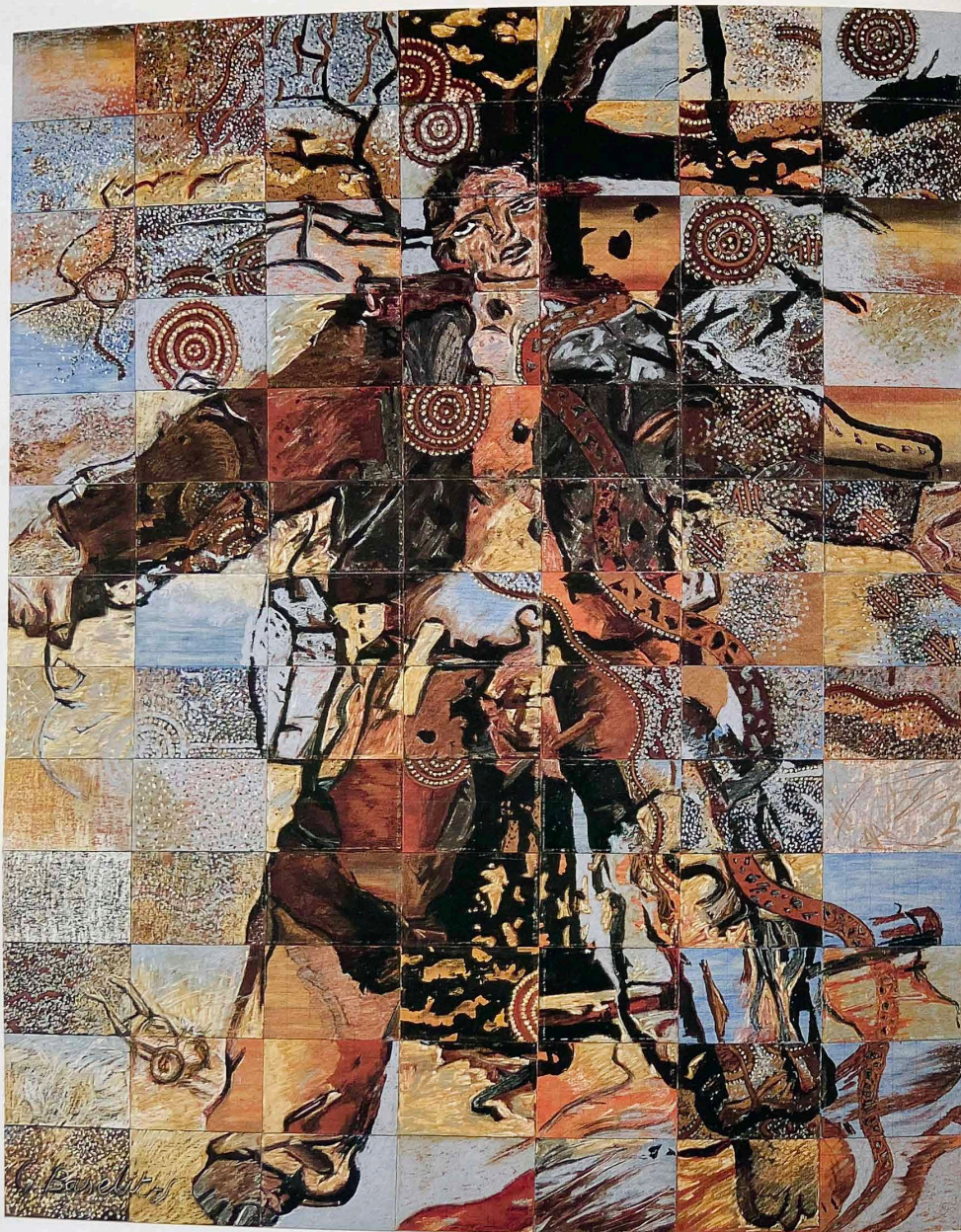


Imants Tillers



THE NINE SHOTS. 1985

# Imants Tillers

Venice Biennale 1986  
Australia

The Visual Arts Board of the Australia Council, Sydney  
and  
Art Gallery Board of South Australia, Adelaide



*Copies* Not infrequently, one encounters copies of important people; and, as with paintings, most people prefer the copy to the original.

- Friedrich Nietzsche

*Title: TOWARDS FRANCIS PICABIA*

*Just as Stephane Mallarmé was once maligned I am afraid that this too might be happening in our time to Giorgio di Chirico. Now as then this is ultimately not important at all. Despite foolish murmurings about such trivial matters as time, place and style within an enormous body of work, the artist pursues his intention.*

*After the great metaphysical discoveries, an even more magnificent one of a personal order, that is, what to do with these discoveries. He had almost no choice. Evidently, a rigorous epistemological study was required. So, unlike Marcel Duchamp, for example, he undertook such an investigation but completely hidden from view. In what he has been doing, there is almost no process which can be seen. Luckily I had some suspicions for a long time. Then recently I had a chance to meet him.*

*When we spoke about the so called scandalous dates, he replied: "Why do people care so much about numbers? I can put any number I wish. Can't people distinguish between imitation and variation? Many artists make variations but when I make extremely exact variations people complain." (Nearly totally exact in his variations which on such occasions hide a process of discovery which he internalizes).*

*When asked by M. Gins, "What is missing from this world?" he replied immediately: "Morality, kindness and a sense of justice."*

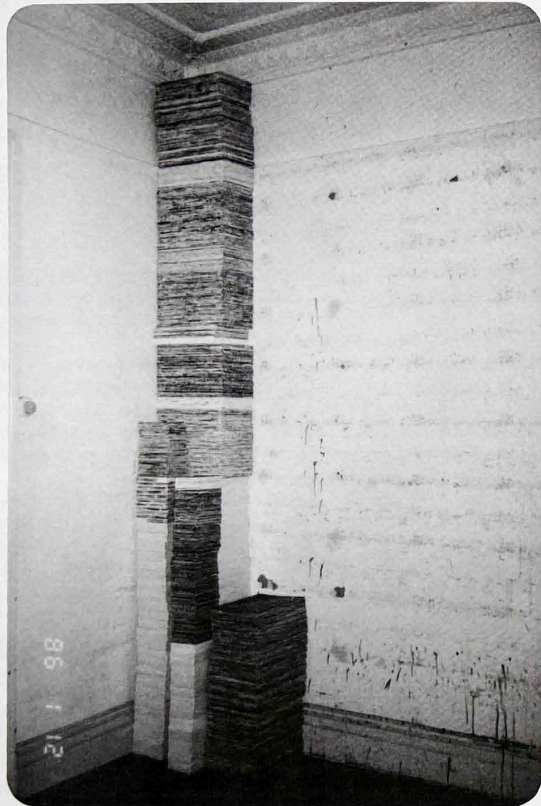
*Regarding the quality of layered transparency in his work, the important discovery he has written was "no longer dried pigment, but colored matter."*

*During our conversation, he emphasized:*

*"I hate lemons, but I love lemon pies."*

*These are only a few examples to roughly spell out a hidden process. This might be thought of as a private language in public terms. Giorgio di Chirico might paint anything supposedly easily recognizable to all but it is intended into his secret process not out to the viewer. Oddly this is completely a one-man show or act, nameless and unrecognizable at this time, but in the near future we will call it an effort toward the construction of a model of being, mind.*

