



Imants Tillers, *The Nine Shots*, 1985, oilstick, synthetic polymer paint on 91 canvas boards
(No. 7215 – 7305). 330 x 226cm.

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Mammon or Millennial Eden?: Interview with Imants Tillers*

by Paul Foss

Australia: "a new demesne for Mammon to infest?
Or lurks millennial Eden 'neath your face?"

Bernard O'Dowd, *Australia* (1901)

Imants, is this phrase "Mammon or Millennial Eden?" really going to be carved on the face of the new Federation Pavilion?

That's still to be decided. Originally the idea was to have the names of the States which formed the Federation around the outside, but Alexander Tzannes (the architect) and I decided that it would be a good idea to give a more complex meaning to the project by having some sort of slogan.

I don't think many people would hold out much hope for any millennial Eden occurring in Australia in this or any foreseeable future. Isn't the irony of it rather strained?

I think it is slightly sceptical. But it does suggest two possible options for the future of Australia, one positive and the other negative. We're still at a stage where options are possible, so in that sense I think it's still an appropriate thing to say. My original idea was to be wholly positive and have the phrase "Continent of Light" around the edge of the Pavilion. This I meant metaphorically, but also in the direct physical sense that Australia is always thought of: the interior, the intensity of the light, etc.

What strikes me about the phrase is that it doesn't at all correspond to the mural you intend doing for the site. The eclectic nature of your work wouldn't, I imagine, limit itself to such closed options – here I am referring to something like the use of "creative montage" in opposition to the paradigms or depositories of progressive styles in art.

* This text is an edited version of a dialogue between Paul Foss and Imants Tillers that was taped in November 1986. The occasion of the dialogue concerned Imants' design for the new Federation Pavilion in Sydney's Centennial Park, to be unveiled in 1988.

By limiting the options of the Bicentenary project to the given historical ones, which are very much linked to the ideal of progress, it risks either collapsing back into some sort of negative past, a primitive or Aboriginal one, or moving blindly into the Brave New World which was the idea behind the Federation in the first place.

That's a good point, Paul. There are many things about the project which are as givens: for example, the architectural forms themselves, the foundation stone, the landscaping, the artwork, the quote from O'Dowd ... But I do not think the quote is necessarily the key for reading the project as a whole. It's an element referring back to the past; but it doesn't reflect my own views on Australian culture or our political or economic possibilities. Also, the proposed new Pavilion will modify and transform the traditional forms of the first monument. I guess that my artwork, too, will modify the quote rather than the quote pre-determining the work.

May I quote to you the concluding passage from a recent article by Nena Dimitrijevic in *Flash Art*, called "Alice in Culturescapes":

A return to the past may be progressive or regressive. Appropriation is justifiable only when it serves to establish a new signifying system. Only those works which activate different receptions of the same text under different historical circumstances elude the trap of nostalgic escapism. In other words, only works that through the method of historical retrospection open up a dimension of critical interpretation of the present moment in history and in art, put into operation the transformational force of art. (no. 129, Summer 1986)

I suppose it occurs to me to ask you, on the basis of this, whether you are in any way interested in "the transformational aspect of art".

(Laughter) I guess it's still a pertinent question for me, but it's not something you deliberately set out to do. I think that art has to proceed from its own basis and from one's own feelings and subjective reactions to things. Only if art achieves some sort of power can it have a transformational role.

However, Imants, with the Pavilion project a number of questions do arise. For the moment, let's persevere with your relationship to a historical phrase referring not only to a past that did not happen, but also to a projection of a future which almost certainly won't. I'm concerned to ask you how you think your work can interact with the monumental function of the building itself. At two levels: first, at the level of its solidity, its tonality, its edifice, where one is still in the shadow of the State and its institutions; but more particularly, in its relationship to a body of signifying practices which will undoubtedly help to consolidate future projections for this country.

In a project of this nature, even though there is no pressure to produce a particular kind of meaning, I am aware that on a public level it will inevitably serve a direct function. It's just not possible for a work like this to maintain a highly critical stand, because that would subvert its function – that of celebration, on this occasion. But having said that, it doesn't mean that there isn't a framework of other ideas which may be less immediately readable, which form another kind of meaning around the monument not necessarily obvious to either the public or the client. And in fact, the general idea of a mix of European and Aboriginal elements has proved quite popular with the architect, as an obvious solution to the problem ...

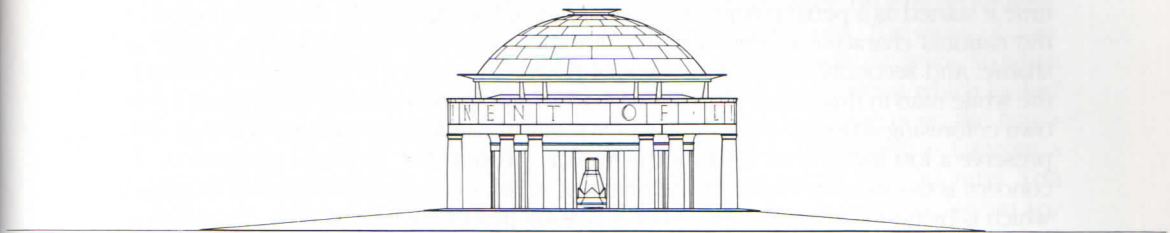
Exactly. It's exactly the adjacency of Aboriginal quotation to the white man's phrase, to the European quotation which seems to provide the larger irony of the work, and its appeal no doubt.

