leichhardt. Passiona. Bottle.

BIELEFELD SATURDAY MARKET which is in north-west Germany points one to the human universality of markets as one could feel as if at the Surry Hills market but simply on a much larger scale. Apparently, it is simply a matter of contributing a baked cake to have a stall at this market.



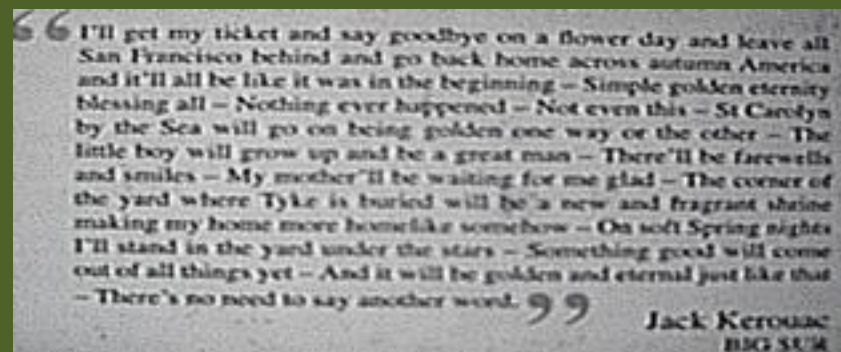
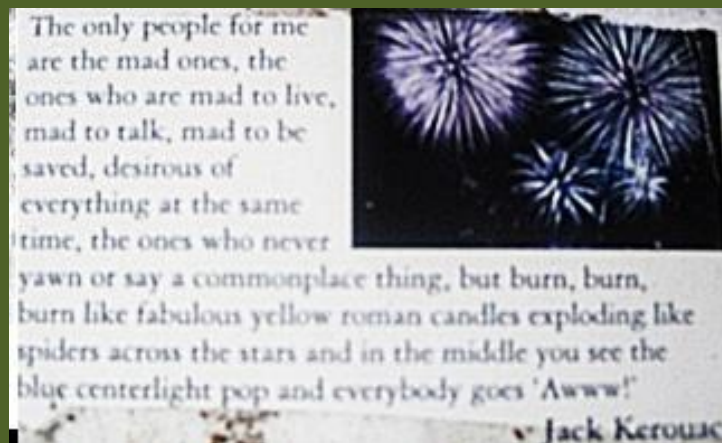
Ernie who in Bielefeld is famed for riding around on his bicycle totally naked. Surely a Dadaist performing artist extraordinaire.



A circus van and beside this photo a Bielefeld flea market. There was a community of people who lived in these circus vans used for housing on a former carpark. It should be noted that Bielefeld is the sister city of Esteli in Nicaragua. It is also quite an artistic place. On another note one came across a memorial to holocaust victims outside the main station. A nation in conscious reconciliation with its dark past.

Wonderland on Alice Bookshop & Jack Kerouac business cards

I accidentally came across a bookshop on Alice St between Enmore and Newtown on a rainy Saturday afternoon and discovered that the proprietor - who also worked as a part time truckdriver – was a big fan of Jack Kerouac. He had the writings of Jack Keroauc on his business cards.



FOUND CULTURAL SPACE



Sappho Bookshop Monthly Poetry Night
Found poetry CD. Found book at Sapphos .

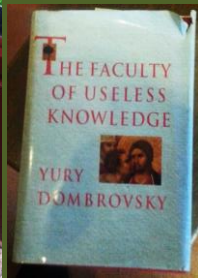
Last Books St.Peters
lastbooks.com.au



Nicholson Museum Twitter
profile and objects in



The TAP GALLERY
also works as a
community space
<http://www.tapgallery.net>



Gertrude &
Alice café
bookstore.
Bondi.



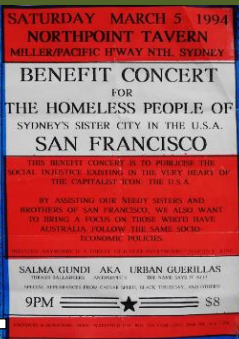
Apostrophes
'café card



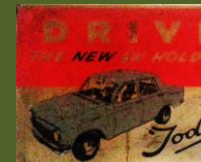
Da Vinci flight
suburban lion



A cultural icon



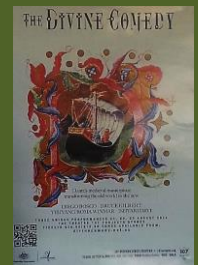
Posters, awnings &
EH tin plate.



Twittering Bird
cage art by Angel
Place concert hall.