- Arakawa

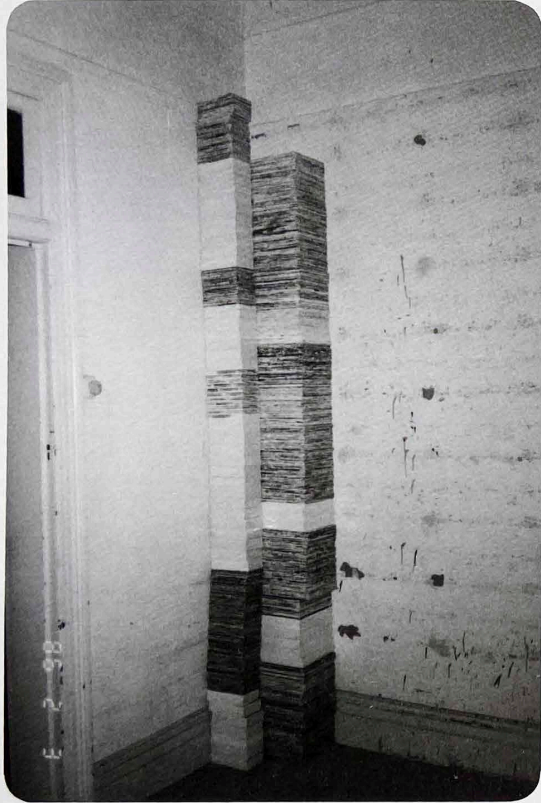


STACKS.  
Stacks of paintings, studio, Mosman 1986



STACKS.  
Stacks of paintings, studio, Mosman 1986

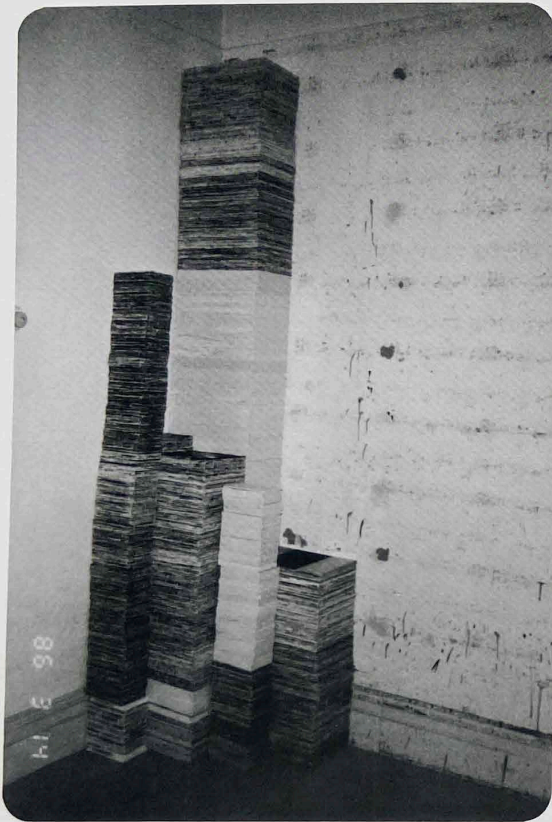




STACKS.  
Stacks of paintings, studio, Mosman 1986



STACKS.  
Stacks of paintings, studio, Mosman 1986



STACKS.  
Stacks of paintings, studio, Mosman 1986

DANIEL THOMAS

### SITES OF POWER

*The Studio at Sirius Cove.* Since 1981 Imants Tillers has lived and worked in a house on a rain-forested cliff, looking down on Sirius Cove, a sub-tropical fiord of the inland sea which is Sydney Harbour. On the opposite bank is Sydney's zoo; the soft roar of jaguars and lions reaches the studio through palms and vines and humid air. The house looks down from a spacious, lived-in verandah to the site of an artists' camp where in the 1890s Arthur Streeton painted, in aesthetic Japanese format, glittering images of sun-glare, now amongst the most prized icons in Australia's national culture. Stone steps lead up to the street and to the suburban shops of Mosman where in the 1920s Margaret Preston, Australia's most celebrated modernist artist, painted Australian native flowers. Jennifer Slatyer, Tillers's wife, once an archaeologist, in 1981 opened in Paddington (the art-dealer's district of Sydney) a shop called Modern Wildflowers to sell the kind of flowers Preston once painted. The Tillers house is high-ceilinged with white rooms, the bedroom afloat with clouds of white mosquito-netting. They have the ground floor apartment. Upstairs lives another family, a film-maker, a museum education-officer, their baby daughter Lara, whose rooms have identical uses to the Tillers's rooms below. In 1985 Lara's nursery was mirrored by that set up for the Tillers baby daughter Isidore ("gift of the moon", having been born at the full moon, but also a name found in the Australian National Gallery which displays Man Ray's *Enigma of Isidore Ducasse*). Tillers works at a table at a window facing into the green bamboo cliffside and the stone steps up to the street. At the table he searches through magazines and books, selects images (now mostly reproductions of high-art paintings), draws a fine grid over the torn-out reproductions so that each tiny grid section can be enlarged by copying onto a standard 10 by 15 inch (25 x 38 cm) canvas board. The copying medium is acrylic paint, oilstick and occasionally oil paint; the implement was often the artist's own fingers but they became calloused and have given way to oilstick and some use of brushes. Before the move to Sirius Cove on the north shore of Sydney Harbour, Tillers had a more conventional studio, shared with Adrian Hall, in a western suburb a short distance from his previous home. There access for conventional stretched canvases of large size was easy. At Sirius Cove the access by steep steps and the smaller studio, within the house, led to the method of painting on small canvas boards, easily stored in stacks in the studio, easily carried up the steps to his wife's wildflower van or a taxi (Tillers does not drive; he travels to the city centre by Harbour ferry), easily airfreighted to other cities, easily installed onto a large wall for an exhibition - when, magically, a paint-stained stack of numbered boards is transformed into a painting - and easily decomposed into a stack when the exhibition is over. In the other rooms are a few small works by artist friends, George Baldessin, Tony Clark, Tim Johnson. Visitors to the house are relatively few; his dealer, critics, exhibition curators. In 1986 visitors included Aldo Giurgola, Pierre Restany with the widow of Yves Klein; Gil Silverman, Detroit collector of avant-garde drawings.



*The Camps.* Tillers is daily reminded of the erased artists' camp where in the 1890s, on the shore below his own verandah, Australian painters produced now-famous landscapes. In 1976 he spent seven days in Latvia, his parents' native land, and in his father's village outside Riga the most potent monument was a camp preserved as a reminder of Hitler's internment there of Russians.

Tillers's generation includes many Australians born in the 1940s and 1950s in displaced-persons' camps. Nearing age 40, they seek out their birthplaces and in 1986 on his way home to Melbourne, Sam Schoenbaum, revisiting a now-erased camp for Polish Jews near Graz, Austria, learnt from the village's burgomaster that he was the first person known to have sought out that particular birthplace.

Tillers remembers that at the age of 11 or 12 his own greatest excitements were the rare, difficult journeys across Sydney Harbour from his southern suburb of Sylvania, to the far distant northern suburb of Palm Beach, then by ferry to Ku-ring-gai Chase, then by cliff path to a disused army camp on Commodore Heights, where in the early 1940s Sydney had watched for Japanese invaders; there in the early 1960s the young schoolboys had holiday camps.

*The Picnic with Paik: The kookaburra, the nightingale, the Queen.* Commodore Heights is now an erased army camp. It is a beautified picnic spot. Casuarina trees are placed to frame views of rocky islands which resemble lions. The Japanese business community of Sydney goes there for outdoor landscape painting in oils, sitting at small easels. When I lived in Sydney I took overseas visitors there for picnics, starting with a 1973 picnic for Gilbert & George; one could always count on kookaburras, a peculiarly Australian bird with a raucous laugh for which it is also named the Laughing Jackass, but the peculiarly Australian koala bear was not always found grazing in the treetops and so for Gilbert & George's picnic (which was being televised) I rented one to ensure that the picnic was perfect. Among others for whom I gave picnics were Keith Sonnier, William Wegman, Mel Bochner, Sol LeWitt, Daniel Spoerri, Nigel Hall, David Troostwyk, Henry Geldzahler, Les Levine, Anna Canepa. It was John Kaldor's *Art Projects*, beginning with Christo, which had started the stream of artist visitors to Sydney. Only Gilbert & George got the rented koala bear but Nam June Paik, who had installed his *Video Garden* at the Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney, in 1976, got the most perfect picnic of them all.

Paik and I sat on the clifftop facing Lion Island framed by casuarinas and started on strawberries, wine, mangoes and brie. An old man with a brown-paper bag, and a woman worried about him, came from a busload of pensioners and sat near us, facing the bus from which they had come.

A kookaburra squawked at Paik's prosciutto.

The old man said to the old woman "Is that a nightingale?"

She said "What's a nightingale?"

He said "It's a bird they have in England and in poetry."

She said "What's poetry and where's England?"

He said "England is where the Queen comes from. Poetry is noble words and thoughts".

The visiting artists' picnics on the clifftop at Commodore Heights, picnics which had made the place a sacred site of the 1970s, were always followed by visits to nearby ancient rock-engravings, sacred sites for Australian Aborigines. Tillers learnt of these picnics in 1986 and the military camp, and the camp for children at play then became a full site of power for him - perhaps equal to the *Wrapped Coast*, another cliff, south of Sydney, where he had worked with Christo in 1969 and where the then young architecture student was first gripped by a feeling for the immense, wonderful power contained in works of art.



VIVIEN JOHNSON

## THE ART OF DECOLONISATION \*

One of the exhilarating things about a show which brings together traditional Aboriginal Art with the work of urban Aboriginal artists and their white counterparts for possibly the first time, is the very difficulty of conceptualising it. On those rare occasions when, by an act of radical imagination, Art actually runs ahead of social practice, it also transcends existing linguistic categories. Thus even the attempt to describe the exhibitors in *Two Worlds Collide* is fraught with complications. The Papunya artists, some of whose recent work is shown here, do exemplify the category of traditional Aboriginal Art, but they have also transformed traditional ideas of Aboriginal Art. The previously mutually exclusive categories of Aboriginal and High Art have been fused.

"Urban Aboriginal" is also unsatisfactory. "Traditional" and "urban" are complex and overlapping categories. The historical reality of "uneven development" of the Australian continent means that individual Aboriginal people occupy an immense range of life situations relative to the dominant white culture. Instead of multiplying categories, I will adopt the suggestion of Aboriginal artists involved in Artspace's 1985 survey of contemporary "non-traditional" Aboriginal Art, that the term "Koori" serve as a general descriptive for Aboriginal people. The hundreds of tribes whose distinct territories were mapped out across the length and breadth of the land for tens of thousands of years before the European occupation were subsumed by the objectifying gaze of white racism under the undifferentiated label of "Aborigines". Simultaneously the ties to land which generated these separate identities were obliterated. This spurious unification has now been turned into a weapon of resistance in the contemporary Aboriginal struggle as the concept of Aboriginality, principle of black solidarity.

Considering the non-Aboriginal artists in the exhibition, there is no positive characterisation which encompasses the multi-ethnic composition of Australian society, much less indicates the variety of grounds for their inclusion in Artspace's show. Perhaps "non-Aboriginal" would be the most appropriate term to use here, since they do have in common the lack of that cultural unity inherited and continuously reconstituted which distinguishes the Aboriginal position. Some mainstream white artists have even suggested that they share with all peoples discultured by contemporary forms of imperialism a dispossession which entitles them to the status of "White Aborigines". The work in the exhibition indicates the possibility of other avenues of cultural convergence involving a more sensitive engagement with Aboriginal priorities.

