
Imants Tillers

When Locality Prevails

Everything pushes towards landscape

PHILIPP OTTO RUNGE

Imants Tillers is an internationally recognised Australian artist who has had major exhibitions in the US, UK, Mexico, Finland, Italy, Latvia and New Zealand. The National Gallery of Australia is preparing a major exhibition of his work for early 2006.

man with a secret. He is in the boiler room under the
like a Hollywood film). He is holding a letter, that he
pieces. Suddenly, the scraps of paper are caught in an
sappear up a dark flue above the actor's head. Then the
ed up into the flue, until only his legs are showing. When
completely different. A disembodied voice tells him he has
tity. The voice continues:

French now, not English, and you are homosexual, not

t my wife?' asks the man in a panic.

'I see her; she will be a very close friend of yours. She won't
yone but a friend.'

an metamorphoses a second time. Now he is an Italian,
r. A heterosexual who pines for his previous homosexual
onscious of his previous selves, unlike, say, an insect which
upal and imaginal stages.

poet, essayist and playwright whose 'Virilities' series of
investigation into masculine identity. The *Faune endormi*
a sculpture by Edme Bouchardon. *Le Sommeil d'Endymion*
ne-Louis Girodet-Trioson when he was in his seventies.
is the source for the 'love-in-a-lorry' quip.

Since we moved to this (some would say) godforsaken, bleak, arid, treeless landscape called the Monaro nearly eight years ago, an awareness of landscape has become inescapable to me. Every journey, on foot or by bus, car or aeroplane, entails contact with the austere local vistas of a landscape tempered by heat, frost, drought and decomposing granite. Here I have come to understand what Thomas Bernhard meant when he described gardening 'in all its possible and impossible forms'.

Naturally, issues of locality and identity have become uppermost in my mind and have made their presence felt in my recent work, not as literal representations of landscape, of the grass, hills, sky, clouds or rocks around me, but as *evocations*, through text and other layered visual elements. I have also been attracted to the ready-made poetry of the names of towns and localities and geographical features in my vicinity. For example in *Nature Speaks: AT* (2002) Bunyan, Polo Flat, Four Mile, Coolringdon, The Arable Road, The Brothers, The 'Jenny' Brothers, Kybeyan and Nimmitabel refer to actual sites in and around Cooma.

Being here has reinforced my interest in Aboriginal art, still the most powerful discourse within Australian art, and proof of the power of Joseph Beuys's dictum, 'Every human being an artist'. I strive to connect with this important art, which draws essentially on responses to the landscape. One approach I have taken is to collaborate with the Warlpiri artist Michael Nelson Jagamara. *Nature Speaks: AX* (2002) is one example of this. I dream and speculate on an enthusiastic response to Aboriginal art which one could call 'post-Aboriginal'.

I began the 'Nature Speaks' series in September 1998, and have completed 89 works, including the 12 reproduced here. With one exception, each consists of 16 canvasboard panels arranged in a 4 x 4 grid. My goal, now not far from reach, is to complete 100 works.

At first glance the series appears to proceed like an *algorithm* because of the repetition of certain elements within each work – like the word 'horizon'; the Mallarméan mantra 'A throw of the dice will never abolish chance'; the Tau cross of Colin McCahon's 'load-bearing structures'; and the ubiquitous cherubim of Philipp Otto Runge, from his unfinished *Gesamtkunstwerk* 'The Times of Day'.

There is also room for deviations, digressions, coincidences. *Nature Speaks: BK* (2004) is one such instance, inspired by a trip to

Uluru and Kata Tjuta in 2000, which subsequently had a peculiarly *local* resonance for me. I discovered later that a fairly unremarkable outcrop of lichen-covered rocks surrounded by native *colitris* pines and overlooking the southern approach to Cooma was also named Ayers Rock. I pondered the mystery of this enigma: with the return of the *real* Ayers Rock to its Aboriginal custodians and the change of name to Uluru, it seemed as if its former name had somehow migrated or been displaced to the south-east of NSW – to Cooma. The 'Nature Speaks' series is always alert to such displacements, and attentive to enigmas.