Verge Gallery found ZIN cards
& paraphernalia where 'found
film' about oil was seen There
Will Be Blood (2007) put on by
the 'Earlwood Farm'
<http://earlwoodfarm.com/>
Verge Gallery. Sydney Uni:
<http://verge-gallery.net/>



WREATH FOR
REFUGEES. Sunday June
16. 2013. Cenotaph. Sydney.
(For World Refugees Day).
See VIDEOS webpage
<http://nicholsonmuseum.com.au/videos.php>

There is the Annual Sydney Uni Book Sale at the Great Hall & next to Sapphos is Gleebooks which often holds talks, book launches upstairs.
https://www.google.com.au/search?q=gleebooks&aq=chrome_69157j015.7489j0j4&sourceid=chrome&es_sm=93&ie=UTF-8

fair trade
east timor
bookmark



FOUND OBJECTS OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY & ANTIQUITIES

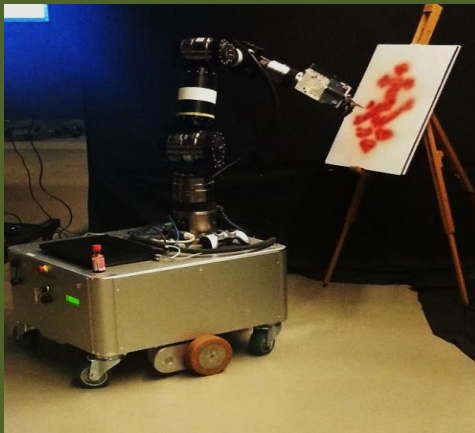


Left: A laptop - handy for stage coaches.

Top: Central America map (Rozelle markets) ; Middle: Australian map without Canberra (Gdansk): bottom: Middle Eastern donkey feeding bag.



FOUND OBJECTS OF THE TWENTY FIRST CENTURY



Social media #PeaceforParis symbol after tragic terrorist attacks against many innocents. Friday Nov 13, 2015.



See through garbage bins which belie a growing lack of security transparency of the governments that introduce them. Followed By UTS Mechatronics drawing machine 'playing' at a concert of the Australian Piano Quartet.

<http://www.uts.edu.au/partners-and-community/initiatives/australia-piano-quartet/australia-piano-quartet-uts-ensemble>

The last image is a screenshot of a Reuters tweet showing abandoned lifejackets used by desperate refugees on Lesbos.

FOUND CULTURAL/HISTORICAL/SPIRITUAL OBJECTS



(a) Anzac Soldier (b) Speeds Milk Bar. 1960s to 1980s community tile. Newtown. (c) Jose Marti. Central Railway. (d) Christmas Kanga with moving blinking lights which it was noted a local white rabbit would watch nightly as if watching television – a metaphor for our modern culture?



(e) Mexican sugar coffins (f) Ganesha statue. AGNSW.(g) 2 SER FM icon (h)abandoned shopping trolley (i) ageing picture of gorilla mother and child (j) telephone for smartphone. (k) female 19th century bolivian guerrilla resistance fighter central railway . (l) retro cup.



Shopping Trolley Performers. Outside Customs House. Circular Quay. Sydney.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xifmzbemtgs&feature=youtu.be>



Demonstration for the 43 disappeared Mexican Ayotzinapa students. Outside Customs House. Circular Quay. Sydney.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CO31fEXPhMw&feature=youtu.be>



Contemporary archaeology: the refuse of found objects on the streets of a consumer society awaiting landfill; a wasteful civilization that ironically relies on the utilitarian function of its artefacts to be short lived so as to maintain a long-term existence; it is a form of human habitation that is proving to be a global, harmful burden to nature.

BREATH by Samuel Beckett

Curtain.

1. Faint light on stage littered with miscellaneous rubbish. Hold for about five seconds.
2. Faint brief cry and immediately inspiration and slow increase of light together reaching maximum together in about ten seconds. Silence and hold about five seconds.
3. Expiration and slow decrease of light together reaching minimum together (light as in I) in about ten seconds and immediately cry as before. Silence and hold for about five seconds.

Rubbish. No verticals, all scattered and lying.

Cry. Instant of recorded vagitus. Important that two cries be identical, switching on and off strictly synchronized light and breath.

Breath. Amplified recording.

Maximum light. Not bright. If 0 = dark and 10 = bright, light should move from about 3 to 6 and back.

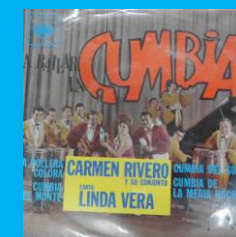
See: *Abated Drama: Samuel Beckett's Unbated "Breath"*. William Hutchings.

ariel.ariesynergiesprairies.ca/l/index.php/ariel/article/viewFile/1967/1924

* URL: www.samuel-beckett.net/breath.htm



Found music. WINTER STATION. Union Hotel.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2TRynBGCw4Y>



The world is a Pandora's Box of found objects such as the home-made television antenna produced by the artist's father. An El Salvador wooden cross and a photo of an Indian light festival with a found frame acquired by the artist at a fundraising benefit for an Indian school at TAP GALLERY. CUMBIA from Mexico City, 1986. A party piñata a table with records and 3D glasses that also remind one of glasses for solar eclipses. Throw away plastic fork. The world has an endless variety of found objects. Including dancing robots:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=90LOWQfgQzs



The Eugee Goosens Hall at the ABC Centre Ultimo is another found cultural space. One can go to free Sunday concerts by the publicly funded Classic FM. It is important that public finding remain for the arts and for the survival and expansion of the cultural public space. Consider Baroque music by Latitude 37 which could be seen for free that's true s cultural freedom.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x_kpAZoi

TRAVEL MEMENTOES



DRY FLOWER LEADLIGHT

Origin: Brackley, England.

