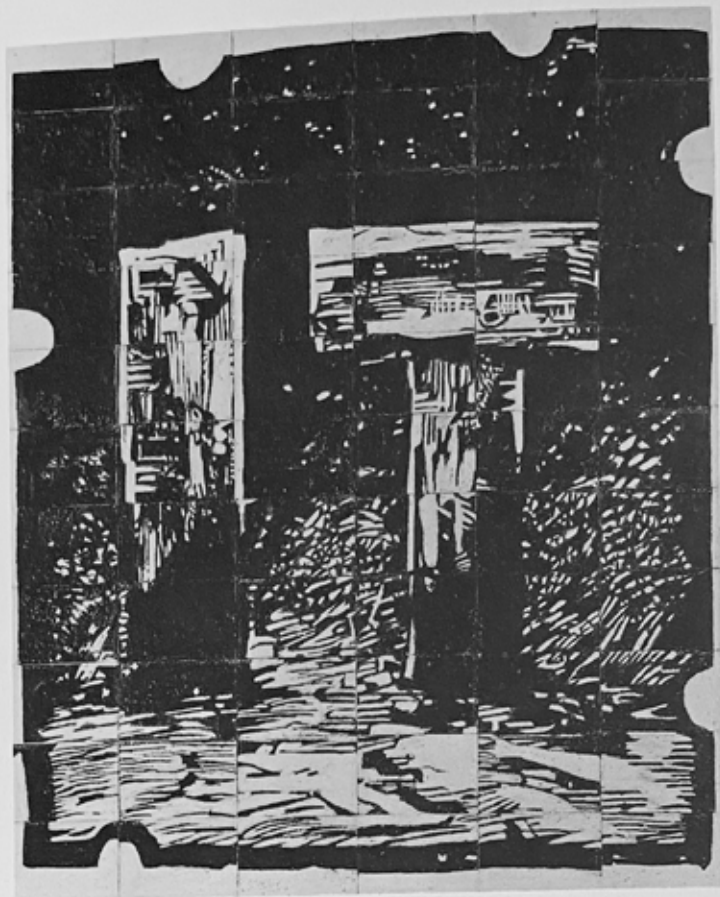




IMANTS TILLERS: WORKS 1978-1983

IMANTS TILLERS: WORKS 1978-1988



#### THE MORNING PRAYER OF THE TRUE PAINTER

My God, make my craft as a painter  
More and more perfect.  
Let it be, my God, that with the help  
of materials  
I will achieve greater progress  
Until the last day of my life  
Give me also, my God, intelligence  
More strength, health and willpower  
So that I may always improve  
My emulsions and my daubing oils.  
So that they will help me  
more and more  
So that they will contribute  
to the substance of my painting  
And to greater transparency  
and body,  
To increasing polish and fluidity.  
My God, stand by me,  
Above all inspire me,

So that in my work as a painter  
I solve the problems of the MATERIALS.  
So that I can restore the splendour  
of painting.  
The splendour it has lost  
for almost a century.  
Help me, my God, to re-establish  
the honour of painting,  
In that I solve the problems  
of the materials.  
For the metaphysical  
and spiritual problems,  
They are now solved by the critics  
And the intellectuals.  
Amen.

*Giorgio de Chirico, 1945*

THE UNNAMEABLE 1985  
acrylic, oilstick, oil on 66 canvas  
boards  
110" x 105"  
Courtesy Yuill/Crowley

## PREFACE

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*'At this point the story could mention that among the virtues of mirrors that the ancient books discuss there is also that of revealing distant and hidden things. The Arab geographers of the Middle Ages, in their descriptions of the harbour of Alexandria, recall the column that stood on the island of Pharos, surmounted by a steel mirror in which, from an immense distance, the ships proceeding off Cyprus and Constantinople and all the lands of the Romans can be seen. Concentrating the rays, curved mirrors can catch an image of the whole. Together with the centrifugal radiation that projects my image along all the dimensions of space, I would like these pages also to render the opposite movement, through which I receive from the mirrors images that direct sight cannot embrace. From mirror to mirror – this is what I happen to dream of – the totality of things, the whole, the entire universe, divine wisdom could concentrate their luminous rays into a single mirror. Or perhaps the knowledge of everything is buried in the soul, and a system of mirrors that would multiply my image to infinity and reflect its essence in a single image, would then reveal to me the soul of the universe, which is hidden in mine...'*