As language constructs our reality, these terminological difficulties are not merely academic, but reflect gaps in our social practice which this sort of show attempts to bridge. But even if we think the relations between Koori and non-Aboriginal artists form a meaningful part of a discourse of decolonisation, this doesn't alter the fact that what is in question is still the artistic dialogue of a subjugated people and their colonisers. As we contemplate the

\* "The Art of Decolonisation" was written for the exhibition catalogue, *Two Worlds Collide: Cultural Convergence in Aboriginal and White Australian Art*, Artspace, 1985.

disturbing beauty of these works, we need to be conscious of the relations of social power underlying the aesthetic response which the gallery context invites.

"We have a rich heritage, the great part of which remains neglected. And even if this is not specifically our own heritage, there is no question at all that it will come to have a much greater bearing on our own Australian art in years to come."<sup>1</sup>

Tuckson's message was barely heeded in his lifetime. Another voice crying in the wilderness was Margaret Preston's, whose proselytising zeal from the mid 1920s for the incorporation of Aboriginal design sense by white Australian art produced little effect in the work of her contemporaries - white contemporaries anyway. The lasting benefits of their advocacy of the aesthetic achievements of Aboriginal culture may well lie in having indirectly assisted the emergence and subsequent flowering of a new practice within Aboriginal culture: the enterprise of Aboriginal Art. The spectacular development of this enterprise over the past half century and particularly the past decade from a predominantly white to an Aboriginal initiative, assuming a significant role in the struggle for Land Rights and taking its place in the art galleries and other sites of mainstream Australian culture alongside the works of white artists; and the effects of this meeting of cultures on both Koori and non-Aboriginal artists, form the immediate background of the Artspace exhibition.

Beyond that lies a tradition of exchange between indigenous and immigrant artists going back to the very beginnings of European occupation of the continent. The original exclusion of traditional Aboriginal artists from the official histories of Australian art on account of the supposed "primitiveness" of their artistic vision and presumed commercial motivations underlying their work's production, parallels the position of the so-called convict artists. The Port Jackson Painter and Joseph Lycett may one day be recognised as precursors of contemporary white artists whose work acknowledges on some level the historical realities of colonisation and resistance in their immediate environment. The lack of technique of the convict artists may then look more like an act of radical imagination in defiance of the prevailing stylistic conventions of High Art for that time. Their paintings of Aboriginal subjects supply a vital historical record comparable with the rock-engravings and cave-paintings where Aboriginal artists recorded their observations of the invaders. They inspired a second generation of immigrant artists also preoccupied with this theme, after which a mysterious silence descends on the subject of Aboriginality in mainstream Australian Art. Then suddenly, in response to the explosion of Aboriginal political and cultural expression into white consciousness, it has re-emerged into a new historical context. White excursions onto the terrain of Aboriginal representation are now highly problematic. But they are equally imperative in order to contradict in practice the dismal doctrine that no rapprochement is possible.

1 J.A. Tuckson, "Aboriginal Art and the Western World", in Berndt, R.M., *Australian Aboriginal Art*, Ure Smith, 1964.



IN PERPETUAL MOURNING \*

"Australia is the dumping ground for the rubbish of all the earth."

— *The Skull* (Ross May)

In Australia the experience of works of art through mechanical reproduction always precedes their direct experience. For example, Enzo Cucchi's painting, *The wind of the black roosters*, 1982, bought recently by the Australian National Gallery was reproduced in *Flash Art*<sup>1</sup> before it could be seen first hand in Canberra. The caption "Courtesy Canberra Museum", however, seems to deny the reality of "Australian National Gallery" banishing Cucchi's masterpiece (if it has to be in Australia) to an entirely fictitious repository of art. For Australians too, there is some comfort in this oversight - for the acknowledged presence of a Cucchi in Australia would evoke feelings of disbelief. It would undermine our sense of protection from 'originals' - from their aura, their surface and their authority. The dot-screen of mechanical reproduction renders all images equivalent, interchangeable, scale-less and surface-less; but above all it makes them far more susceptible to local readings. Thus another of Cucchi's works in reproduction, *Fierce painting*, 1981<sup>2</sup>, strangely echoes the distinctive profile of Joern Utzon's Sydney Opera House and we all recognize his desolate 'barbaric landscapes' not as prophetic images of the future but as the severely eroded landscape of Australia's present.

On 15th August 1983, the *Sydney Morning Herald* carried the following report:

"Jackson Pollock's 'Blue Poles' was reproduced in New York recently to mark the 27th anniversary of Pollock's death. Artist Mike Bidlo recreated the work on 132 masonite tiles and then gave them away to onlookers. Asked why he chose 'Blue Poles', Bidlo claimed that the canvas had helped change the Government of Australia. When the Australian people found out what the Government had paid for it, they were outraged. They threw the Government out! Pollock's painting was bought for \$1.3m by the Whitlam Government in 1973."

This report is remarkable for two reasons, firstly the supreme almost mystical power it attributes to a work of art (the power to change governments) and the inversion of the normal state of affairs - that of artists outside of Australia 'recreating' works of art that are here.

Indeed the 'aura' surrounding *Blue Poles* is such that even when attempting to talk about any other work, say for example, Shusaku Arakawa's painting *Out of Distance/Out of Texture*, 1978 which is also on display in the Australian National Gallery, it is difficult not to mention Pollock's masterpiece. *Blue Poles* with its latticework of paint seems to act as a vortex into which all other works are drawn. Thus we cannot avoid seeing Arakawa's painting as the accumulation of a series of superimposed layers of paint. One layer is in the form of a text, another in the form of perspective lines, another in the form of an

\* "In Perpetual Mourning" was written for *ZG/Art & Text*, summer 1984, New York.

architectural plan (a living room) and yet another in the form of rotating lines which appear to be forming themselves into volumes (broken columns) which might even be the tentative visualisations of the point of consciousness. There may even be other layers. The rather mechanical construction of these layers in Arakawa's work, however, is in direct contrast to the loose intertwining of gestural, gossamerlike threads of paint in *Blue Poles*.

Or we might consider the New Zealand artist Colin McCahon's painting *Victory over death 2*, 1970 in which the starkly monochrome and monumental typography of the words "I AM" seems to echo New Zealand's mountainous topography. This reading of McCahon's painting is determined by our realisation that *Blue Poles'* viewpoint is aerial and flat (like the viewpoint in Papunya painting)<sup>3</sup> and echoes the enormous expanses of Australia's interior - its shifting veils of turbulence seen from high above, hypnotic and unfocused, through dust and haze.

Cucchi's *The wind of the black roosters* no doubt will eventually take its place in orbit as yet another satellite of *Blue Poles* and its meaning, too, will be altered and overlaid by the meanings that emanate from that haloed fragment of 'modernism' which sits uncomfortably here on the other side of the earth. Like the sole surviving fragment of Western culture in Russell Hoban's apocalyptic vision of the future *Riddley Walker* (ie. the tapestry depicting the legend of St Eustace), *Blue Poles* engulfs us all in its impenetrable veils and mysteries. In a culture of counterfeit images, the direct perception of a work such as *Blue Poles* produces a devastating effect of cultural inferiority in the viewer. The following passage from *Riddley Walker* might even be the literal response of local artists (certainly the accent is right) when confronted by the enormity of the cultural gap:

"Now you're talking jus like me I don't know how many times I've said that. Now you see the wool thing what I'm getting at its why I'm all ways strest and straint I'm just a wear out man. Riddley we aint as good as them befor us. Weve come way way down from what they ben time back way back. May be it wer the barns what done it poysening the lan or when they made a hoal in what they callit the O Zoan."<sup>4</sup>

The problem with *Blue Poles* is of course that it is concrete proof of our provincialism. It is one of the few art objects of indisputable quality and presence which can be apprehended directly here in Australia. In a sense it undermines the second-hand reality of the mechanically reproduced image which otherwise saturates our consciousness determining our view of ourselves and of the external world.

As pointed out ten years ago, provincialism appears primarily as 'an attitude of subservience to an externally imposed hierarchy of cultural values.'<sup>5</sup> But most of us treat such a projection as if it were a construction of reality when in fact it is a culturally relative viewpoint. The patterns of provincialism are deeply etched in Australia.