Paradoxically the move to Cooma was more than a move to the grasslands of the Monaro. It gave me the opportunity to live and work in an old European-style garden of hundred-year-old pines, cedars and deciduous trees, including mature silver poplars, elms, prunus, crab-apples and birches, and to experience fully the four seasons, what Runge calls 'the year in its successive states – blossoming, producing, bearing and destroying'. A European rhythm significantly different from that of the Australian landscape, yet still somehow within it. Here, in the garden at 'Blairgowrie', nature speaks in the Latvian vernacular of my childhood. As the Latvian poet Ilze Kalnāre describes it:

Runā akmens, runā kalns
Runā vārpus druvā
Runā katrs koks un lauks
Valodā tik tuvā.

The rock speaks, the mountain speaks, every ear of corn speaks, every tree and field, in a language so intimate and familiar.

Philipp Otto Runge, writing in the early nineteenth century, not far from the shores of the Baltic Sea, echoes this sentiment:

There are times when it seems to me as if the world was splitting up into its individual elements, and as if the land, water, flowers, clouds, the moon and rocks were all conversing with one another. They all seem to be alive, and I start to feel half crazy; but I am patient and when I can get outside again I understand everything better.



Nature Speaks : BC (2003)
No. 73103 – 73118



Nature Speaks : BD (2003)

No. 73985 – 74000



Nature Speaks : AZ (2002)
No. 72682 – 72697



Nature Speaks : AX (2002)

No. 72650 – 72665



Nature Speaks : AQ (2002)
No. 72464 – 72479



Nature Speaks : AT (2002)

No. 72586 – 72601



Nature Speaks : BE (2003)
No. 73951 – 73966



Nature Speaks : BI (2003)
No. 74033 – 74048

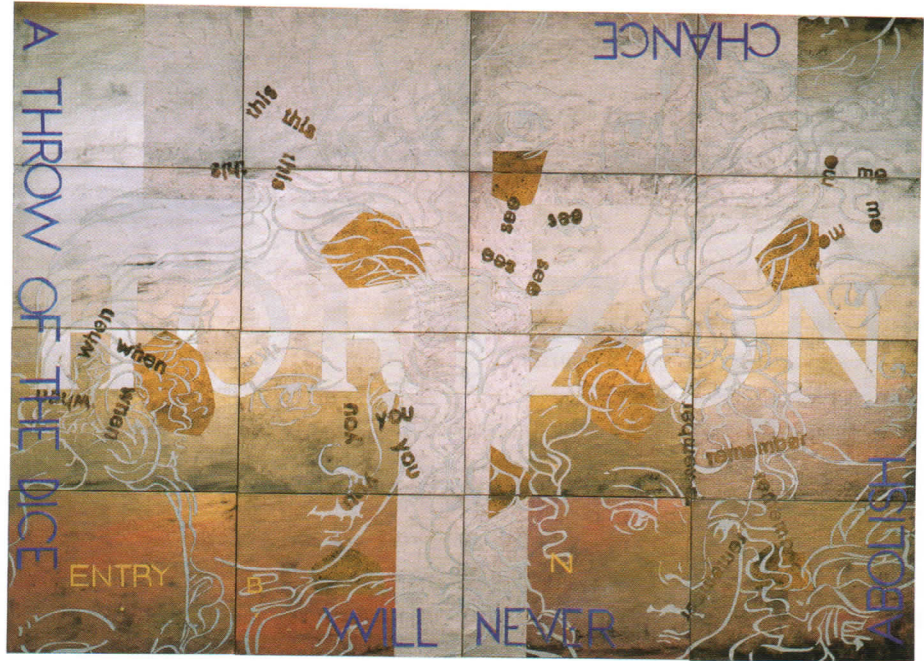


Nature Speaks.: BK (2004)

No. 71742 – 71757



Nature Speaks : BM (2004)
No. 74358 – 74373



Nature Speaks : BN (2004)
No. 74374 – 74389