Period: c. Second Half of the Twentieth Century.

Materials: dry flower; amber glass; silver lead.

Artist: Produced by a U.S. American military nurse who attended the Stonehenge Summer Solstice Rock Festival, 1982.

Height: 13cm.

Width: 4cm.

Thickness: 50mm.

History: Overseas Gift High Sentimental/Memory Value; Iconoclastic.

Additional Notes: Unique object, travel souvenir.

Private Collection.



RESTING BUDDHIST STATUETTE

Origin: Vietnam.

Period: c. Twentieth Century.

Materials: stone

Artist: Unknown.

Height: 11 cm.

History: Overseas Market Purchase
received locally as gift. High
Sentimental Value. Decorative.

Additional Notes: Unusual Pose.
Private Collection.



GUATEMALAN WALLET

Origin: Lake Atitlan. Guatemala
Period: c. Second Half of the Twentieth Century.
Materials: cotton, dye.
Artist: Unknown; considered to be a Mayan indigenous person living in the Lake Atitlan area.
Height: 12cm.
Length: 21cm.
History: Overseas Market Purchase.
Sentimental/Memory Value. Functional.
Private Collection.



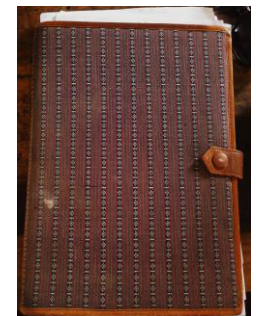
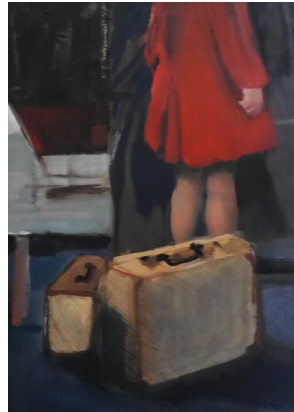
SMOKING PIPE

Origin: Vilnius, Lithuania.
Period: c. Second half of the Twentieth Century.
Materials: wood, plastic.
Artist: Unknown.
Length: 16cm
Bowl diameter: 3cm
History: Overseas Gift. High Sentimental/Memory Value. Functional.
Additional Notes: Despite what Surrealist artist Rene Magritte would infer - this object is a pipe.
Private Collection of the artist.



Travel items postscript

- (a) An antique wooden suitcase that was acquired in an antique bric & brac goods shop in Vilnius Lithuania.
- (b) An original QANTAS AIRWAYS bag in good pristine condition acquired at Paddington Saturday markets. Sydney.
- (c) Refugee suitcases. Estonian House.
- (d) Hopes for a New Land. Francine Courteille. Oil on canvas. 2004. Found painting with suitcase at Refugees: Artists Impressions exhibition. St. George Regional Museum. Hurstville. Sydney.
- (e) Cyprus donkey in a glass ball.
- (f) Red fez. Morocco. (A gift to the artist).
- (g) Guatemalan blanket.
- (h) Laotian folder: by Vientiane women's group.



johnny cash and the innate meaningfulness of each individual life in a thousand worlds

As I sifted through hundreds of old photos in dusty cardboard boxes I sanguinely noted how quite a few of my favourite ones have been ruined or lost. I realised how these half-forgotten, faded paper images had taken on a nostalgic 'archival quality'; 'visual soundings' of the past which I had been motivated to review after it dawned on me at the Apostrophe Café exhibition the autobiographical nature of my printmaking. Johnny Cash's video clip of singing Hurt came to mind: a montage of images of his life juxtaposed to lyrics brooding on the very transience of it. Johnny Cash's rendition makes me, at least, aware of the innate meaningfulness of each individual life. Memory is lost with death. Thus, the human impulse to capture with symbols (written and visual language) any ephemeral moment before it disappears; to picture the present as it invariably becomes the past so it will be recounted in a future yet to come and for generations yet to be born; the unborn to know the dead. Life is in between: a firework that briefly lights up a vast dark sky. I recall what a friend said to me at a Darlington rooftop New Years Eve party as the fireworks lit up the Kings Cross skyline: "There are a thousand worlds." Within the many tiny fireballs within each immense floating fireball I could imagine a separate life vignette; yet all to be enveloped by the night.

The artist as shaman in the cave re-presents an afterlife 'other-world' that will not fade; whose immortal qualities need to be mirrored in this mortal world so life can continue seamlessly when the human spirit 'ascends' from a physical self-contained perimeter (re: the human body) that will dissolve; to an ever constant non-material boundless ether: eternalness. Much present-day art may no longer serve an overtly religious function but there is still an inherent desire that continues to link us to our Neolithic forebears: to defy time; with the simple press of a mobile camera button a fleeting present is crystallized. Life as 'readymade'; every human being a 'found object'; the ordinary transfixed as extra-ordinary.