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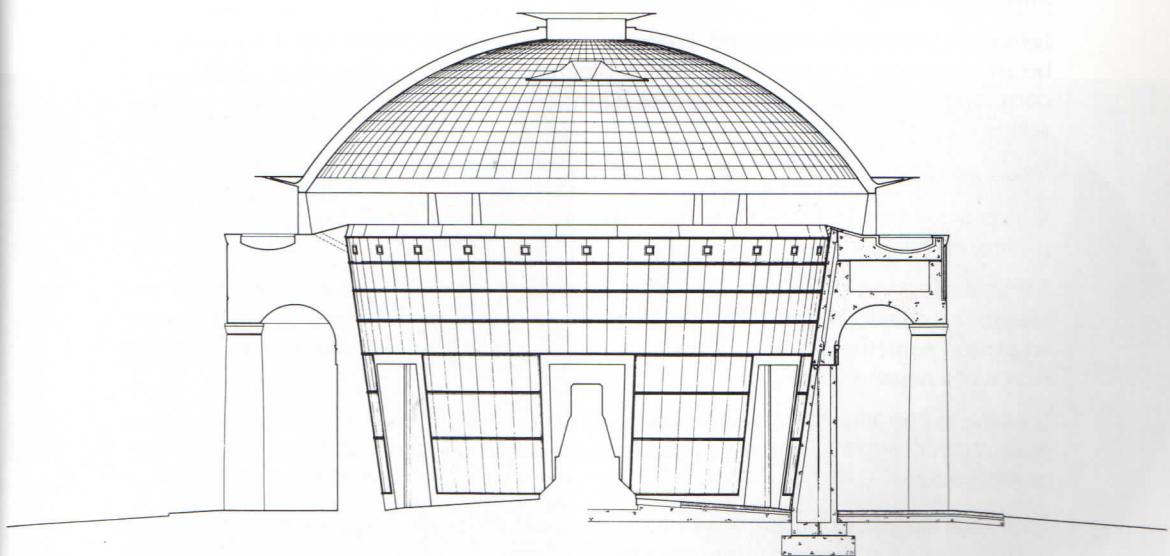


THE FEDERATION PAVILION
Centennial Park
ELEVATION

ALEXANDER TZANNES
ARCHITECT

December 1985

Alexander Tzannes, *The Federation Pavilion*, Centennial Park, Elevation, December 1985.



THE FEDERATION PAVILION
Centennial Park
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ALEXANDER TZANNES
IMANTS TILLERS
ARCHITECT

December 1985

Alexander Tzannes, *The Federation Pavilion*, Centennial Park, Section, December 1985.

Why do you say that?

First, because of the utopian closing off of options which the montage suggests. Let us not forget that Australia began its history as a utopian experiment, almost at the same time it started as a penal colony: that utopian ideal has remained a dominant aspect of the national character and the national ambition, and hence a continuing source of shame. And secondly, as heir to a colonial power, as a victim of colonisation himself, the white man in this country has always had an ambiguous relation with regard to his own colonising activities, something which today informs the irony behind the need to preserve a lost indigenous landscape as well as, presumably, its whole pertinence. My concern is to question the signifying practices at risk in the project's creative montage, which is by no means original to it but is already part of the whole fabric of Australian mythology.

Yes, I agree with that. I've definitely approached the monument from the point of view of its suggested meanings. I know it is a monument to white culture in Australia – 1901 would only be celebrated by white people. But that's who the client is and that's where my responsibilities lie. Someone who had a hostile attitude to that framework wouldn't have been selected to do the job. So within the given structure you can perhaps suggest secondary readings, but they are definitely secondary to the primary function of the monument.

It's interesting to reflect, Imants, that perhaps it might have been better to employ an Aboriginal artist for the project.

Yes, but remember that the first thing that visitors to the new Parliament House in Canberra will see is a large mosaic by Michael Nelson Tjakamarra. I had that in mind when I chose to quote from his work. The Pavilion is also linked to Parliament House in the sense that Federation is a political reality. In my mind, the two structures are intrinsically linked.

Let's move on to the work itself. From the sketches you've shown me, it does seem to be an extension of your recent Venice Biennale work, *The Nine Shots* (1985). Am I correct in assuming that the Baselitz figure comes from his "A New Type of Man" series?

Yes.

Which again ties in with the utopian theme chosen for the Pavilion. What are you playing on here?

