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IMANTS

TILLERS

- plates 56-58 -

Imants Tillers, based in Cooma, Australia, is engaged in the distribution and circulation of visual imagery. He takes his images from other sources – especially reproductions in catalogues and art magazines – and then presents them, in whole or in part, in new combinations or in altered forms. The paintings are made of aggregations of canvasboard panels that have been numbered since he began his *Book of Power* on his canvasboard system, beginning with number 1 in 1981. Now he is up to 74.000.

*Mexico, etcetera and Surrender*

The work *Mexico, etcetera* (2001) is a meditation on unexpected journeys, uncanny connections, resonances, coincidences and inexplicable feelings of empathy towards particular words, phrases, images and even artists. It was produced especially for inclusion in this exhibition for the Pori Art Museum in 2001 and evolved in parallel with the exhibition itself.

*Mexico, etcetera* is also a continuation of my exploration of the issues of originality and authorship in relation to the mechanical reproduction of works of art. It is also a further example of the intertextual and intratextual resonances to be found within the total body of my canvasboard works, *The Book of Power*. The work relates to a major work from the previous decade, *The Bridge of Reversible Destiny* (1990) and also to the *Diaspora Trilogy*, not only in its scale but also in its diasporic themes to do with identity, displacement, exile and personal redemption.

*Mexico, etcetera* also relates to my own (and my family's) unexpected relocation and voluntary exile from Sydney to the small inland town of Cooma in southeastern New South Wales in 1996. The title of the work refers in passing to the 1945 homoclimatic map of the Monaro-South Coast region which came to my attention shortly after our arrival here. Comparing locations in terms of their micro-climates, the map revealed that Cooma was linked to 'Guerrero City' in Mexico. Not long after, with no prior connection to Mexico whatsoever, I found myself there in Mexico, uncannily, on two separate, unrelated occasions with thousands of my canvasboard panels on display firstly in Mexico City in 1998 and then in Monterrey in 1999.

The painting *Mexico, etcetera* is dominated by a large 'IT' and although this could refer to my own initials, it might equally refer to some other physical or metaphysical entity or in self-referential mode, refer even to itself - a sign for the *Book of Power*. In any case, the letters themselves are appropriated from the work of the great New Zealand artist, Colin McCahon. Indeed, the work consists entirely of quotations,

drawing on images and words from such artists as Giorgio de Chirico, Shusaku Arakawa, Madeline Gins, Lawrence Weiner, John Baldessari, Robert Barry, Ed Ruscha, Kurt Schwitters, Joseph Beuys, Paul Neagu, Sigmar Polke, Stephane Mallarme, Piero Manzoni and Chris Ofili. There are also references to 'Zapatistas', to the Mexican mural painters, to the Mexican Day of the Dead, to the Yuendumu doors, to Aboriginal art, to the 'O -T map of Isidore of Seville', to the Mexican city of Monterrey, to the biblical apocalypse and to the names of geographical localities in southeastern Australia. Also present as a kind of background or field are the angels, the cherubim, which began to appear in my work soon after we arrived in Cooma. These are derived from a drawing by Philipp Otto Runge (c. 1806). Then there is another angel, which can be found as a small detail inset in the left-hand arm of the black 'T' which is based on Hugo Simberg's famous painting in Helsinki *Wounded Angel* (1903). In this painting, Simberg shows two boys carrying a blindfolded angel in white robes on a stretcher. It is a curious inversion of normal convention since angels are supposed to rescue us! However, as a depiction of human compassion for an angel in distress it is both an apt leitmotif for 'empathy' and also a moving reflection on the enigma of life and death.

*Surrender* (2003), the work exhibited at Artspace, Sydney, takes its title from the original motto on the coat of arms of the city of Sydney: I TAKE BUT I SURRENDER. This work underscores the surrender of intentionality within my *Book of Power*. This comes from the realisation that more and more, the vast image bank and the connections between its constituent parts already present within the *Book of Power* determines what comes next - the next step that my work takes. I am no longer the principal author of my own oeuvre. Now, after 20 years, the work itself has a momentum and direction of its own - it seems, increasingly, to move according to its own volition. *Surrender* is also an image of connectivity - a strange fusion of Brice Marden's late-modernist loops with the great Aboriginal artist, Emily Kngwarreye's rhizomatic yam dreamings.

*Imants Tillers*