Italo Calvino, *If On A Winter's Night a Traveller*

Imants Tillers' reflections of reproductions of 19th and 20th century Western 'masterworks', often invaded with fragments of 'native' culture, suggest place through displacement; reality through re-presentation; authorship, origin and identity through the copy, through distance and through, not the author, but the spectator who gazes down this hall of mirrors.

His choice of images is not arbitrary or ironic. The meaning of each fragment is carefully investigated and all its possibilities both celebrated and exploited. In this sense Tillers cannot be collapsed within the 'appropriation' bracket which characterises so much postmodern practice through the 80s. Although his paintings emerge from and deal with the particulars of Australia's antipodean predicament, they touch in the broadest sense on issues of dominant cultural centres, their peripheries and publics; and in the reinvestment of meaning and spirituality.

I would like to thank Imants Tillers for his energy, commitment and cooperation in bringing together the first retrospective of his work in this country. I am also grateful to Jennifer Slatyer, Judy Annear and Kerry Crowley for their invaluable advice and assistance, and Andrea Schlieker for all the work she contributed to this project. Thanks are also due for the generosity of the lenders to the exhibition; and to Michael Newman for his contribution to this publication.

The ICA is grateful to John Kaldor and the Visiting Arts for their support of this project; and to the Australian Bicentennial Authority without whom the presentation of this exhibition would not have been possible.

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*hwona Blazwick*

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# IMANTS TILLERS: THE ARTIST AS TRANSLATOR

BY MICHAEL NEWMAN

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'...no translation would be possible if in its ultimate essence it strove for likeness to the original. For in its afterlife – which could not be called that if it were not a transformation and a renewal of something living – the original undergoes a change.'

Walter Benjamin, 'The Task of the Translator'

Carl Andre once wrote that 'Both Leonardo and Duchamp abandoned painting for strategy. Or tactics?'<sup>1</sup> He also suggested that the Duchamp of the readymades represented the cynical side of modern art.<sup>2</sup> Duchamp and the more earnest Andre are both important to Tillers. As the invitation to his 1977 exhibition 'The Property of Being Found' Tillers made postcards from an illegal photograph he took in the Hermitage Museum, Leningrad of a painting by the minor 16th century artist Andrea Salai (known as Caprotti) which is itself a bare-breasted version of Leonardo's *Mona Lisa*. Duchamp had drawn a beard on a postcard of the *Mona Lisa* and inscribed it 'L.H.O.O.Q.' (She has a hot tail); Tillers inscribed his postcard 'I.L.B.C.N.U.'. *Metal Rug* (1988) refers to Carl Andre's floor pieces consisting of metal plates, and the occasional showing of the canvasboard paintings as stacks is a homage to Andre's approach to sculpture. By means of his 'translations' from reproductions of the art of others, Tillers inserts his work into circulation through mimicry, yet that very mimicry also creates a distance, a space for subjectivity.

The supposed self-subsistence of identity as origin is always infected by difference. Identity and difference can be seen at work in Tillers' *Untitled*, 1978, which consists of two large-scale copies made by a computer process on canvas of different reproductions of the same painting. The painting is *Summer*, 1909, by Hans Heysen, one of the best known and most widely reproduced images of the 'gum tree', the eucalyptus which has become, through such images, one of the most stereotypical emblems of the Australian landscape. Australian national identity is bound up with and reflected back to itself in this image which has multiplied and disseminated as far as China where, according to Tillers' book *Three Facts*, 1981, the sheep have been misinterpreted, perhaps in some subtle act of political criticism, as cows. The image in its disseminated form as reproduction has been returned to canvas, each of the two panels from different reproductions: the differences register in terms of the identity of the image, as in Rauschenberg's *Factum I* and *Factum II*, 1957, which duplicate the accidents of gestural painting. The repetition of the connotatively loaded image serves as a device of cancellation or neutralization, combining minimalist seriality with Duchampian indifference.