I was attracted to that particular series because it suggested many ideas in the one image: the convict origins, the heroic rural settler clearing the land, etc. In a sense it suggested something both positive and negative, and I wanted this sort of transcendence of a negative past.

Looking at *The Nine Shots* one is reminded of your overall Duchampian strategy. Even in *ILLB.C.N.U.* (1976), you were already playing with quotation and the quoted image as readymade.

In fact, looking back on my work of the 70s, I did seem pre-occupied with the idea of paring down the image to minimal visibility, around the time of *Conversations with the Bride* (1975) and *Moments of Inertia* (1973). It was effective in my mind, but it worked in a negative way because people couldn't really see what was going on.

I'd like you to repeat two stories you told me, the ones concerning the making of *ILLB.C.N.U.* and *Heart of the Wood* (1985).

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Imants Tillers, from
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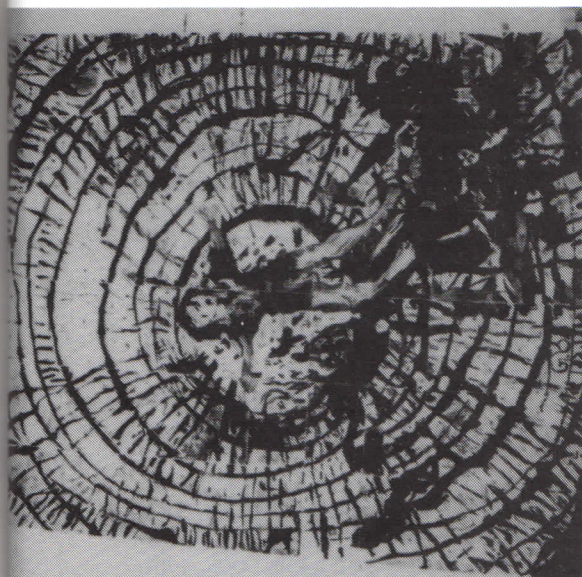
I.L.B.C.N.U. was done around the time of *Conversations*, which originated from the idea not just to duplicate Duchamp's *Large Glass* but to recreate it. I explored various logical ways of doing this, by analysing the formal structures of the glass and trying to replicate it in a different form on the one hand, and on the other, on a more intuitive, irrational basis to do with the readymade as a sort of rendezvous. The ideas of coincidence and synchronicity also came into it – a continuing interest in my work. So when I was in Leningrad at the Hermitage in 1976 I came across this painting which looked like a parody of the *Mona Lisa*: the figure was nude but in the same pose, the hands too. I discovered that the painter was Andrea Salai who was also known as Caprotti, a contemporary of Leonardo da Vinci. The coincidence was too good to miss. You weren't allowed to take photos in the Hermitage, but I had on me my Latvian spy camera and managed to photograph it ...

(Laughter) Hidden in a koala bear like the Sorbent ad?

That's right. So I took a photo of the image mainly because it was such an arresting thing to come across. Then it later dawned on me that there was a double Duchampian connection in bringing together *The Bride Stripped Bare...* and his *L.H.O.O.Q.* That process of conjunction, rendezvous and coincidence still interests me, and in fact while working on the dome for the Pavilion I've had to find a key ... no, more a signal to arrive at the possibilities of the work. I found this in the conjunction of Jasper Johns and Arakawa.

And the other story?

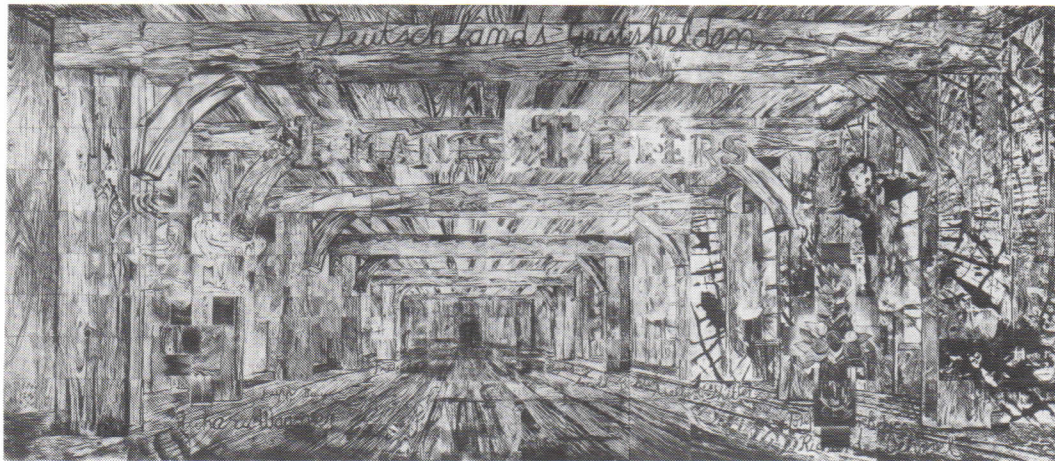
Well, I was in Venice. One of the reasons why I wanted to do *Heart of the Wood* was because of the Kiefer painting, *The Wooden Hall*. There were a number of reasons. In Latvian culture the theatre is quite a strong tradition: there are a lot of theatre sets that look like *Heart of the Wood* in their monumentality, wooden beams and the like. In



Imants Tillers, from George Baselitz' *The Poet* (c.1965)
oilstick on 66 canvas boards, 280 x 229cm.



