

Imants Tillers

WHITE ABORIGINES

MATT'S GALLERY

23rd OCTOBER – 30th OCTOBER 1983



WHITE ABORIGINES 1983 Acrylic Paint on 100 Canvas Boards 254 × 381 cm

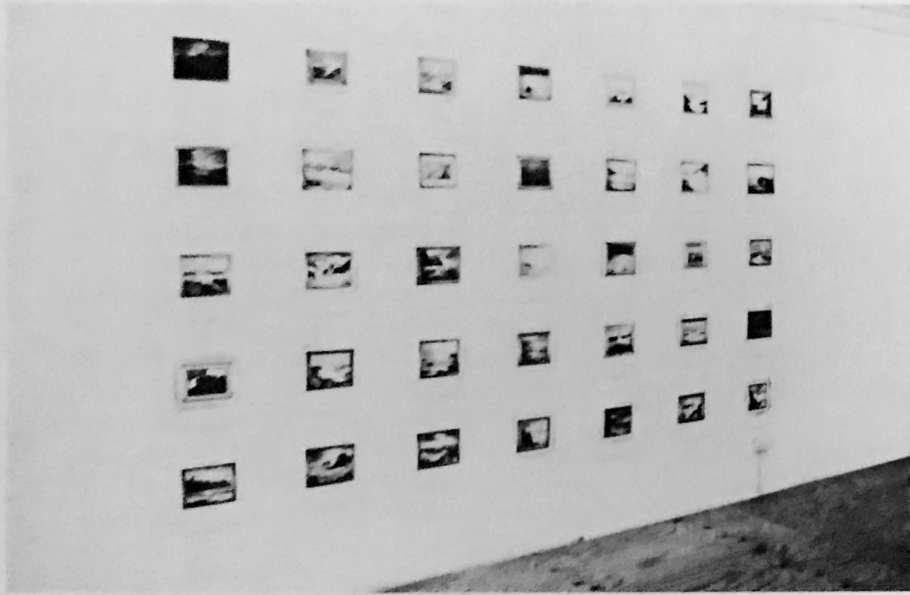
WHITE ABORIGINES

Text by
Paul Taylor

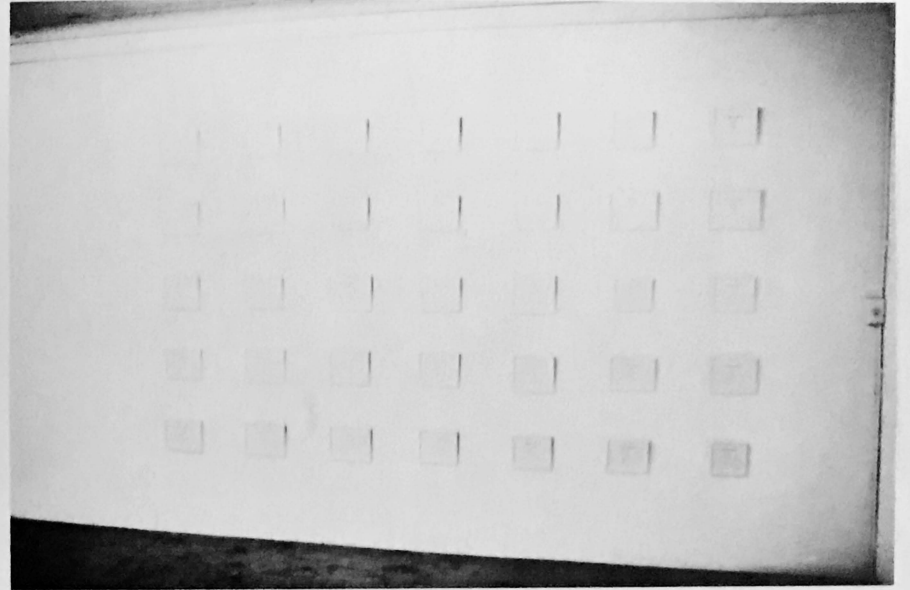
IMANTS TILLERS was one of the artists from Australia in last year's *Documenta 7*. Two of his paintings, made only a few years apart, instance two varieties of contemporary Australian art and, furthermore, dramatise the crisis of faith which is recently upon all advanced art.