With the mass availability of instant digital photo technology and of mass digital high speed visual transportation systems such as the internet it is apparent that the mass urge to record 'life' has enormously magnified; each individual can immediately be the 'historian' of oneself; each digital 'icon' can become an additional fragment of a new ever-mutating paradoxical 'eternal present' re: that endless electronic window: cyberspace; what is particular and private can be contextualised as a microcosm of the universal and public; (such is the perceived commonality of human experience). Art democratized. Each life does count; Johnny Cash asks what has he become? Old; wise - but then dust; yet, I can watch every stage of his life through images on a virtual desktop that will not fade; sustained only by light: that 'other-world' on the cave wall is now

readily available anywhere on the globe on every computer and television screen; each life can be viewed and appreciated; just as art on a societal level exists to form (and reform) and preserve cultural memory every individual memory also has the opportunity to transcend death; our unlimited human imagination continually multiplying; as well as limitlessly able to record in multiple ways what each generation sees what it diversely means to be human for all time – lest we forget.



start postcards

As already previously presented ordinary amateur photos as portable electronic images on gaudy blue desktop screens satisfying an ongoing human need to present a recognizable world filled with a sentimental valued personal significance; in much the same way Dutch artists from centuries past painted so called ordinary 'low life' domestic scenes that proved popular to an ever widening audience. Everyday life is ubiquitously duplicated in equivalent fashion in the twenty-first century on computer screens from laptops to smart televisions to smartphones of which the latter are evermore in the possession of an ever accelerating large percentage of the global population; even becoming an essential survival tool to refugees. Extraordinary, unique events are also eternally replayed on websites and television sets that can lead to greater public access to knowledge and information (so as to provide added depth to social history) but also to greater propaganda; paradoxically the overplaying of raw human events may also lead to an emptying of human meaning and even to a numbing process of dehumanization that can only reinforce an inward insular indifference to human suffering rather than to embracing an inclusive outward sense of universal humanity that can lead to compassion.



FOUND OBJECT:
portable supermarket
television radio.



start

let love in on tha arafura sea.rtf



IMAGE 1_jacqui and gerard.jpg.



IMAGE 2_gary, lisa and david.jpg.



IMAGE 3_candace and tim.jpg.



IMAGE 4_nic.jpg.



IMAGE 5_julie.jpg.



IMAGE 6_nada and kristina

start

sunglasses.rtf



IMAGE 1_suzie and sadi 'luka' jpg.

start

sunglasses.rtf



start

V STRONG woman.rtf.



IMAGE_1_EXTERMINATE!.jpg



IMAGE2_EXTERMINATE!.jpg



IMAGE_3_EXTERMINATE!.jpg

start

darlek attack. rtf.



IMAGE_1_anya1.jpg.



IMAGE_2_anya2.jpg.

start

russian blue kitten flight check.rtf.



start

russian play about a soldier who outwits satan/indonesian puppets used ,



image 1 cricket bat slide guitar



image 2 cricket ball and bat totem painted in an aboriginal style by a young afghan refugee male esl student.

start

cricket bats as cultural objects. rtf.



image one man on the moon



image two playground space rocket

start

american future. rtf.



start

roomies stall/roomies exhibition/art initiative for marginalised.rtf.



start

HIDDEN. Rookwood Cemetery. 2015. rtf.



start

suburban soccer.rtf



start

meaning in the twenty first century: ipl. rtf



start

sculpture in the park maundrell park petersham. rtf.

Catalogue List

For a more convenient return to the main catalogue with etchings, appendix & details about the etching process please if you wish go via the following webpage link:

<http://nicholasnicolaetchings.synthasite.com/leichhardt-2016.php>

Thank You.