Imants Tillers, first preliminary design for the dome of
The Federation Pavilion, 1985 synthetic polymer
paint, gouache on paper, 55 x 55cm.



Imants Tillers, *Heart of the Wood*, 1985
 oilstick, synthetic polymer paint on 338 canvas boards
 (No. 5002 – 5339)
 280 x 648cm
 Power.Gallery, University of Sydney

many of them the swastika appears as a benign symbol. So there was that connection, too.

The swastika of Nazi Germany or the mythological symbol?

Well both, they both occur. In Latvian imagery it's a symbol of thunder. Obviously it's a potent symbol, which is why it was used by Hitler. I guess that part of my attraction to Kiefer was a similar response to the same cultural background. Latvia was consecutively under German and Russian occupation. Someone like Kiefer is exposing the guilt that the generation after the war experienced. I guess I've felt that too, at different times.

But you had an idea for *Heart of the Wood* which you finally rejected.

Yes, I thought of inserting a symbol from an S.S. group active in Latvia during the war – an eagle holding a skull in its claws. I don't know much about them except that in Russian propaganda they are much despised. Anyway, there's a remnant of the symbol in the painting, in that area to the right where you can vaguely make out a skull with two eyes. That was as much as I thought I could include, otherwise people might've found the work too offensive. Well, when I was in Venice last year this New York art critic was standing in front of the work and was told the story by Bess Cutler. His reaction was to say that his whole family, which was Jewish, had been wiped out in Latvia by the Germans. It had a strong effect on him. And it's interesting also from the viewpoint of what meanings can be produced when you borrow an image. My use of Kiefer is not a deconstructive strategy, but has a sort of emotional basis.

Though it is strange to find your name carved on one of the beams along with those of Wagner, Hitler, Friedrich II, and the whole litany of Germanic cultural history, past or modern!

It has to do with a certain relationship I feel towards artists like Kiefer or Baselitz, with the fact that their art has power in the international art world and mine doesn't. Actually I'll show you a little drawing I did of two Latvian figures from a folk book, with a huge giant and a little man at his feet. The drawing was called *Julian Schnabel, Can You Hear Me?* (1984)



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Imants Tillers, *I am the door*, 1985
 oilstick, synthetic polymer paint, oil on 187 canvas boards
 (No. 5841 – 6027)
 280 x 648cm
 Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide.

(Laughter) I see that in the completed work there is a Margaret Preston vase of flowers. Is that a Baselitz figure there too?

Yes. In fact, the Baselitz figure in a radiating tree stump is from a work of his called *The Poet*. It's a good point you've noticed because it was really the first thing I thought of when I was given the dome commission – not that I finally used it, but it was what I thought of first. Here I guess I was bringing Baselitz and Kiefer into some sort of dialogue: Baselitz's wood and Kiefer's construction made out of wood.

This brings us to your rather provocative interview in the *Weekend Australian* (6-7 Sept. 1986), where you make a claim for modelling yourself on the international art scene and its successes. Obviously a lot of people might think this is just self-promotion. But more importantly, you ignore the whole mechanism whereby the Schabel's and Baselitz's of this world can receive the kind of attention they do. Such a mechanism does not operate in Australia, nor should it some would think. It is not so easy to dream away the fact that the selection of images and icons from the European and American systems can often fall flat as far as Australian art signifying practices are concerned. It risks being misread as simply bad conscience, a longing to live where in fact you are not living. Or it appears meaningless, an empty transliteration of references as a game unto itself.

I had one interesting response in Venice. The six works I put in that Biennale were consciously aimed at that context, though one of them had a reference to von Guerard – which to them would have been indistinguishable from, say, a Friedrich. The other five paintings all had German reference.

And what was the response from the critics?

I think a lot of the people who hadn't seen the work before were quite shocked. I remember Norman Rosenthal walking through with Christos Joachimides and they ... well, their response was interesting. One of them hated it and the other couldn't look through the catalogue fast enough to see what the other images were. (Laughter) The Germans seemed to like it, perhaps because it was an acclamation of their art. One young German artist hounded me, though. He was a bit of a bore. He couldn't com-

prehend why an Australian would want to do art like the Germans do it. But the fact that it was a question in his mind quite struck me. It's a paradox I can't really explain, but there's something compelling in that incomprehension or illogicality.

Well, on the one hand it overcomes the romantic attitude that all Australian art is a form of cave painting, and on the other it confirms your theory that Australia is an "isle of the dead" and only deals in the corpses of others. Surely you appreciate the strange and circuitous history of our relations with European culture.

