

Cover:
Studio Phenomenon. 9.30am 12 September 1994
Photo: Imants Tillers

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Milburn Gallery
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Imants Tillers, Graham Coulter-Smith & Milburn Gallery

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TELEPATHIC MUSIC

In 1990 in an interview with Evelyn Juers (1) I wrote:

"Although my work process continues to utilise pre-existing images - reproductions from books, catalogues, magazines as it always has, what really interests me is how my paintings engage with the real world. This world includes, for example, my immediate environment, the position of my body within it, the position of the sun, the contents of my mailbox, my idiosyncratic movements through space, my regular commuter's path from home to studio, from studio to home, the dust on the studio floor, the contents of the latest **Flash Art** (one item, perhaps), the flecks of paint on the skirting board, an unsolicited phone call (wrong number). It is the exact interrelationship of these things within each moment that I try to observe. Thus, unlike someone who 'paints from nature' I focus on those subtle aspects of phenomena which others might fail to notice or having noticed find scarcely credible - those unexpected collisions of objects, destinies and events which Carl Jung called 'synchronicities'. I seek (unconsciously) a certain resonance between the contents of a picture (the one I'm working on) and my immediate experiences in my immediate surroundings."

So recently, while researching a short piece Was it Fluxus Speaking?, for an exhibition catalogue (2), I came across a reproduction of a work by the Fluxus artist, Robert Filliou (3). His work Telepathic Music No. 5 1978 which consisted of 33 music stands reminded me very strongly of my own work Conversations with the Bride which I had completed earlier in 1975 and for which I had designed and constructed the 112 stands myself. Since I could not believe that Filliou could have known my work or been influenced by it, I decided to work on a new piece for 1994, using ready-made music stands which could perhaps interrogate this uncanny correspondence, this acausal connection between us. (4)

It was easy to find the support for the work - ie. the music stands. It was far more difficult to find a set of appropriate images for them to carry. I began working with a number of ideas and images including George Maciunas' fluxfilm End after 9 1966. This was basically a short 8mm film loop which counted from 1 to 9 and then finished.

While I was trying out this imagery, which I did not feel was entirely satisfactory, I was continually moving the 9 music stands around my studio, in different configurations and different locations. Sometimes they were randomly bunched up, sometimes in a regular configuration, sometimes with blank canvasboards on them, other times without. Sometimes they were placed against the wall, sometimes next to windows, in pride of place or at other times completely hidden from view.

Now it is a peculiar feature of my studio that there is much play of light within it - direct light and light reflected from distant city buildings. This indirect light in particular is unpredictable and comes from unexpected directions at particular times of the year. However it was not this indirect light which came into play on this occasion but rather the direct light. For on one morning, at about 9.30am on the 12th September 1994, the wall adjacent to where the music stands had been left the night before was unexpectedly illuminated with cyphers of light, hieroglyphs, or musical notation - indeed the traces of a telepathic music. Light streaming through the windows at a certain time, a certain place had been reflected off the music stands onto the wall, forming this luminal text - at once banal and mysterious. And it was these momentary traces that I fixed on film and then transcribed onto the hitherto blank but expectant canvasboard panels. What was so surprising and unpredictable in this process was that the body of the music stands themselves should act as the literal receivers and transmitters of light, form and meaning. At this moment could it have been Robert Filliou (who died on 2nd December 1987) shaking hands with me across the gulf of time and agreeing on the outcome of a strangely telepathic interaction?

Imants Tillers
1994

Notes:

- 1) Evelyn Juers, "Imants Tillers: the phenomenon" Part 1, The Adelaide Review, Adelaide, June 1992
- 2) 25 Years of Performance Art in Australia, Ivan Dougherty Gallery, Sydney, 1994
- 3) Reproduced in "Fluxus: Today and Yesterday", Art and Design, London, 1993, p. 76
- 4) Right at this time, ie. September 1994, Leigh Dayton, the science writer for the Sydney Morning Herald reported on a recent theoretical alternative to Jung's 'acausal connecting principal' (synchronicity). This was the idea of 'backward causation' as expounded by Dr Huw Price, a philosopher at the University of Sydney who specialises in the bizarre and tiny world of quantum mechanics. Dayton writes:

"In a recent issue of the British journal Mind Dr Price says it is high time physicists seriously consider the theory of 'backward causation', the odd and largely disregarded scientific notion that an event in the future can influence the past. According to Dr Price such back-to-the-future style events do indeed occur in the mind-numbingly small world of the atom. Atoms are the chemical building blocks of elements, substances which form the 'everyday' world of rocks, water, air and living things.

In that world, sub-particles smaller than the atom itself interact with one another. When they do, says Dr Price, past and future meet. Physicist Dr John Cramer of the University of Washington in Seattle explains that this occurs because just before one sub-particle interacts with another, it sends out an 'offer' to the second sub-particle in the form of an electromagnetic wave. The second sub-particle receives the offering and sends back an electromagnetic wave in reply. In Dr Cramer's view, the first sub-particle exists in the past and the second in the future. The sub-particles shake hands across the gulf of time and agree upon the outcome of the interaction. If the two interacting particles are physically close together, the gulf between past and future is 'incredibly tiny', says Dr Price. But if they are far apart it is huge, possible lasting millions or billions of years."