CATALOGUE LIST

1. **Dance of the Dead.** Wolli Creek
6"X 4". B&W. drypoint. copperplate.
2. **Well of Life.** Cronulla.
6"X4". B&W. drypoint. copperplate.
3. **Rockface.** Coledale.
6"X 4". B&W. drypoint. copperplate.
4. **Coledale. Early Morning.** Coledale.
6"X 4". B&W. drypoint. copperplate.
5. **Angel Rock.** Gordons Bay.
6"X4". B&W. drypoint. copperplate.
6. **Heart of the Universe.** Gordons Bay.
B&W. 6"X4" sugarlift. aquatint. zinc plate.
7. **Archangel.** Wolli Creek.
B&W. 6"X4" sugarlift. aquatint. zinc plate.
8. **Mangrove Souls.** (Awaiting to go to Paradise).
Cooks River.
B&W. 6"X 4" sugarlift. aquatint. zinc plate.
9. **The Last Judgement.** (Apocalypse). Wolli
B&W. 6"X 4" sugarlift. aquatint. zinc plate.
10. **Fallen Angels.** Wolli Creek.
B&W. 6"X 4" sugarlift. aquatint. zinc plate.
11. **River of Lethe.** (River scene). Cooks River.
20 cm X 5cm. B&W. plastic plate.
12. **Mangrove .** Cooks River.
10cm X 7cm. sepia. aquatint. zinc plate
13. **Reeds.** Cooks River.
10cm X 7cm. B&W. aquatint. zinc plate.
14. **Reeds.** Cooks River.
10cm X 7cm. sepia. aquatint. zinc plate.
15. **Reeds.** Cooks River.
10cm X 7cm. sepia. aquatint. zinc plate.
16. **Reeds.** Cooks River.
10cm X 7cm. sepia. aquatint. zinc plate.
17. **The River is Calm.** Cooks River.
18. **Riverbend.** Cooks River.
10cm X 7cm. B&W. zinc plate.
19. **Rhythm of Life.** Cooks River.
B&W. aquatint.sugarlift. zinc plate
20. **Under the Shade.** Cooks River.
10cm X 7cm. B&W. aquatint. zinc plate.
21. **Hades.** Cooks River.
10cm X 7cm. B&W. aquatint. zinc plate.
22. **Mangrove Rhythm.** Cooks River.
B&W. 6"X 4" sugarlift. aquatint. zinc plate.
23. **It Will Pass...** Cooks River.
6"X 4". B&W. copperplate.
24. **Beulah.** Cooks River.
6"X 4". B&W. drypoint. copperplate.
25. **Old Mangrove.** Cooks River.
B&W. 6"X 6" sugarlift. aquatint. zinc plate.
26. **Supernova.** Wolli Creek.
6"X 4". B&W. copperplate.
27. **Zeus's Cave.** (The Eye of God). Wolli Creek.
B&W. 6"X 4" sugarlift. aquatint. zinc plate.
28. **Nebula.** Gordons Bay.
6"X 4". B&W. aquatint. sugarlift. zinc plate.
29. **Emergence of Life.** Gordons Bay.
6"X 4". B&W. aquatint. sugarlift. zinc plate
30. **Emergence of Life.** Gordons Bay.
6"X 4". B&W. aquatint. sugarlift. zinc plate
31. **Ravelling of Life.** Gordons Bay.
6"X 4". B&W. aquatint. sugarlift. zinc plate.
32. **Cycle of Time.** Gordons Bay.
6"X 4". B&W. aquatint. sugarlift. zinc plate.
33. **Cosmos. (Corpuscles of the Universe).** Gordons Bay.
6"X 4". B&W. aquatint. sugarlift. copperplate.
34. **Rings of Time.** Gordon Bay.
6"X 4". B&W. drypoint. copperplate.
35. **Emergence of Life.** Gordons Bay.
6"X 4". B&W. aquatint. sugarlift. zinc plate.
36. **Dark Matter Nebula.** Gordons Bay.
6"X 4". B&W. aquatint. sugarlift. zinc plate.
37. **Ghost Nebula.** Gordons Bay.
6"X 4". sepia. aquatint. sugarlift. zinc plate.
38. **That tree, the Universe.** Gordons Bay.
6"X 4". sepia. aquatint. sugarlift. zinc plate.

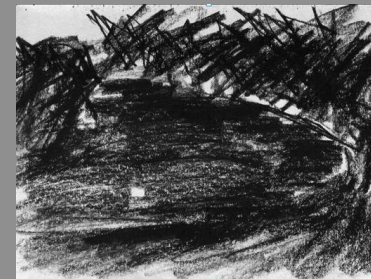


Circle of Hell.
(After an image of Dante's *Inferno* by Boticelli).
B&W. 10cm X 7.5cm.sugarlift. zinc plate.



39. **Our Canopy, the Universe.** Blackwattle Bay Tree. Glebe.
B&W. 6"X4" sugarlift. aquatint. zinc plate.
40. **Ulysses & the Sirens at Bronte.**
6"X4". B&W. drypoint. copperplate.
41. **Angel Wings.** Bondi.
(The original Sculpture-by-the-Sea)
6"X4". B&W.drypoint. copperplate.
42. **Fallen Angel.** Shelley Beach. Cronulla.
6"X4". B&W. drypoint.copperplate.
43. **Fallen Angel.** Shelley Beach. Cronulla.
6"X4". B&W. drypoint. copperplate.
44. **The Birth of Zeus.** Nielson Park.
B&W. 6"X4" sugarlift.aquatint.zinc plate.
45. **Galaxies Swirling Towards a Black Hole.'** Middle Head. Sydney Harbour.
8" X 6". B&W. aquatint. sugarlift. zinc plate.
46. **Three Fates.** Little Marley. Royal National Park.
6"X4". sepia. aquatint. sugarlift. zinc plate.
47. **Falling Angel.** Bobbin Head National Park.
B&W. 6"X4" sugarlift. aquatint. zinc plate.
48. **Cosmic Currents.** Botany Bay National Park.
B&W. 6"X4" sugarlift. aquatint. zinc plate.
49. **Tree Womb.** Hawkesbury River.
sepia.6"X4"sugarlift.aquatint. zinc plate.
50. **Tree Womb.** Hawkesbury River.
sepia. 6"X4"sugarlift.aquatint. zinc plate.
51. **Tree Womb.** Hawkesbury River.
sepia. 6"X4"sugarlift.aquatint. zinc plate.
52. **Hydra.** Botany Bay National Park.
B&W. 6"X4" sugarlift. aquatint. zinc plate.
53. **Tree Life Rhythm Flow.** Hawkesbury River.
6" X 4". sugarlift. aquatint. zinc plate.
54. **Misguided Angel.** Hawkesbury River.
6" X 4". B & W. sugarlift. aquatint. zinc plate.
55. **Burnt Angel.** Hawkesbury River.
6"X4" B&W/sepia. sugarlift. aquatint. zinc plate.
56. **Burnt Angel.** Hawkesbury River.
6"X4" B&W/sepia. sugarlift. aquatint. zinc plate.
57. **Burnt Angel.** Hawkesbury River.
6"X4" B&W/sepia. sugarlift. aquatint. zinc plate.