That I suppose goes to the heart of the matter. I guess my painting is totally opposed to that of the Antipodeans or the great landscape tradition, the sort of idea of Australia being promoted by the likes of Peter Fuller. I just flicked through his recent book, *Images of God*, and there's a great quote from Fred Williams, where he says that after visiting the Pilbara if an artist couldn't paint that landscape then he was in the wrong profession. My attitude is completely opposed to that. I would rather paint German landscapes, interiors, American painting – anything in fact other than the Australian interior. My reason for this is that the notion of our interior has become so tyrannical that despite the supposed modern art movements in Australia the basic mentality still goes back to the landscape.

Quite true, as a generalisation. I like your idea that Australia is a dumping ground for all the world's rubbish. For instance, if works like *A Plan For Exploring the Interior* (1985) or *The Continent of Light* (1985) could be seen to paraphrase the way the dominant art languages of Europe and America are dumped in Australia, then indeed your work would have a transformational power in the major centres. But of course it can't possibly be read that way. And wouldn't it be seen only as a young upstart from the back of nowhere trying to out-brushstroke the masters?

What interests me about my approach is to try and juggle these different meanings that the art has here and in America or Europe. It might sound ludicrous but I did a work for Bess Cutler in 1985 after Donald Kuspit gave me a really scathing review in *Art in America*: he said I was just a parodist and that I only made him want to look at the originals more. When an article by him appeared in *Artforum* on selfhood – which is his whole line, about the integrity of the individual in the face of mass culture – it was illustrated by two Malevich paintings, one of which was an abstract and the other a pre-abstract or figurative one. This happened I think in the September issue, and I just had enough time to do one more painting before the work got packed up and sent to New York. So I combined the two images which illustrated his article and called it *A Portrait of Selfhood*. It appeared as a painting in New York virtually a month after the article to which it referred was published. That caused a few ripples because people there have this idea that Australia is so remote that such information couldn't be picked up so quickly. After all, people thought it was the current issue of *Artforum* stuck on a wall. Subsequently *Artforum* reproduced my version of their published images, but they downgraded the issue into one of trivial pursuit. To me it was a clear demonstration of what happens when you send images back to their place of origin quickly.

Shall we return to *The Nine Shots*? When I was looking at this work earlier on in the year for a little paper I gave at a Victorian College of the Arts forum on quotation, trying to relate your gesture of quoting Michael Nelson Tjakamarra through the guise of Duchamp, I was immediately reminded of something that Salvador Dali wrote in 1968:

In Paris, in the early days, there were 17 persons who understood the "readymades" – the very rare readymades by Marcel Duchamp. Nowadays there are 17 million who understand them, and that one day, when all objects that exist are considered readymades, there will be no readymades at all. Then Originality will become the artistic Work, produced convulsively by the artist *by hand*.

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This is in his preface to the Cabanne dialogues with Duchamp. I imagine Dali was referring to the way that Duchamp's conceptual gesture had been so degraded over the years that its meaning had become the exact opposite of what he had initially intended: to question notions of originality and manuality in art. I find these words by Dali quite profoundly prophetic. The same notion exists, but in reverse, in Borges' "Pierre Menard, Author of Don Quixote": there the difference presented by him between Menard's *Quixote* and Cervantes' is the passage of 300 years, which is the difference between reading and rereading it, between that of the different epochs. For Borges, or despite Borges, the original creation is recuperated, in making it identically coincide, in producing "pages which would coincide – word for word and line for line – with those of Miguel de Cervantes". Now, you yourself drew a distinction earlier on between repeating and remaking, which is something like the distinction between copying and coincidence – Duchamp's coincidence, his unrepeatable, chance occurrence. But where does such a distinction leave us? When is coincidence just a copy, non-conceptual, and simply a banal excuse for continuing originality by other means?

I realise the orthodox interpretation of Borges is to say that a change of the reading's circumstances is what distinguishes purposeful art from ordinary reproduction. I agree with this, as far as it goes. But what I also need to know is what exactly *are* the changes in circumstance such that this purpose is readable to me – not to me alone, but in terms of what the given codes already prescribe as significative or not, and for everyone. This is something which most art criticism continually fails to realise (clearly I am only referring to the more sophisticated types of criticism). Here as elsewhere the mere sign of a differential analysis would appear sufficient. For instance, to turn the whole problematic on its head, what are the respective histories within which one reads Cervantes and Borges/Menard in such a way that we no longer think to ask precisely why *la verdad, cuya madre es la historia* is incapable of providing the desired *ejemplo y aviso de lo presente, advertencia de lo por venire*? We are never told, certainly not by Borges. Nor is it hardly ever explained to us who or what controls the reading of a quoted work in order that the necessary "distance", or irony, is produced as such.