Typically, relentless provincialism is marked by the tensions between two antithetical positions: a defiant urge to localism (a claim for the possibility and validity of "making good original art right here") and a reluctant recognition that the generative innovations in art and the criteria for standards of 'quality', 'originality', 'interest', 'forcefulness' etc. are determined externally. But far from encouraging "innocent art of naive purity, untainted by too much thinking", provincialism in fact produces highly self-conscious art "obsessed with the problem of what its identity ought to be."<sup>6</sup>

Waves of hope that the provincialist bind can be broken recur cyclically in Australian art. In



the 1920s 'nativeness' was celebrated. In the late 1940s a number of painters (later called the 'Antipodeans') placed their faith in a localism pursued with a sharp awareness of European traditions. During the 1950s and 1960s, following the influence of Abstract Expressionism, hope grew for the possibility of an avant-garde 'breakthrough'. In 1974 in the 'inventiveness encouraged by open form sculpture, process, environmental and performance art'<sup>7</sup>, and during the late 1970s and early 1980s, it was placed in an attempt by some artists and curators to blend the exoticism of Aboriginal culture with certain manifestations of contemporary art<sup>8</sup>. This artificial blending culminated in the French curator Suzanne Pagé's exhibition *From Another Continent: the Dream and the Real* 1983 at ARC Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris.<sup>9</sup>

Today, in 1984, we place our hope in what the English critic John Roberts has termed "the re-emergence of a strong urban-based art, orientated towards mimicry and deconstruction of the codes and signs of consumerism."<sup>10</sup> These sentiments invite us to exaggerate our natural tendencies towards mimicry, to emphasise rather than hide our provincialism, even to bathe ostentatiously in it. For once the call from the other side of the world is congruent with our real cultural condition. It seems that at some moment each succeeding generation of artists in Australia expresses the sentiment "Australia is now part of the art scene"<sup>11</sup>, only to later recognise their hopeless invisibility and powerlessness. By employing strategies of mimicry, deconstruction and even hyper-conformism,<sup>12</sup> 'invisibility' and 'powerlessness' can now be turned to our advantage. With this realisation we are also witnessing an inversion of the normal patterns of art production in Australia, rooted as they are in low self-esteem. The shift is from the hitherto pervasive condition of 'anorexia nervosa' (i.e. small, tentative, self-effacing and ultimately self-destructive outputs) to a condition resembling 'bulimia' (binge-eating and vomit). In the latter case, we see this as an over-excessive consumption of images and their regurgitation in a manner which is psychologically motivated and completely (often defiantly) unrelated to those market forces (the proverbial 'hunger for pictures') which seem to have stimulated art production in Europe and America.

The wide-ranging image consumption and regurgitation results not in the death of the author but in his or her apparent fragmentation. Wolfgang Max Faust has called this process the "wilful dissociation of subjectiveness and style". The image has become the site of a transient fascination that represents not the unity of one ego but a multiple subjective view. Each painting becomes a battleground, an arena of conflict where "the artist's visions and longings face a showdown with his or her knowledge of art history. A momentary irritation caused by some picture from a magazine or television ad, an art book or a dream battles with the need to make an image that is authentically of and about the self."<sup>13</sup>

Dick Watkins is in many ways the pioneer of this tendency in Australia and he has for some time been engaged in the digestion and regurgitation of Pablo Picasso and Jackson Pollock. Recently he came up with another Pollock which he ominously entitled *City of the Living Dead plus Zombie Holocaust*, 1982-3.<sup>14</sup> This title reminds us that when there is no room left in hell, the dead will rise up and walk the earth. In other words when authority ceases to be representative beware the dispossessed lest they rise up in revolt against everything held sacred to the prevailing order and inherit the ruins of a shattered ideology.<sup>15</sup> In *Riddle Walker* it is only the dispossessed who survive the nuclear holocaust and, by virtue of their survival, it is their interpretation (no matter how pathetically misconstrued) of the remaining

fragments of civilisation on which the new culture is built. Cultural meaning is reformed by the bricoleurs of the post-industrial, post-nuclear age. As George Miller's popular films, *Mad Max* and *Mad Max II (The Road Warrior)* seem to suggest, Australia is already the landscape of the future and it is no coincidence that the degenerated language in *Riddle Walker* echoes the all-too familiar strains of the Australian accent. In this Land of the Living Dead our 'strategies of mimicry' are no more than adaptations of primitive principles of magic, particularly the Law of Similarity whereby the magician implies that he can produce any effect he desires by merely imitating it.<sup>16</sup> Some Aboriginal folklore already confirms Australia as the land of the dead: "If the spirits stray from their path to their totemic country on island of the dead, the white cockatoos alone will see them and give a piercing cry of warning. Their cry screams out across Arnhem Land today as they continue to warn the living of the presence of the spirits in the bush."<sup>17</sup>

The recent and brutal history of Australia is strewn with many corpses. For example the term 'isles of the dead'<sup>18</sup> referred to those islands off the western coast of Australia where Aboriginal tribes, often sick and dying from their lack of resistance to the most harmless of white man's diseases, were herded together with no regard for their totemic differences and left to die. Another island, Tasmania, is the infamous site of a near genocide.

This social history is of course a metaphor for our cultural present. While the dot-screen of mechanical reproduction renders all images equivalent, interchangeable, scale-less and surface-less, the consumption and regurgitation or 're-creation' of these images reinvests them with an aura, surface, substance and scale entirely different from their corresponding 'originals'. In this sense mechanical reproduction is a purgatory or limbo for image patterns. Like disembodied souls floating textureless in books, they are waiting to be reborn, to be recreated, to feel the actuality of their reality. The mechanical reproduction of images is a form of death (crucifixion)<sup>19</sup> - when resurrected onto new surfaces these images remain 'stigmatised' by the marks of their death. Thus 're-created', paintings often appear unnaturally monochrome, faded like poor xeroxes, 'out-of-register', excessively grainy or to carry residual traces of a dot-screen.

The possibilities of painting in Australia in 1984 allow the collision of several image patterns onto one surface - 'worlds in collision' where the worlds might be 'xerox satellites'. In this sense our culture is an Island of the Dead and our paintings facilitate the Return of the Living Dead. As our work too passes into reproduction, we realise that our painting, like our cultural condition, is destined to be a kind of 'perpetual mourning'.

"I never sung no beginning because you wont never fynd no beginning its long gone and far pas. What ever youre after yowl never fynd the beginning of it thats why yowl all ways be too late. Onlyes thing youwl ever fynd is the end of things. What ever happens itwl be what you dint want to happen. What ever dont happen thatwl be the thing you wantit. Take your choosing how you like youwl get what you dont wont."<sup>20</sup>



Notes

- 1 Giancarlo Politi and Helena Kontova, "Interview with Enzo Cucchi", *Flash Art*, Nov. 1983, p.20.
- 2 *Ibid.*, p. 16.
- 3 Papunya is the Aboriginal settlement where a now flourishing aboriginal art movement in Western materials began in the early 1970s.
- 4 Russell Hoban, *Riddley Walker*, Picador 1982, p.120.
- 5 Terry Smith, "The Provincialism Problem", *Artforum*, Sept. 1974, p.54.
- 6 Robert Hughes, *The Art of Australia*, rev. ed. Harmondsworth, England 1970, p.314.
- 7 Terry Smith, *op. cit.*, p.57.
- 8 For a discussion of the drawbacks of this attitude, see Imants Tillers, "Locality Fails", *Art & Text*, no.6, winter 1982.
- 9 See Jill Montgomery, "Australia - The French Discovery of 1983", *Art & Text*, nos. 12 & 13, 1983-4.
- 10 John Roberts, "Principles of Motion", *Art Monthly*, Feb. 1984, p.17.
- 11 For example see Royston Harpur, "An Important Academy", *The Field*, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne 1968, p.92.
- 12 See John Young and Terry Blake "On Some Alternatives to the Code in the Age of Hyperreality: the Hermit and the City-Dweller", *Art & Text*, no.2, winter 1981, p.7.
- 13 Wolfgang Max Faust, "'Du hast keine Chance. Nutze sie!' With it and against it: Tendencies in Recent German Art", *Artforum*, Sept. 1981, p.39.
- 14 Exhibited at Pinacotheca, Melbourne and Yuill/Crowley, Sydney in 1983.
- 15 Glyn Banks, "Mulheimer Freiheit: The Return of the Living Dead", *Art Monthly*, Feb. 1984.
- 16 J.G. Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, Macmillan 1970, p.14.
- 17 Jennifer Isaacs (ed.), *Australian Dreaming - 40,000 years of Aboriginal History*, Lansdowne Press 1980, p.229.
- 18 Daisy Bates, *Passing of the Aborigines*, Butler and Tanner, London 1938, p.93.
- 19 Some artists, recognising this, have begun to make paintings which attempt to defy mechanical reproduction. For example Sigmar Polke's "Heroes in the Air", *Artforum*, December 1983, pp.52-53.
- 20 Russell Hoban, *op.cit.*, p.147.