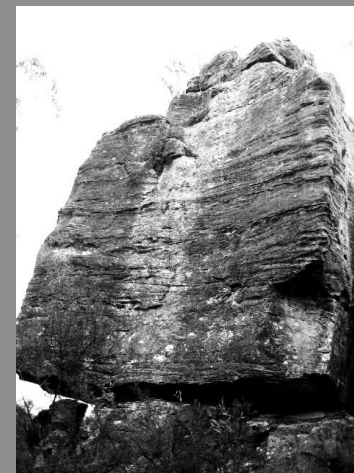
58. **Fallen Tree Galaxy.** Mougamarra Reserve. Ku-ring-ai Chase National Park. Hawkesbury River.
6"X4" B&W/sepia. sugarlift. aquatint. zinc plate.
59. **Trojan Wall.** Mougamurra Reserve. Hawkesbury River.
6" X 4". sepia. aquatint. sugarlift. spit bite. zinc plate.
60. **Tree Couplet.'** Minnamorra Rainforest. Jamberoo.
6" X 4". B&W. aquatint. sugarlift. zinc plate.
61. **Note of the Universe.** Royal National Park.
7" X 2". B&W. aquatint. sugarlift. zinc plate.
62. **Evolution of the Universe.** Royal National Park.
6" X 4". B&W. aquatint. sugarlift. zinc plate.
63. **Flow of Time.** Blue Mountains.
B& W. 10cm X 7cm.aquatint. sugarlift. zinc plate.
64. **Flow of Time.** Blue Mountains.
B& W. 10cm X 7cm.aquatint. sugarlift. zinc plate.
65. **Flow of Time.** Blue Mountains.
66. **Dance of the Pinnacles.** Western Australia.
B& W. 10cm X 7cm.aquatint. sugarlift. zinc plate.
67. **Black Galaxy.** Rock pool. Bundeena. Royal National Park
B&W. 6"X4" sugarlift. aquatint. zinc plate.
68. **Eagle Rock.** Curramoors. Royal National Park. Mt. Purgatory.
B& W. 6" X 4". drypoint. copperplate.
69. **Curramoors.** Royal National Park.
B& W. 6" X 4". drypoint. sugarlift.aquitint. zinc plate.
70. **Symphony of the Universe.** Botany Bay National Park.
10" X 6". aquatint. sugarlift. zinc plate.
71. **Road to Mullumbimby.**
8" X 6". B&W. drypoint. zinc plate.
72. **White Ox.** Dorriggo.
sepia on cream. 9"X 10".
73. **Misty Bluffs.** Coledale.
6"X4". B&W. drypoint. copperplate.
74. **Conception of Life.** Wombarra
6"X4". sepia. drypoint. aquatint. sugarlift, copperplate.
75. **Forming Galaxies.** Bulli Beach.
B&W. 6"X4" sugarlift.aquatint.zinc plate.
76. **Pillar of Time.** Minnamurra Rainforest. Jamberoo.
9.5" X 3". B&W. aquatint.sugarlift. zinc plate.
77. **Time Totem.** Minnamurra Rainforest. Jamberoo.
8" X 4". sepia. aquatint. sugarlift. zinc plate.



cooks river

78. **Eternity.** Minnamorra Rainforest. Jamberoo.
4" X 2". *sepia. aquatint. sugarlift. zinc plate.*
79. **Pillar of Time.** Minnamurra Rainforest. Jamberoo
6" X 4". B&W. *aquatint. sugarlift. copperplate.*
80. **Wisdom & Youth.** Minnamurra Rainforest. Jamberoo.
B&W. 6" X 4" *sugarlift. aquatint. zinc plate.*
81. **Minnamurra Falls.** Jamberoo.
6" X 4". B&W. *drypoint. zinc plate.*
82. **Eroding Rocks.** Jervis Bay.
6" X 4". B&W. *aquatint. sugarlift. zinc plate*
83. **Eroding Rocks.** Jervis Bay.
6" X 4". B&W. *aquatint. sugarlift. zinc plate.*
84. **Sunset. Greenpatch. Jervis Bay.**
Black on Grey. 8" X 4" drypoint. zinc plate.
85. **Minnamurra Tree.** Jamberoo.
6" X 7". B&W. *zinc plate.*
86. **Apostles of the Universe.**
Great Ocean Road. Victoria.
6" X 4". B&W. *drypoint. zinc plate.*
87. **Alpha.** (Central Australian diptych)
6" X 4". *sepia. sugarlift. aquatint. zinc plate.*
88. **Omega.**
6" X 4". B&W. *sugarlift. aquatint. zinc plate.*
89. **Alpha.** (Central Australian diptych)
6" X 4". *sepia. sugarlift. aquatint. zinc plate.*
90. **Omega.**
6" X 4". B&W. *sugarlift. aquatint. zinc plate.*
91. **Alpha.** (Central Australian diptych)
6" X 4". *sepia. sugarlift. aquatint. zinc plate.*
92. **Omega.**
6" X 4". B&W. *sugarlift. aquatint. zinc plate.*
93. **Embryo of the Universe.** Central Australia.
6" X 4". B&W. *sugarlift. aquatint. zinc plate.*
94. **Pendulum of Time.** Central Australia.
6" X 4". B&W. *sugarlift. aquatint. zinc plate.*
95. **Mother & Child.** Central Australia.
6" X 4". B&W. *sugarlift. aquatint. zinc plate.*
96. **Conception of the Universe with Cosmic Egg.**
Central Australia.
8" X 6". B&W. *aquatint. sugarlift. zinc plate.*