Most of my comments about your work have this sort of difficulty in mind. I don't think it is at all productive to argue, grandly or with malice, that "appropriation" is an evil to be stamped out at all cost. To be perfectly honest I find the whole discussion of it bogus, if only for the reason that Dali brings to the fore. There is a way in which a discourse can exist by covering its tracks so well that one can find it almost impossible to detect that its sole purpose, in effect, is to provide an even stronger case for what it is not saying than for what it is saying. This is the classic use of irony, and as we all know Brutus is an honourable man, too honourable perhaps. Thus it occurs to me to ask: where is the irony of so-called appropriation? In the art itself, or in the discourse which endlessly tries to ironise it? I think the proper question to pose with regard to the use of quotation should address itself to that discourse and to the practices which its recourse to irony is intended to destroy, that is to say, again referring to Borges' story, to those significations which tell us specifically what or "who is the rival of time, depository of deeds, witness of the past, example and lesson to the present, and warning to the future". In brief, I am much less worried by the art of appropriating discourse than I am by the discourse that appropriates art. That would indeed be "the truth, whose mother is history ..."

All this is quite pertinent, I think, to any discussion of *The Nine Shots*. I am not concerned to know whether or not you have consciously quoted from the sketch Duchamp did for his *Large Glass*, where the nine shots appear. But it is a matter of interest to me to discover which signifying practices can inform a reading of them as, say, the Southern Cross or as transformations into Aboriginal motifs – here Michael



Nelson Tjakamarra's use of traditional circular marks. In fact, the figure borrowed from Baselitz seems shot through with this sort of double-barrelled appropriation. Clearly European in inspiration on the one hand, and, on the other, linked to the white Australian's view of his own colonisation by Aboriginal territory. The struggle between two opposed continents is also represented by the primitive snake which entwines around the dead tree of modernity. Here the Baselitz figure assumes a cross motif, it is like a scapegoat, an act of crucifixion ...

I didn't intend any specific meanings in the painting, Paul. Though *Pataphysical Man* (1984) contains a small gnostic symbol of a snake nailed to a cross. That was something that occurred to me afterwards.

Let me explain myself. I realise that in speaking in this way I risk reading the picture rather than seeing the material practices invested in the work, something which would require a very different kind of response. But again my purpose at this moment is to query the *transposition* of themes and visual techniques from one culture to another, particularly with regard to how such a transposition makes apparent a certain myth of Australianness. For instance, who's shooting through, and with what? Is it the European tradition that is being rivetted by the Aboriginal state of play, or is it that we Europeans are trying to bring into line an "art of white aborigines"? And are these any different? Added to which one might mention a possible depiction of the way that traditional Aboriginal art forms are increasingly being embraced by European expressionist devices, colours, tools, whatever. Thus the sort of signifying practice I have in view before this work is one that endorses the recolonisation of localised cultural activities in this country.

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Imants Tillers, 2 panels (25.4 x 38.1cm each) from
Supressed Imagery, 1981
pencil, charcoal on 49 canvas boards
(No. 1 - 49), 178 x 266cm
Paul Taylor, New York.

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Imants Tillers, *The Field*, 1982
charcoal on 100 canvas boards
(No. 196 - 295), 254 x 381cm
National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne.

All that is true. But this was the first image where I directly quoted from an Aboriginal painting. I saw it as a dangerous activity in a way, much more dangerous than quoting from Kiefer or Schnabel. So in a sense the Aboriginal image is penetrating the figure. The connotations are of danger and dread.

Yes Imants, but what I'm getting at is that the thing quoted, "appropriated", or remade means nothing other than what it originally meant if it cannot at the same time be caused to corrode or displace its historical and cultural sources. So the sense of danger or dread you describe may come precisely from the failure to do anything with the quoted material except to repeat it unassailed.

Anyhow I've had my say on that topic – you must be getting bored with it. I'd now like to turn to your manner of working, particularly your use of Borofsky's system of boards. Is it true that Jenny Watson influenced your decision to follow this formal device?

What I should say is that she didn't. If you look back over my work you'll see that I have been using multi-paneled forms for a long time, though not necessarily on canvas boards. Perhaps her work alerted me to the easy availability of canvas boards, but not to any structural use of them. In fact, a key image that influenced me in this regard was Duchamp's *Tu m* (1918), where coloured panels emanate from a point – that's the way I've always thought of it. In French the title means something like "you bore me". But with me it's the exact opposite: it doesn't ever bore me. I like the idea of an infinite multiplication of panels.

It occurs to me that at least Borofsky numbered the boards, making the conceptual point of it clearer. If the boards do not form a combinatory then they simply become pieces in a jigsaw puzzle, or tiles, mosaics or whatever.

I like having the reference to Borofsky. Also, his stacks of sheets of paper are interesting and my work obviously relates to ...