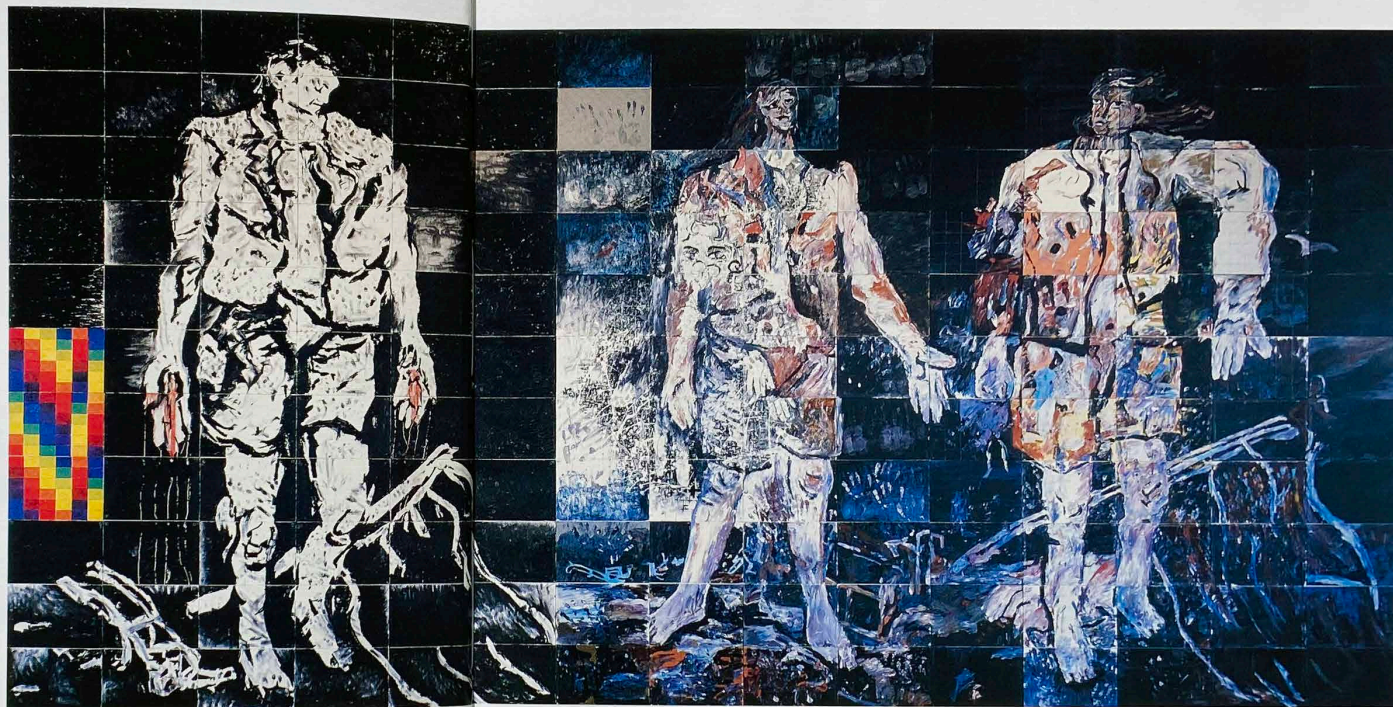
THE ISLAND OF THE DEAD. 1982  
charcoal on canvas board  
250 x 380 cm.  
Australian National Gallery, Canberra