Tillers plays off against each other the two senses of 'place' – spatio-geographical location and linguistic places or *topoi*, the figures of rhetoric – thus deconstructing the notion of identity as an originary presence which underlies the identification of indigeneity with special characteristics of the land or landscape. *Untitled*, 1978, reminds us that any such identity is constructed from disseminated and displaced images. Yet geography is not to be ignored: images *travel*, they err and get lost, to be rediscovered in unexpected places, and their trajectory embodies relations of power. Tillers shows that origin and place are dependent upon dissemination and displacement.

In one form or another displacement has featured in all Tillers' works. *52 Displacements (one year's work)*, 1979-80, consists of paintings of seascapes by Frederick Waugh from Walter T. Foster 'how to paint' books. The images of the

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American seascape, already displaced from painting to reproduction, are displaced again into the paintings of the Australian artist who includes the gilt frames, signifiers of the value of high art, and the frame itself is framed by the border of white ground, then primer, then raw canvas. Displacement involves reframing in such a way that the material labour, the work of painting becomes apparent, and the time taken, one painting a week for a year. The paintings by Tillers are accompanied by an equal number of the same text: '52 DISPLACEMENTS/ Of Image/ Of Time/ Of Water/ Of Feeling/ one year's work'. While the paintings are displayed unframed, the text is framed. The difference within repetition recalls Monet's *Poplars*, *Haystacks* and *Rouen Cathedral* paintings of the 1890s, the first examples of the modernist practice of working in series which culminates in the seriality of the Minimalist grid of the 1960s and 70s. *52 Displacements* seem to demonstrate perfectly the point Rosalind Krauss made in an article three years later that the "constitution of the work of art as a representation of its own space of exhibition is in fact what we know as the history of modernism." The gallery wall, as a signifier of inclusion, comes to constitute a representation of 'exhibitionality'. Krauss argues that painting, particularly landscape painting, came to internalise this space of exhibition, such that "aesthetic discourse resolves itself around a representation of the very space that grounds it institutionally".<sup>3</sup> Already in *Untitled*, 1978, and *52 Displacements* Tillers has shown a concern with landscape both as a disseminated ideological signifier and as an index of exhibitionality through the device of repetition.

While Krauss' argument concerns the formal flattening of the picture plane which, in modernism, defines Art to the exclusion of kitsch, Tillers' strategy invokes inclusion and exclusion in terms of the relation of centres of power and lines of domination. Works of art only become visible in the art world if they fulfill certain conditions which change with history and fashion. Tillers makes explicit and strategically exploits the fact that the dominant centres will only attend to art from the 'margins' which conforms to the current paradigm. The 'Catch 22' for artists outside the main centres is that their work will only attract attention and support if it resembles work already being made in those centres, while if it does so it will always be belated. So one aspect of Tillers' work is the repainting or remaking of fashionable works of art from reproductions, often very soon after their appearance, reinserting these translations into circulation in the very centres which gave rise to the 'originals'. As in two versions of the Heysen painting, Tillers' versions are not identical to the originals: not only are they repainted or remade from reproductions in a different format, often images from different sources are juxtaposed. Tillers' works are different, but that difference cannot be referred to a different source or origin, but is rather marked as difference in terms of identity. Subjectivity is constituted in the play of identity and difference, rather than itself being their origin.

Meaning, for Tillers, is an *effect* of the signifier, its ability to generate other signifiers through the play of analogy and correspondence. A painting done in Australia in the 1860s by the Swiss painter Eugen von Guerard which makes Mt. Kosciusko, the highest mountain in Australia, look like a Swiss Alp is discovered in Sao Paulo, Brazil in 1973 and completed the circle of its journey in the National Gallery of Australia. In 1985 Tillers makes a painting from a reproduction and calls it *Mount Analogue* which is the title of a book by René Daumal which he began in the Alps in 1939 and died before he could complete it in 1944. The narrator goes on an expedition with a team led by one 'Father Sogol' ('a rather childish anagram') who is a mountaineering instructor, in search of the symbolic mountain:

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“For a mountain to play the role of Mount Analogue... *its summit must be inaccessible, but its base accessible* to human beings as nature has made them. It must be *unique*, and it must *exist geographically*. The door to the invisible must be visible.”<sup>4</sup> This idea resembles Duchamp’s *Bride Stripped Bare by her Bachelors, Even (The Large Glass)*, 1915-23, which, according to the artist’s notes, involves the unconsummated passage from the third to the fourth dimension, and the mythical Tlön, invented by a secret sect to obey laws other than those of the world, of Borges’ story ‘Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius’ which in the end is merged with the everyday world until “in all memories, a fictitious past occupies the place of any other.” These are writers and artists who, instead of countering the totalisation of instrumental reason with expressionism, delight in inventing, like Jarry, a ‘pataphysics’: a speculative, imaginary and sometimes absurd and subversive distorting mirror of the laws of science, logic and society. Borges writes that in Tlön ‘Books are rarely signed. The concept of plagiarism does not exist; it has been established that all books are the work of a single writer, who is timeless and anonymous. Criticism is prone to invent authors’.<sup>5</sup> This idea which is recalled by Tilters’ notion of a ‘Book of Power’, a total work, like Mallarmé’s project for *Le Livre*, a single work comprising all his works which will, we might extrapolate, include all the works of others which Tilters draws into his own. The numbering of each panel constructs authorship purely on the basis of an abstract temporal series, which will be terminated by a Duchampian abnegation or mortality. If the ‘death of the author’ coincides with the birth of the reader, as Barthes suggests, then the origin is replaced by a multiple and inclusive subjectivity. The series could only complete itself as a circle around a centre: without a centre, the author as God-like origin, it is endless. Yet in Tilters’ work a limitless dissemination of subjectivity compensates marginality by extending it to include any possible centre.

In his text ‘Locality Fails’ Tilters asks: “How are we to interpret the fact that ‘objects’ no more convincing than the crude representations in Giorgio de Chirico’s paintings occur with an unnatural frequency in the Australian suburban landscape?”<sup>6</sup> Tilters explains this by the degree to which Australian experience is mediated by photographic images, so that the qualities of photographic reproduction are reproduced in the actual buildings. These simulations mirror de Chirico’s paintings. Tilters characterises de Chirico as a simulator – of tradition and of himself – with a pathological desire to defy the incontrovertible circumstance of his time and place in which he finds an echo of the Australian experience post 1788. The painting *The Vortex*, 1984, is based on de Chirico’s painting *The Archaeologists*, 1929, with, among fragments of other paintings, the addition of two heads by Julian Schnabel which are already appropriations, one the self-portrait of Artaud which hovers like an apparition between the two seated classical figures with fragments of buildings in their laps. Below them looking upwards and rather lost is the image of a boy from an illustration in *The White Book (Balta Gramata)* depicting rural life in early 20th century Latvia (Tilters is of Latvian parentage). The painting becomes a vortex in which separate events – images – catastrophically implode. Displacement, simulation and appropriation are coupled with handprints, as ‘primitivist’ signifiers of origin as in rock painting and indeed the handmade origin of the work itself, and spirals such as are found in Aboriginal painting. In this vortex – Australia? postmodernism? – ‘everything goes’ as the motto at the bottom of the painting puts it, ambiguously adapting Feyerabend’s motto of anarchist science – ‘anything goes’ – to suggest that everything is possible and everything disappears into the hyper-irreality of simulation.<sup>7</sup>