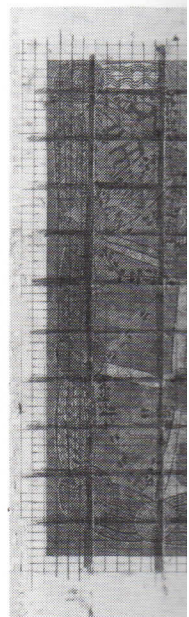
... John Nixon? (laughter)

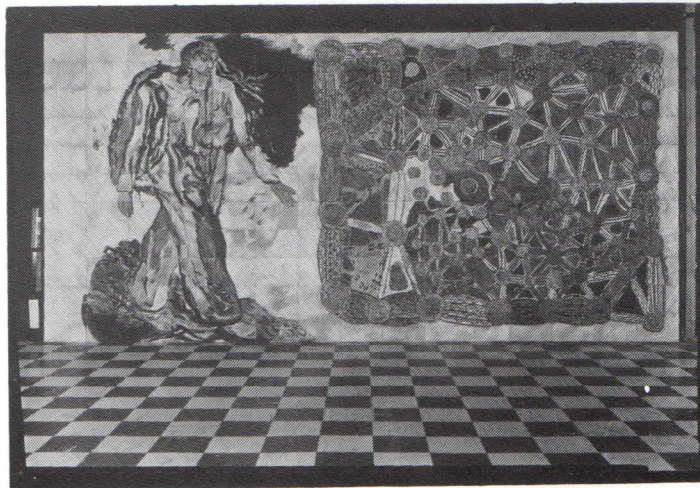
What really interests me is how this method enables the painting to exist in two simultaneous states, like Duchamp's door that is opening and closing at the same time. When the painting is on the wall it exists as one image, but when you take it down it becomes a mass of objects. The more panels I paint, the greater the mass this cumulative work becomes. It's like David Malouf's novel, *Harland's Half Acre*, where an artist's output is measured in acres.

What about the door in *I Am The Door* (1985)? It reminds me of what Barthes says in his 1978 essay "The Image": "Nothing for it, I must pass through the Image ..." I'm tempted to ask you, is this door the image of Polke? or is it the image of Tillers entering himself as Polke?

Well, I don't think the door is Polke. The door in the painting is a lead metallic opening; to me it was supposed to be a reference to some of Carl André's metal panels resurrected up on a wall. But also it represents the difference between the impenetrability of André's work and the pictorial space you can enter into. And the particular Polke work referred to is completely unchanged except for the structure of the panels themselves. The reason I chose it was that it could quite easily have been a composite painting done by me. It was like a readymade Tillers done by Polke.

You've said in print that you admire the work of Salle. I wonder whether you also admire his pretence of criticising the system from within. If you look at your quotation practice as a whole, one moment you seem to be playing off the more conceptual (and

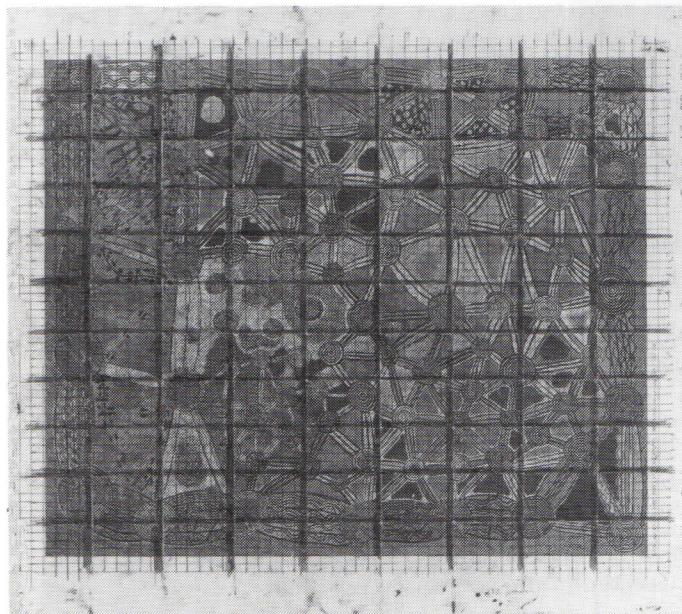




Imants Tillers, *Prism*, 1986
synthetic polymer paint, oilstick on 165 canvas boards
(No. 8417 - 8581), 280 x 571 cm



Imants Tillers, working drawing for *Prism*,
1986, 27.9 x 21.2 cm



Imants Tillers, working drawing for *Prism*,
1986, 30.6 x 33.9 cm

not really expressionist) painters against Americans like Salle, who are perfectly happy to bring their critique to the party; and the next moment you use the Australian art scene as a collision point with Aboriginality, which is one of the world's most cherished signs of extant originality: the dead heart of Australia. If I can again quote Barthes back at you, from the same essay: "the point is not to destroy Images but to unstick them, to distance them." But as you yourself have written, you liken our cultural condition to "a kind of perpetual mourning". Of course, you must realise that according to Freud mourning is a symptomatic formation concerned with repeating a primal act which never happened.

That's a really good point, Paul. Australia is just like that: people are always mourning something which hasn't happened.

Though it's a disadvantage in many ways. Let's conclude by discussing the operations you have used in order to realise your ideas for the Pavilion.

I think it would be more effective to show them pictorially.

But I'm interested now in the way you use the magazine format to suggest and build up a grid for the overall design.