99. **this god the river & this river the cosmos.**
12" X 4". B&W. *aquatint. sugarlift. Two copperplates.*
100. **This River, A Strong Brown God'.** Cooks River.
(After T.S. Eliot's The Four Quartets).
Four square etching plates all adding up for an image that is 29 cm X 8 cm. sepia. aquatint. sugarlift. drypoint.
101. **White Matter, Dark Matter.**
40 cm X 15 cm. *sepia/B&W. aquatint. sugarlift.*
Two zinc plates.
102. **River Rhythm.'** (Cooks River. Sydney).
B&W. 20 cm X 30 cm. *aquatint. sugarlift. zinc plate*
103. **Currents of the Universe.'**
sepia. 13" X 23". cm. drypoint. aquatint. sugarlift. zinc plate.
104. **Parallel Universe.'**
sepia/B&W. 11" X 4". aquatint. sugarlift. Two zinc plates,
105. **Cosmic Flow.**
sepia. 12" X 8". aquatint. sugarlift. copperplate.
106. **Cosmic Tracers.**
9.5" X 7". B&W. *aquatint. sugarlift. zinc plate.*
107. **Reed Universe.**
11" X 8". B&W. *aquatint. sugarlift. zinc plate.*
108. **Fabric of the Universe.**
8" X 8". B&W. *aquatint. sugarlift. zinc plate.*
109. **Black Poles.**
8" X 8". B&W. *aquatint. sugarlift. zinc plate.*
110. **Resurrection.**
8" X 8". B&W. *aquatint. sugarlift. zinc plate.*
111. **Dark Matter Stems of the Universe. Wolli Creek.**
8" X 6". *sepia. sugarlift. aquatint. zinc plate.*
112. **Resurrection Fallen Tree.** Royal National Park.
B&W. 15cm X 22cm. *aquatint. sugarlift. copperplate.*
113. **Multiverse.**
B&W. 14cm X 19 cm. *aquatint. sugarlift. zinc plate.*
114. **Eroding Universe.**
6" X 4". *sepia. aquatint. copper plate.*
115. **Eroding Universe.**
10" X 6". B7W. *aquatint. copper plate.*
116. **Accelerating Universe.**
10" X 6". B&W. *aquatint. copperplate.*



Mt. Sinai

117. **Nirvana.** Indonesia. Java.
sepia on cream. 6" X 4". drypoint. copperplate.
118. **The Creation of the World.** Ubud. Bali.
sepia on cream. 6" X 4". drypoint. copperplate.
119. **Tree of Life.** Java. Indonesia.
sepia on cream paper. 6" X 4". drypoint. copperplate
120. **Pennies from Heaven.** Flores. Indonesia
sepia on cream. 6" X 4". drypoint. copperplate.
121. **Adam and Eve.** Rinca. Indonesia.
sepia on cream. 6" X 4". drypoint. copperplate.
122. **Anu Krakatau is Angry.** Sumatra. Indonesia
sepia on cream. 6" X 4". drypoint. copperplate.
123. **Borobudur.** Java.
B&W. 8" X 5". drypoint. zinc plate.
124. **Kite flying.** Sydney Park. St. Peters.
B&W. 11.5" X 8". zinc plate
125. **Suburban Dream.**
B & W. 8" X 6". drypoint. zinc plate.
126. **Dancing Puppets. Kings Cross Street Festival'.
(Sydney Voodoo).**
B&W. 6" X 4". zinc plate.
127. **Speed's Milk Bar.** Earlwood.
B&W. 5.5" X 8.5" drypoint. zinc plate.
128. **Black Deaths in Custody March.** Eveleigh St. Redfern
B&W. 6" X 4". drypoint. zinc plate.
129. **Zorba the Greek.** Llewellyn. St. Balmain.
'After Matisse.' B&W. 8" X 6". drypoint. zinc plate.
130. **With Water & Courage.**
B&W. 8" X 6". drypoint. zinc plate.
131. **The Swimmer.**
B & W. 4" X 2". drypoint. zinc plate.
132. **An Angel At My Park.** Burwood
Black on grey paper. 6" X 4". drypoint. zinc plate.
133. **Resurrection Night.'** Earlwood.
B&W. 6" X 4". drypoint. zinc plate.
134. **Herr Baker and Frau Bishop on the way to Stalingrad
to give Herr Nicola his two t-shirts.**
Commemorative etching to the 50th anniversary of the
Battle of Stalingrad. 1943-1993.
sepia on white. 8" X 10". drypoint. zinc plate.