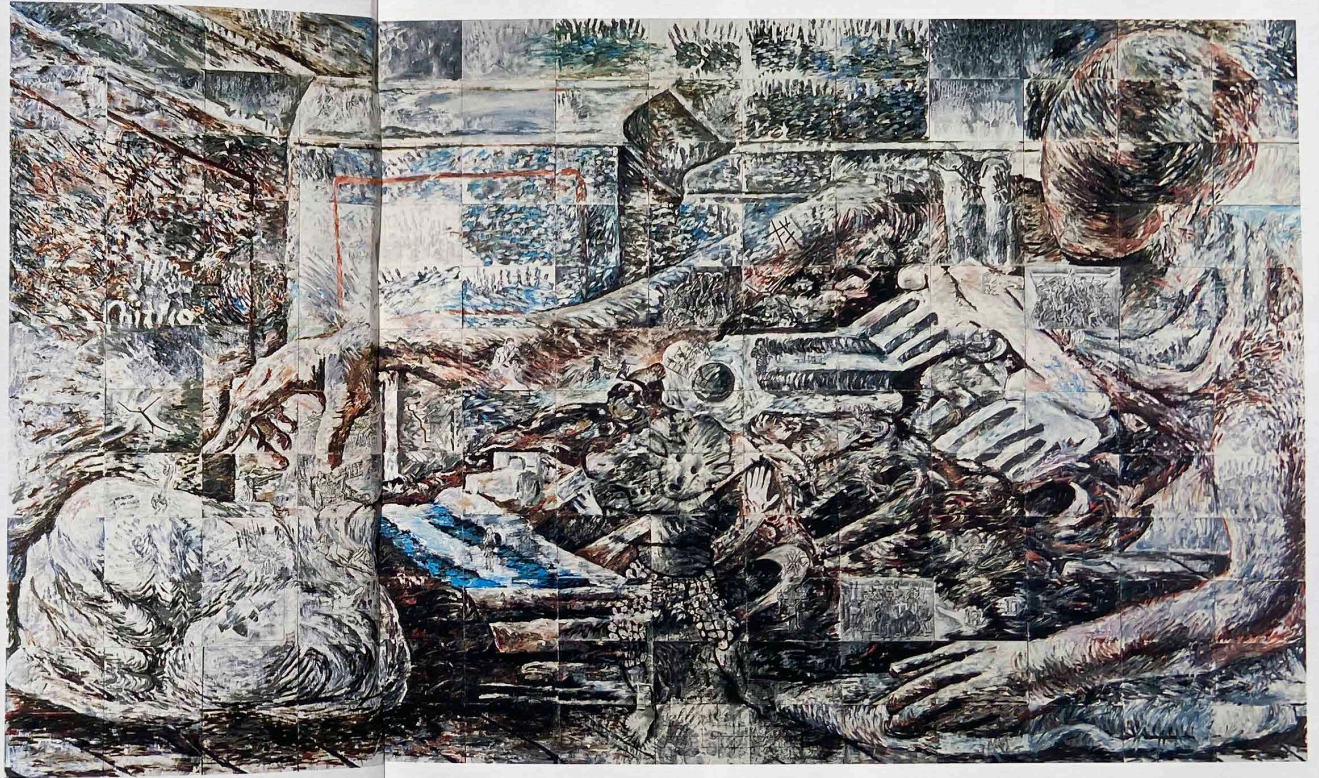
THE VORTEX. 1984





THE WORLD OF MEN, 1984





PATAPHYSICAL MAN. 1984





THE CONTINENT OF LIGHT. 1985



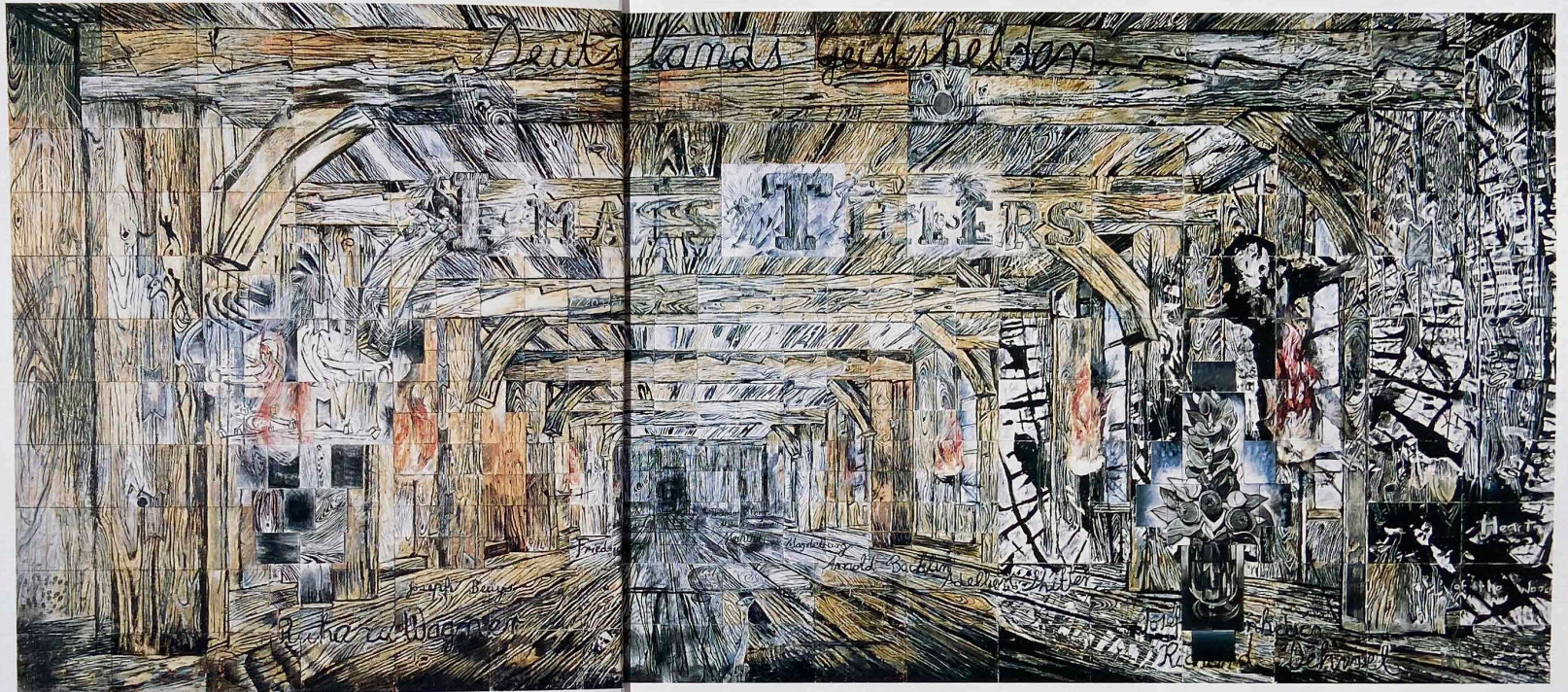
A PLAN FOR EXPLORING THE INTERIOR. 1985





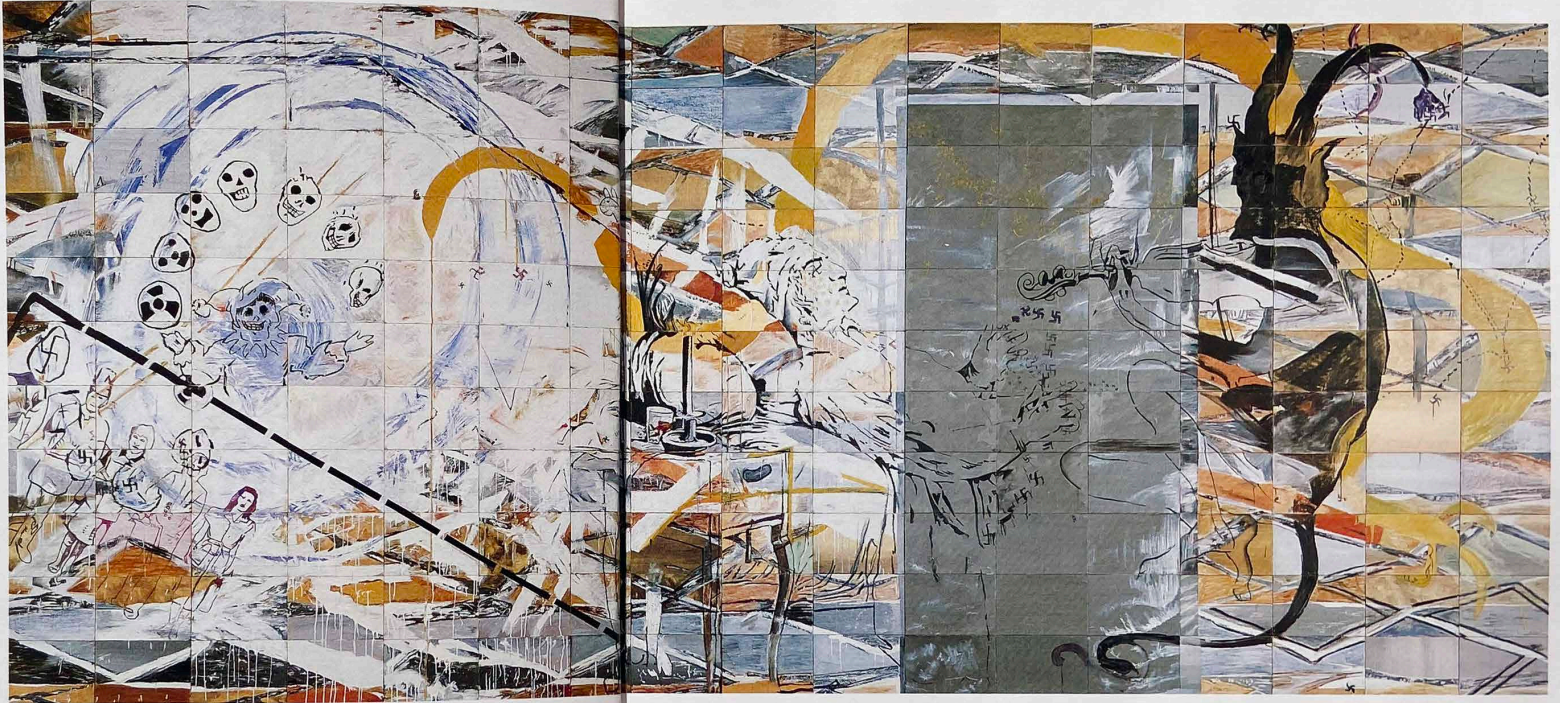
THE DECENTRED SELF. 1985





HEART OF THE WOOD. 1985





I AM THE DOOR. 1985



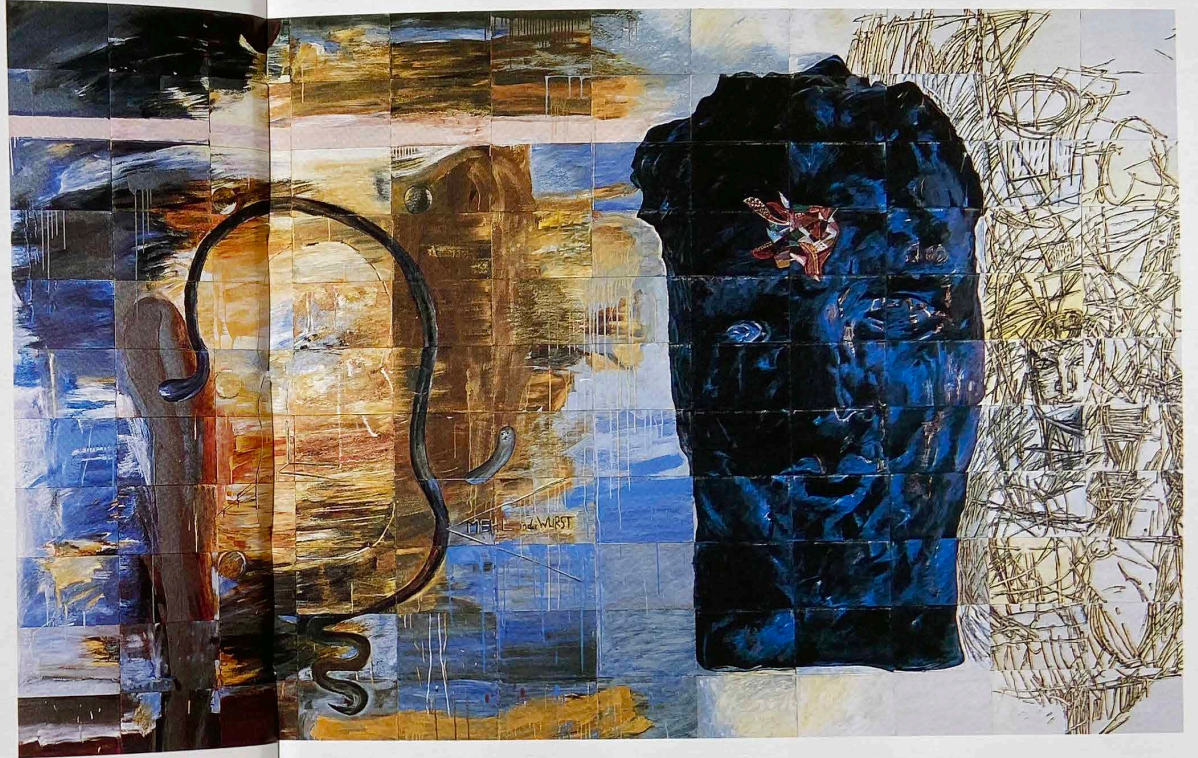






MOUNT ANALOGUE. 1985





PSYCHIC (for Yves Klein). 1986



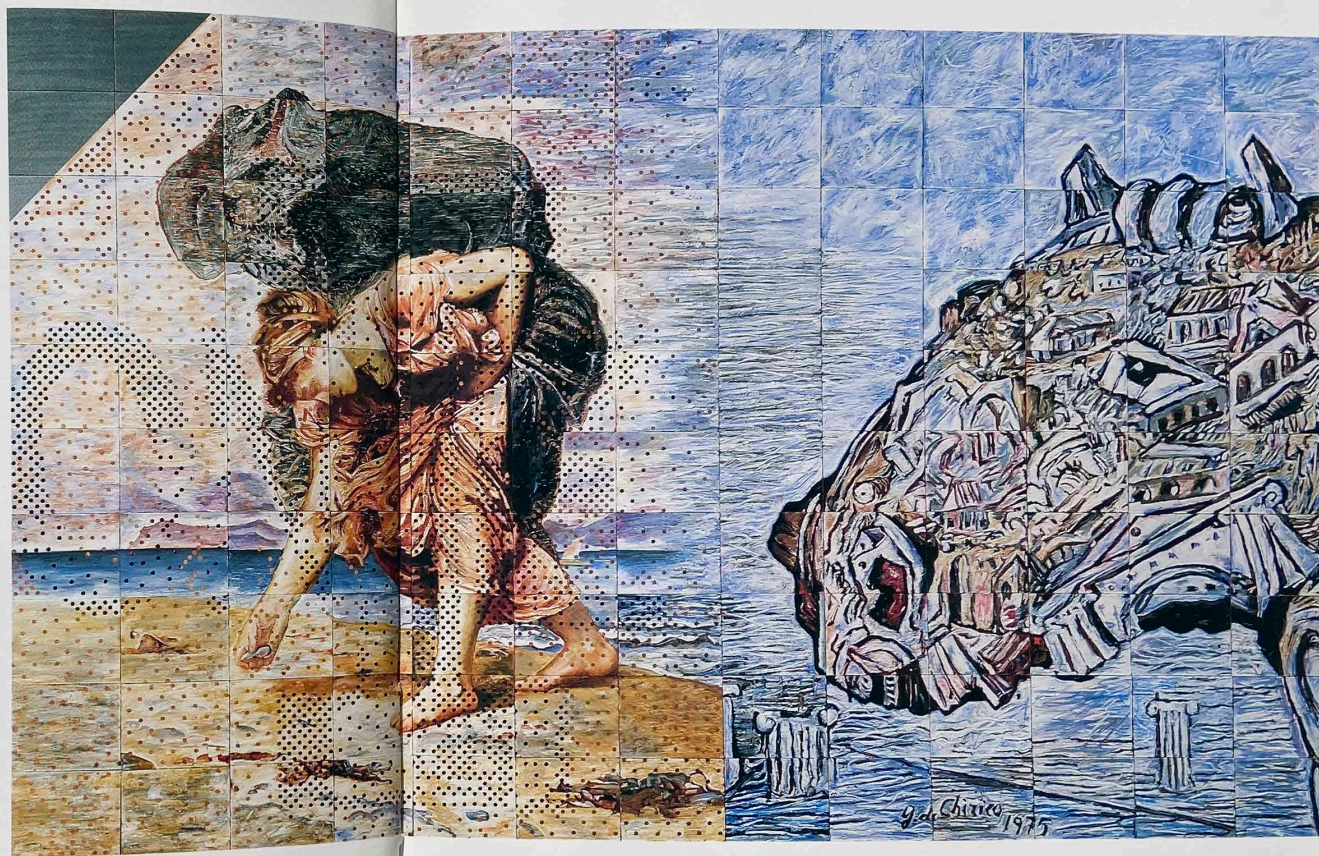


THE KONDRATIEV WAVE. 1986

Höhere Wesen befehlen rechte obere Ecke Schwarz

malen!