The first painting, *52 Displacements* (1979-80), is a visual document of its making. Executed over fifty-two weeks (one picture per week, each accompanied by a framed text), each is a seascape lifted from a book of academic paintings of the sea and then repainted on a little square of canvas. The texts do not really explain the images but refer to and document them; they are a kind of image about the image. *52 Displacements* is a work steeped in reference: to the sea (nature), to the book of original paintings (representation), to itself (modernism), to the privileged set of signifiers which make realist art possible and, finally, to all the media that interrelate and cross-refer between all of these. Its *modus operandi* is that of encoding and hence the work appears to us as a last attempt at a conceptual modernism. This is evident in the uses to which parody and quotation are put, added to which is perhaps a wry reference to the Northern European romanticism in which Tillers, despite his heritage, cannot participate. *52 Displacements* is a fragmented picture which describes the world as a body of artificial pre-determined images. It suggests the world's mediation by images can be decoded and displaced by the artist whose role, in turn, becomes that of a re-presenter. The artist would be, in fact, an idealised spectator, a critic.

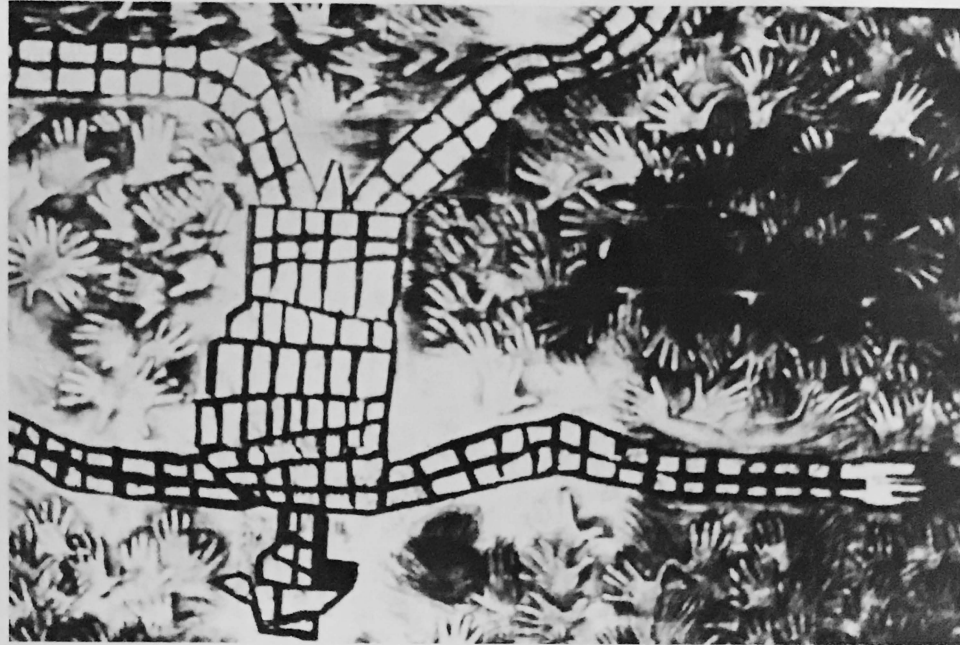
How different, then, is the painting of 1983, *White Aborigines*, which, while almost identical in method to *52 Displacements*, is radically different in destination. This painting is also painted on little canvases although now they are the readymade ones available at art suppliers which parade their reified status as paintings-to-be. This work is also fragmented, but without any temporal or spatial logic. Insofar as its two large figures seem to be dancing as they are being blown apart, they can be called the performers of the painting. They dominate the picture while inside them other figures pose and scramble; beneath them lies another, overpainted, image and below them is an obscure German text. This juxtaposition is not purposeful but is oriented towards good design. These images too are purloined yet their combination scarcely addresses the phenomenal world or its encoding in dominant modes of visual or literary representation. *White Aborigines* instead participates in the anti-Rationalism of the present and the desiring relations between the 'subjectivity' of the artist and the arbitrary depositing of images onto the unlimited field of the painting. The picture is painted with both brushes and fingers, and whole handprints are evident on a few boards. It is a painting which is evidently closer to the sensibility of the artist, to his denial of his subjectivity other than one constituted from without, from layered images filtered through mechanical reproduction. Yet Tillers' work is not a critique of such reproduction . . . far from it. It is more of a submission to it, a defeat, a fiction arrived at through a fortuitous and chaotic sequence of events. In this art, 'criticism' is replaced by fiction and the artist becomes an orchestrator of imagery. He willingly irrationalises his *oeuvre* and depletes the idealised perspective of artist and spectator alike. Art has arrived at a situation of absolute reality.



52 DISPLACEMENTS 1979-80 (35 part installation)



52 DISPLACEMENTS 1979-80 (35 part installation)



ISLAND OF THE DEAD 1982 Charcoal on 100 Canvas Boards 250 × 381 cm. (Detail)

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