135. **Indian Magicians.** Brunswick Heads.
B&W. 10" X 4.5". zinc plate.
136. **The Angel.** Moscow. Russia.
sepia on cream paper. 6" X 4" copperplate .
137. **Manjustri. Bodhivista of Transcendental Wisdom'. Tibetan**
sepia on cream paper. 6" X 4". copperplate.
138. **Achilles.**
B&W. 10cm X 7cm. drypoint. aquatint. sugarlift. zinc plate.
140. **Hector.**
1" X 2" B&W. drypoint. copperplate.
141. **Eurydice Mourns.**
B&W. 4" X 5". drypoint. zinc plate.
142. **Flute Player.** Kaunas. Lithuania.
B&W. 5cm X 8cm. drypoint. copperplate.
143. **The Human Spirit Rests.**
B&W. 4" X 2.5". drypoint. copperplate.
144. **Neo-Platonic Form.**
B&W 6" X 3.5" aquatint. drypoint. zinc plate.
145. **Elite Restaurant.** Taree
B&W. 8" X 6". drypoint. zinc plate.
146. **Backgammon.**
*(After Matisse)
B&W. 3" X 4". drypoint. zinc plate.*
147. **The Melbourne Cup was raced on the Mexican Day of the Dead.**
B&W. 8" X 5". drypoint. zinc plate.
148. **Shiva the Cricketer.** S.C.G. To commemorate India's innings of 7-705
(declared) at the S.C.G. New Year's Test. January. 2004.
B & W. 9" X 5". drypoint. copperplate.
149. **Luna Park.** Bayon. (Ankor Wat). Cambodia.
B&W. 8" X 6". drypoint. zinc plate.
150. **Berlin Orpheus.** Berlin. Germany.
black on grey. 3" X 8.5" drypoint. aquatint. zinc plate.
151. **Russian Shaman.** Ethnographic Museum. St. Petersburg. Russia.
B&W. 6" X 4" drypoint. plastic plate.
152. **Prayer Wheels.** Xining. Outer Tibet. Ghansu province. China.
B&W. 2X4". drypoint. copperplate.
153. **Winter Trees.** Druskininkai Lithuania.
sepia on cream paper. 6" X 4". copperplate.
154. **Nicaraguan Boy.** Nicaragua.
B&W. 8" X 6". drypoint. zinc plate.

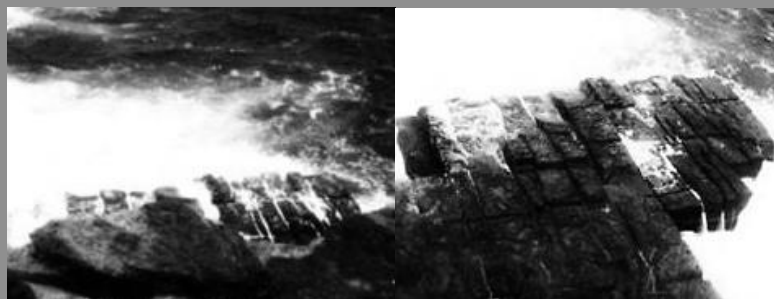


'Eve' at the Garden of Eden known as Seven Mile Beach. Gerroa.

- 155. **Voodoo Cross.** Havana, Cuba.
B&W. 6"X7". drypoint. zinc plate.
- 156. **Guatemalan Couple.** Guatemala City, Guatemala. 1985.
B&W. 4.5" X 3". drypoint. zinc plate.
- 157. **Fiesta.** El Salvador.
Black on grey paper. drypoint. zinc. 5" X 6". (after Diego Rivera)
- 158. **Schoolhouse. Solentiname.** Lake Managua. Nicaragua.
B&W. 10" X 6.5". drypoint. zinc plate.
- 159. **Fire-eater.** Palenque, Mexico.
B&W. 3"X4.5". drypoint. zinc plate.
- 160. **Festival. Bluefields.** Nicaragua. Mosquito Coast. St. Jeromes Day. October 1992.
B & W. 8" X 6". drypoint. zinc plate.



All of the mentioned prints can be found in the main galleries. It should be noted that any etching which appears more than once (e.g. as part of a diptych or tryptich series) it is only its first appearance which is recorded in the catalogue list. The five Cooks River photographs which are also in the exhibition do not appear in the above list as it is restricted to the etchings; likewise for various etchings that are not in the main galleries but appear in the appendix for various reasons they too are not mentioned in the catalogue list which is restricted to the main galleries.



the gap



blue mountains sunrise



<http://www.wires.org.au/>

A final word to nature: what would this possum (who has been known to wink at any human observer) make of our view of the natural world by which we think we are the centre of all things...?



MOMA. NY. April.1986. William Blake's grave. Londond. 8 Feb. 1989. Hermitage.St.Petersburg. 6 Oct.1998. Apostrophes Café. Nov 24. 2005.