THE HYPERBOREAN AND THE SPELUNCAR. 1986







## IMANTS TILLERS

Born 1950 in Sydney, Australia  
Lives in Sydney

### Education

1969-72 University of Sydney  
1973 Graduated as B.Sc.(Arch) Hons  
Awarded University Medal

### Selected Individual Exhibitions

1986 *XLIII Biennale di Venezia*  
(Australian representative)  
Yuill/Crowley, Sydney  
1985 Bess Cutler Gallery, New York  
Yuill/Crowley, Sydney  
1984 Bess Cutler Gallery, New York  
Yuill/Crowley, Sydney  
1983 Matt's Gallery, London  
Yuill/Crowley, Sydney

### Selected Group Exhibitions

1986 *The Death or Resurrection of Originality*, Sixth Biennale of Sydney, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney  
*When Attitudes Become Form*, Bess Cutler Gallery, New York  
*Group Show*, Stavaridis Gallery, Boston  
*Investigations*, McIntosh-Drysdale, Washington D.C.  
*How much beauty can I stand?*, Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, Melbourne  
1985 *Group Show*, Svetlana Achatz, Munich  
*Production Re: Production*, Gallery 345, Art for Social Change, Inc., New York  
*Two Worlds Collide: Cultural Convergence in Aboriginal and White Australian Art*, Artspace, Sydney  
*Dot and Circle: A Retrospective Survey of the Aboriginal Acrylic Paintings of the Western Desert*, R.M.I.T. Gallery, Melbourne  
*Little Works by Big Thinkers*, Bess Cutler Gallery, New York  
1984 *Synthetic Art*, Harm Bouckaert Gallery, New York  
*New Work*, Bess Cutler Gallery, New York  
*Accents/Expressions*, The Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington D.C.  
*An Australian Accent: Three Artists*, P.S.1, New York, Art Gallery of Western Australia, Perth, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney  
1983 *Tall Poppies*, Melbourne University Gallery, Melbourne  
1982 *DOCUMENTA 7*, Kassel  
*Eureka! Artists from Australia*, Serpentine Gallery, London  
*POPISM*, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne  
1979 *European Dialogue*, Third Biennale of Sydney, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney  
1975 *XIII Bienal de São Paulo*, São Paulo

### Commission

1985-7 The Dome of the Federation Pavilion, Centennial Park, Sydney

### Selected Bibliography

1986 Robert Nickas, "The sublime was then (search for tomorrow)" *ARTS Magazine*, March 1986, New York  
Eleanor Heartney, "Imants Tillers", *Artnews*, January, 1986, New York  
Michèle Cone, "Imants Tillers", *Flash Art*, December, 1985/January 1986, Milan  
1985 Carter Ratcliff, "Modern Life", *Artforum*, December, 1985, New York  
John Russell, "Imants Tillers", *New York Times*, 8 November, 1985, New York  
Kim Levin, "Imants Tillers", *Village Voice*, 12 November, 1985, New York  
Imants Tillers, "The Paradox of Dick Watkins", *Dick Watkins: XVIII Bienal de São Paulo*, (catalogue), Broken Hill City Art Gallery and the Visual Arts Board of the Australia Council, Sydney  
Robert Nickas (ed.), "Hunger for Words", *New Observations*, no. 29, New York  
Donald E. Kuspit, "Imants Tillers", *Art in America*, March 1985, New York  
1984 Kate Linker, "Imants Tillers", *Artforum*, December 1984, New York  
Ken Sofer, "Views from Down Under", *Artnews*, December 1984, New York  
Kim Levin, "Upstarts from Down Under", *Village Voice*, 5 October, 1984, New York  
Michael Brenson, "Imants Tillers", *New York Times*, 5 October, 1984, New York  
Thomas McEvilley, "An Australian Accent", *Artforum*, October 1984, New York  
Eric Gibson, "An Australian Accent?" *The New Criterion*, September 1984, New York  
Thomas McEvilley, "On the Manner of Addressing Clouds", *Artforum*, summer 1984, New York  
Imants Tillers, "In Perpetual Mourning", *ZG/Art & Text*, summer 1984, New York  
Benjamin Forgey, "The Edge of Night", *Washington Post*, 22 July, 1984, Washington D.C.  
Robert Atkins, "Australians Arrive at P.S.1", *Newsday*, 11 May, 1984, New York  
Kay Larson, "Seeing Australia", *New York Magazine*, 7 May, 1984, New York  
Kim Levin, "P.S.1's Report Card", *Village Voice*, 1 May, 1984, New York  
John Russell, "The Irony of Chirico", *New York Times*, 27 April, 1984, New York  
John Russell, "3 Vigorous Artists from Down Under", *New York Times*, 20 April, 1984, New York  
Daniel Thomas (ed.), *An Australian Accent: Three Artists* (Exhibition catalogue for P.S.1), John Kaldor, Sydney, 1984 (full bibliography and exhibitions).



## LIST OF WORKS

1. **THE NINE SHOTS** 1985  
oilstick, synthetic polymer paint on 91 canvas boards  
(No. 7215 - 7305)  
130" x 105" (330 x 266 cm)
2. **THE VORTEX** 1984  
synthetic polymer paint, watercolour, charcoal on 144 canvas boards  
(No. 3590 - 3733)  
160" x 135" (406 x 342 cm)  
(2 panels each by Zoran Tillers, John Young)
3. **THE WORLD OF MEN** 1984  
synthetic polymer paint, oil, oilstick on 165 canvas boards  
(No. 3390 - 3554)  
110" x 225" (275 x 570 cm)  
Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane
4. **PATAPHYSICAL MAN** 1984  
synthetic polymer paint, charcoal, pencil on 168 canvas boards  
(No. 2466 - 2633)  
120" x 210" (305 x 529 cm)  
Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney
5. **THE CONTINENT OF LIGHT** 1985  
oil, oilstick, synthetic polymer paint on 49 canvas boards  
(No. 4623 - 4671)  
70" x 105" (177 x 266 cm)
6. **THE DECENTRED SELF** 1985  
oilstick, synthetic polymer paint on 51 canvas boards  
(No. 6450 - 6500)  
100" x 75" (254 x 190 cm)
7. **A PLAN FOR EXPLORING THE INTERIOR** 1985  
oilstick, synthetic polymer paint on 144 canvas boards  
(No. 6906 - 7049)  
120" x 180" (304 x 457 cm)  
Private collection, Melbourne

- \*8. **HEART OF THE WOOD** 1985  
oilstick, oil, synthetic polymer paint on 388 canvas boards  
(No. 5339 - 5502)  
110" x 255" (280 x 648 cm)  
Power Gallery, University of Sydney
- \*9. **I AM THE DOOR** 1985  
oilstick, synthetic polymer paint on 187 canvas boards  
(No. 5841 - 6027)  
110" x 255" (280 x 648 cm)  
Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide; Purchased with assistance from the  
Visual Arts Board of the Australia Council
10. **LOST, LOST, LOST** 1985  
synthetic polymer paint, oil, oilstick on 220 canvas boards  
(No. 5615 - 5834)  
100" x 330" (254 x 838 cm)
- \*11. **MOUNT ANALOGUE** 1985  
oilstick, synthetic polymer paint on 165 canvas boards  
(No. 7416 - 7580)  
110" x 225" (279 x 571 cm)
- \*12. **PSYCHIC (for Yves Klein)** 1986  
synthetic polymer paint, oilstick on 132 canvas boards  
(No. 8582 - 8713)  
110" x 180" (279 x 457 cm)
- \*13. **THE KONDRATIEV WAVE** 1986  
synthetic polymer paint, oil, oilstick on 144 canvas boards  
(No. 9245 - 9388)  
120" x 180" (304 x 457 cm)
- \*14. **THE HYPERBOREAN AND THE SPELUNCAR** 1986  
synthetic polymer paint, oil, oilstick on 130 canvas boards  
(No. 9389 - 9518)  
110" x 182" (279 x 462 cm)

\* Works exhibited at Venice, 1986.



## AUSTRALIA AT VENICE

The Visual Arts Board of the Australia Council, in collaboration with the Art Gallery of South Australia, is proud to present this exhibition of the work of Imants Tillers to officially represent Australia at this 42nd Biennale di Venice.

This bi-annual event is the oldest and most firmly established venue for international participation of visual art and artists and still remains the most strategic and influential on the international art calendar.

In the past it has effectively launched many artists of international reputation; it was, for example, in Venice that the British artist Henry Moore attracted world attention for the first time; in 1950 the exhibition of American artist Willem de Kooning's *Excavation* established his reputation at home and abroad; and more recently, the Italian artists of the Trans Avant-Garde exhibition in Venice showed the world a new aspect of expressionism.

In the same way, the Venice Biennale can play a significant role in the careers of young Australian artists, and for this reason the Visual Arts Board places great emphasis on securing a more permanent site at this all-important venue.