Actually, the artwork was not always going to be in the dome. Theoretically it could have gone anywhere in the building. But we developed an idea for the dome, and part of that idea was to divide the dome up into vitreous enamelled steel panels, which meant that the image could be prefabricated elsewhere. This was completely compatible with the way I work; in fact, the panels in the dome will be of a similar size to the canvas ones I normally use.

So the basic image is again a combination of Baselitz and Michel Nelson Tjakamarra?

Well, it's changed a bit since you last saw it. Now it'll be partly based on the design Michael is doing for the new Parliament House. I've used the image reproduced in *Australia's New Parliament House* (Canberra, 1986). The main thing for me is that the image has already passed into reproduction before it's been made. But I feel that the Tjakamarra motif is too powerful and centralised in composition, so it may not be finally included. In fact, a lot of design decisions will be made in the process of painting it. That allows for the element of spontaneity and coincidence.

The more crucial interface has become two images, one by Jasper Johns which consists of four panels: one panel is a hatching pattern, the two middle panels are of black and red paving, and the fourth panel is a wooden armature of casts from the body – the arms, and head, sort of nailed onto it. So in that image of Johns I've got the basic elements of the dome I've been considering: on the one hand, the hatching pattern which is like the Papunya patterning, and on the other the paving structure which is like the structure of the panels themselves. The cross-referencing for this is a Arakawa image which I just picked out at random; but on closer scrutiny it is in fact based on that particular image of Johns, except that it has replaced the hatch pattern with a spectrum ...

Will the work exist apart from the tiles?

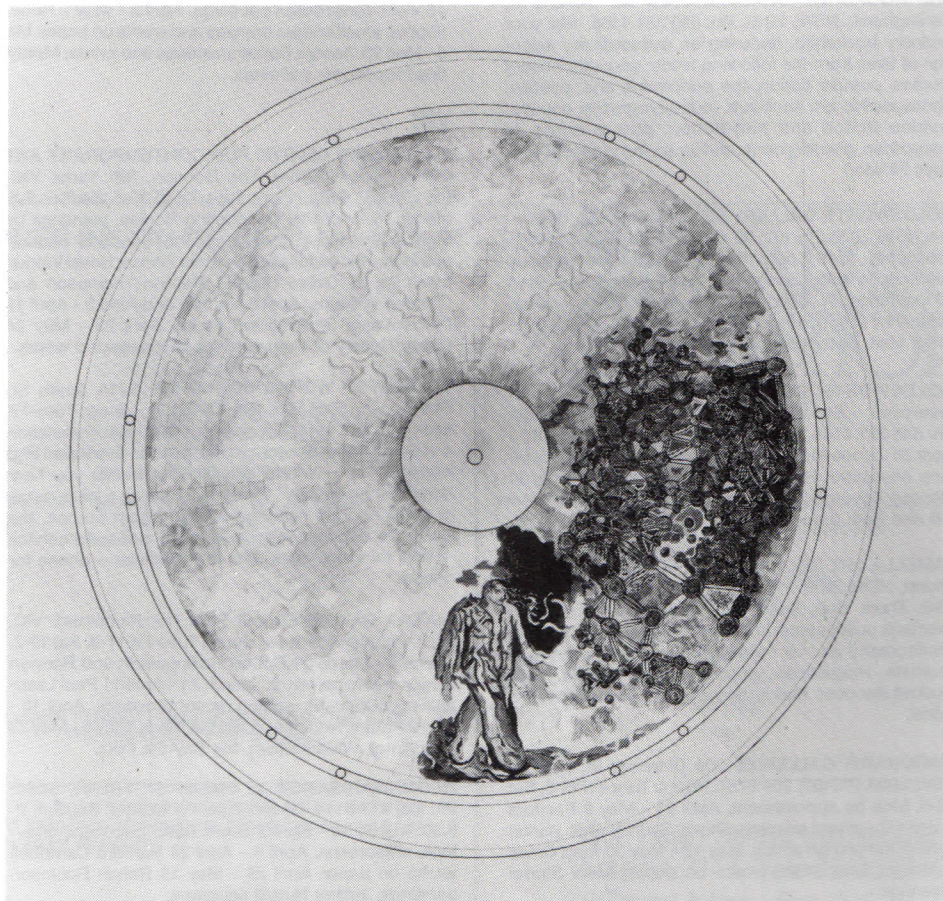
It may sound a bit fatuous, but I've spent 16 months working on the whole thing and it's become like the notes and projections of Duchamp's *Large Glass*.

The taking up of Johns' hatch brushstroke is a great idea. It means that you could abandon the system of boards entirely from now on if you wished.

Possibly. But the boards solve all my problems simultaneously. My main attraction to

them is being able to work on one small unit at a time so that one feels that the activity isn't heroic or monumental, notwithstanding the final product.

Thanks very much, Imants. I feel we've both learnt a lot about each other's work from this discussion.



Imants Tillers, second preliminary design for the dome of *The Federation Pavilion*, 1986, synthetic polymer paint, govache on paper, 68 x 68cm