

Artist's statement/Imants Tillers

What was I thinking?

Ian Fairweather has been with me on an unbroken journey for the past 30 years. The early 1980s was a time of great change in the international art world. It was a time when painting made a spectacular comeback as a viable contemporary art practice and it came in the guise of what was soon labelled as 'neo-expressionism'. Recently leafing through the catalogue *Zeitgeist* from one of the iconic and influential exhibitions of the time, held at the Martin Gropius-Bau in Berlin in 1982, I was amazed at the energetic, coarse, irrational, somewhat lurid and clumsy images reproduced therein. The catalogue even included texts by such philosophical and literary luminaries as Paul Feyerabend and Thomas Bernhard. A number of the younger artists have since passed out of view but certain others continue to be compelling today: Cy Twombly, Georg Baselitz, Anselm Kiefer, Enzo Cucchi and Julian Schnabel to name a few.

It was a moment that no artist could ignore, not even here in faraway Australia. One had to join it or oppose it yet in a sense I ended up doing both. It was at this time I began to make what looked like expressionistic paintings on canvas board panels arranged together in grids to form large composite images. Many of these early works such as *The Great Metaphysical Interior* 1983 and *Spirit* 1983 were quite raw images painted entirely with my hands and fingers (i.e. without brushes). They used a number of striking motifs that came from the paintings of Ian Fairweather and thus Fairweather helped to propel me into the vortex of the new zeitgeist! Ironically, however, while appearing to be paintings of great spontaneity and originality, the use of appropriation and quotation as a *modus operandi* positioned my works in the 'unexpressionistic' camp – the emerging counterpoint to neo expressionism in the early 1980s in what became known as 'postmodern appropriation'.

Nevertheless art cannot arise from just a strategy. The material facts of art and the process of its

production are what is paramount and in this, Fairweather was a great inspiration. I was attracted to his use of low-tech surfaces and materials, his subdued but luminous palette and to his process of layering, repetition and variation which have also become the central tenets of my own art.

Above all, however, it is Fairweather's total immersion in 'process' which is impressive – in the sense that he has been transported into the work's own rhythm and that he is not in control of its hidden law. And this immersion was enabled by a profound solitude especially in his later life on Bribie Island. As Martin Heidegger once wrote:

'Solitude has the peculiar and original power of not isolating us but projecting our whole existence out into the vast nearness of the presence of all things.'

Imants Tillers, 2010



6. (Dervish) 1949
gouache on cardboard 63 × 50.5 cm