We believe however, that Venice is not only a place to be seen, it is just as importantly a place to see. For our artists to have the opportunity to see their work in the context of other countries and other cultures, to meet with other artists, curators, critics and writers is as important as exhibiting their work to this extended audience.

Imants Tillers is recognised as one of the most important contemporary artists within Australia and as such has exhibited extensively outside Australia.

He represented Australia at the 13th Sao Paulo Bienal in 1975 and participated in the Kassel Documenta of 1982. He was recently represented in the successful exhibition, *An Australian Accent*, held at P.S. 1, New York and since then has regularly exhibited with the Bess Cutler Gallery in New York.

Tillers has collaborated closely with the curator, Kerry Crowley, to develop an exhibition of exceptional merit. Ms Crowley has ensured that every feature of the exhibition is of the highest professional standard. The Board offers its appreciation to her for this role.

The Visual Arts Board is confident that by the time of the next Biennale in 1988, Australia will be able to celebrate its Bicentennial year having established a permanent site in Venice for the continued participation of Australia within this important context for international dialogue.

The Venice Biennale offers the opportunity for many people to work collaboratively on behalf of contemporary Australian art practice. The Visual Arts Board acknowledges the commitment and experience of Seva Frangos and Janet Parfenovics in their organisation and management of the exhibition; and the contribution of the curator, Kerry Crowley, in collaboration with Daniel Thomas, Director of the initiating gallery, the Art Gallery of South Australia. We also extend appreciation to Paul Taylor, the Official Representative and Publicist for Australia at the 42nd Venice Biennale - theirs have been significant contributions.

The major accolade however, must go to the artist, Imants Tillers — we congratulate him for representing Australia so assuredly.

Betty Churcher  
Chairperson  
Visual Arts Board of the Australia Council, Sydney

April, 1986

## L'AUSTRALIA A VENEZIA

Il Visual Arts Board dell'Australia Council (Comitato per le Arti Figurative della Sovrintendenza Australiana alle Arti) in collaborazione con la Galleria d'Arte del Sud Australia ha l'onore di annunciare che le opere di Imants Tillers comprese in questa collezione rappresenteranno ufficialmente l'Australia alla 42ma Biennale di Venezia. Questa manifestazione, organizzata ogni due anni, costituisce in campo internazionale la sede più antica ed autorevole sia per le arti figurative di per sé che per gli artisti. Essa rimane tuttora la data più prestigiosa ed influente del calendario artistico mondiale.

Alla Biennale veneziana si deve il lancio di numerosi artisti di fama internazionale. Ad esempio, fu a Venezia che lo scultore inglese Henry Moore attirò per la prima volta l'attenzione del pubblico mondiale. Sempre a Venezia, nel 1950, l'artista americano Willem de Kooning con la sua mostra *"Excavation"* si affermò sia nazionalmente che internazionalmente. In tempi più recenti, gli artisti italiani della Trans-avanguardia hanno fatto conoscere al mondo, tramite Venezia, un nuovo aspetto dell'espressionismo.

Allo stesso modo, la Biennale veneziana può assumere un'importanza fondamentale nella carriera di giovani artisti australiani. Per questo motivo, il Visual Arts Board è così ansioso di vedersi assegnare in pianta più stabile uno spazio proprio nell'ambito di una così prestigiosa manifestazione.

Siamo comunque convinti che Venezia non sia soltanto un luogo in cui farsi vedere ma anche un luogo da vedersi. Per i nostri artisti, avere la possibilità di osservare le proprie opere messe a raffronto con paesi e culture diverse, venire in contatto con altri artisti, critici, conservatori e scrittori è tanto importante quanto esporre le proprie opere di fronte ad un sì vasto pubblico.

In Australia, Imants Tillers è ritenuto uno dei più valenti artisti australiani contemporanei e come tale ha ampiamente esposto all'estero.

Tillers ha rappresentato l'Australia alla 13ma Biennale di San Paolo del Brasile nel 1975 ed è intervenuto nella Kassel Documenta dell'82. Di recente, ha partecipato alla mostra *"An Australian Accent"* tenutasi con successo presso il P.S. 1 di New York e, da allora, la Bess Cutler Gallery di New York espone regolarmente le sue opere. Tillers ha strettamente collaborato con il conservatore Kerry Crowley nella messa a punto di una mostra di eccezionale valore. La Signora Crowley ha saputo assicurare una mostra di altissimo livello sotto tutti gli aspetti; Le giunga pertanto l'espressione della nostra più profonda gratitudine.

Il Visual Arts Board è fiducioso che per la prossima Biennale del 1988 l'Australia celebrerà il proprio bicentenario annunciando la creazione di un locale d'esposizione fisso a Venezia. Ciò consentirà al nostro paese di partecipare regolarmente al dialogo internazionale che genera questa illustre manifestazione.

La Biennale veneziana offre la possibilità di collaborare a favore dell'attività artistica australiana contemporanea. Il Visual Arts Board desidera a questo punto sottolineare l'esperienza e l'impegno di cui hanno dato prova Seva Frangos e Janet Parfenovics nell'organizzazione e nella gestione della mostra; nonché il contributo offerto dal conservatore Kerry Crowley in collaborazione con Daniel Thomas, direttore dell'Art Gallery del Sud Australia, ente promotore di questa iniziativa. Desideriamo inoltre esprimere la nostra gratitudine a Paul Taylor, rappresentante ufficiale e addetto alle pubbliche relazioni per l'Australia presso questa 42ma edizione della Biennale di Venezia. Il loro è stato un apporto più che notevole.

Naturalmente l'elogio maggiore va all'artista, Imants Tillers. Lo congratuliamo per rappresentare l'Australia con tale convinzione.

Betty Churcher  
Presidente  
Visual Arts Board of the Australia Council, Sydney

Aprile, 1986



The Art Gallery of South Australia was delighted to accept the role of initiating institution for this exhibition.

The exhibition proposal came from a freelance curator, Kerry Crowley of the Yuill/Crowley Gallery, following public advertisement by the Visual Arts Board of the Australia Council, the Australian Government's arts funding and advisory body. Although fully funded and organised by the Visual Arts Board, freelance exhibition proposals must be channeled through an art museum. The Art Gallery of South Australia has a special commitment to contemporary art. Australia's most important arts festival, the Adelaide Festival of Arts, was first held in 1960 and since then the Art Gallery of South Australia has had a special interest in international exchange of art exhibitions.

I have particular pleasure in Imants Tillers's work being shown in Venice. I was Commissioner for the Australian representation at the 1978 Venice Biennale and know how effective is this international survey of contemporary art as a showcase not only for artists but also for a nation's cultural image. Artists and nations quickly develop warm friendships in this most enchanting of international cities.

In addition I have pleasure in Tillers's close involvement in this publication, a publication which should be considered as to some extent, an Artist's Book. Tillers's most important artist's book, *Three Facts*, 1981 was a fascinating exercise in internationalism, bringing together Marcel Duchamp's Paris, the South Australian landscape and the art of Hans Heysen, and Chairman Mao's China.

Daniel Thomas  
Director  
Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide

April, 1986

To those mentioned here, and to the many others whose spirited encouragement and practical help have made it possible for this exhibition to break its way along a sometimes resistant path, and to those whose experience of this work will bring it to life, I offer my thanks and dedicate this exhibition.

Imants Tillers and Jennifer Slatyer, Sydney

Nicholas Baume, Sydney  
Giulia Crespi, Sydney  
Bess Cutler, New York  
Seva Frangos, Project Officer, Visual Arts Board of the Australia Council, Sydney  
Vivien Johnson, Sydney  
John Kaldor, Sydney  
Janet Parfenovics, Australian/International Art Exhibition Management, Sydney  
Karl Pickering, Venice  
Paul Taylor, Publisher, *Art & Text*, New York  
Daniel Thomas, Director, Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide

Kerry Crowley  
Curator

April, 1986



**Imants Tillers: Venice Biennale 1986 Australia**

was published by the Art Gallery Board of South Australia and the Visual Arts Board of the Australia Council to accompany the exhibition organised by the Art Gallery of South Australia and shown as the Australian contribution to the XLII Biennale di Venezia, 29 June to 28 September 1986, and subsequent tour in Australian museums.

Cataloguing-in-publication data  
National Library of Australia:

Crowley, Kerry, (ed.)  
Imants Tillers.

ISBN 0 908024 92 4  
ISBN 0 7308 0793 2

Exhibition: Kerry Crowley

Catalogue design: Imants Tillers

Official Australian Representative at Venice, 1986: Paul Taylor

Co-ordinators: Kerry Crowley, Karl Pickering (Venice)

Editor: Kerry Crowley

Assistant editor: Nicholas Baume

Exhibition management: Janet Parfenovics

Photography: D. James Dee, Fenn Hinchcliffe, Imants Tillers

Layout and typesetting: Ashley Art Studios, Sydney

Colour separation: Alfred Johns, Sydney

Printed by: Nadley Press, Sydney

Edition: 3000

Copyright © The Art Gallery Board of South Australia, the Visual Arts Board of the Australia Council and the authors, 1986.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying or otherwise, without the prior permission of the copyright owners.

Art Gallery of South Australia

North Terrace, Adelaide, South Australia, 5000, Australia. Telephone: (08) 223 7200.

Visual Arts Board of the Australia Council

168 Walker Street, North Sydney, New South Wales, 2060, Australia. Telephone (02) 923 3333.