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In *Antipodean Manifesto*, 1986, which also incorporates a painting by de Chirico, *Sun in Metaphysical Interior*, 1971, the woodgraining of the floorboards is exaggerated to resemble a painting by Kiefer, conjoining the wandering Greek with an artist whose theme is origin and the tragedy of German national history. The sun in the centre of the de Chirico is replaced by an Aboriginal motif with cruciform and radiating arms springing from a central 'target', a type of painting which is of the map of a journey, the 'dreaming' in which the features of the land are sung into being. When Tillers here, and elsewhere, cites Aboriginal painting he is, paradoxically, quoting an art of *originary* naming. In the bottom right hand corner is a representation of an Aborigine as a 'primitive' by Schnabel from *Untitled*, 1979 which also appears in monochrome, painted from a black and white reproduction, in *Continent of Light*, 1985, together with a Lhose constructivist abstraction. The title is a cliché description of Australia. It might also refer to the perception of painting as light; and to the progressive, evolutionary schema of the 18th century enlightenment which would consign non-European races to backwardness and which was the period of the 'discovery' and colonisation – which is, after all, the very model of appropriation – of Australia by Britain. 'The Antipodean Manifesto', published in 1959 and signed by Dr Bernard Smith and a group of Melbourne artists, argued against international developments in abstract art and in favour of a figurative, mythic art drawing on life and nature in Australia.<sup>8</sup> Paul Taylor has written the "the problem of 'Australia' ... is not one of geography and origins, it is one of texts and textuality."<sup>9</sup> Tillers' painting represents the simultaneity of textual events in the global village where linear history and geographical distribution is collapsed into the vortex of the painting which thus becomes, as the title of another painting suggests, a 'conquest of space'.

The simultaneity of the painting as displayed in the exhibition contrasts with the systematic temporal fragmentation in which it is painted. Tillers has written:

"While the dot-screen of mechanical reproduction renders all images equivalent, interchangeable, scale-less and surface-less, the consumption and regurgitation or 'recreation' of these images reinvests them with an aura, surface, substance and scale entirely different from their corresponding 'originals'. In this sense mechanical reproduction is a purgatory or limbo for image patterns. Like disembodied souls floating textureless in books, they are waiting to be reborn, to be recreated, to feel the actuality of their reality."<sup>10</sup>

The equivalence of reproduction gives Tillers the freedom to reinvest difference in his translations from an often unseen original. The reproductions are squared up and each square painted individually onto a canvasboard, sometimes over other paintings which leave a residue, like the skull (from a painting by Klimt) in *Antipodean Manifesto*. In the act of painting the signs are deterritorialised into the flux of desire, and reinscribed on the recording surface. As in the 'flatbed' approach to the reception of images on a surface in Rauschenberg's screenprints<sup>11</sup>, the fresh canvasboard is a tabula rasa. As such it may be taken as a metaphor both for colonists' conception of Australia as an empty land and for the receptive consciousness of the postmodern consumer. Subjectivity is constituted as intensity in the process of deterritorialisation – the decomposition of the image into fragments and the flux of the act of painting – and recoding – the painting as a whole once again becomes a signifier within a system.

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Tillers' collection and selection, his parasitism, articulates a truth of the art world, that the flow of images from the Euro-USA centre to the Antipodean periphery very heavily outweighs any flow in the opposite direction. Modernist 'primitivism' mimicked the geographic relations of imperialist capitalism: raw materials imported from the periphery to the centre and products exported back to colonial markets. This is paralleled by the image-flows of monopoly capitalism: images of origin and indigeneity are re-exported, as in the reproduction of the Schnabel painting of the Aboriginal and the commodification of Aboriginal art itself. To propose a strategy of indigeneity as presence, authenticity and origin would be to leave oneself defenceless to this economy. Indeed in the art of the first half of the 80s localism became a commodity in postmodernism, analogous to the street art of graffiti and revivals of early modernist primitivism. Tillers has refused this option, preferring on the one hand to reflect back to the 'centre' translations of its own displaced artistic products; and, on the other hand, to insist that in the form, largely, of reproductions these products form as much part of the 'antipodean' locality as gum trees, landscape and light. As with Duchamp, late Picabia and late de Chirico, strategy and subjectivity are entwined. When subjectivity becomes a commodity, the alternative is either to refuse subjectivity altogether, to show it as constituted, or to play a game of double bluff with strategy, mimicry and mask. It is because he mimics its art, that Tillers is permitted to participate in the centre, yet the mimicry displaces and subverts the very pretensions of its object. This is the case with *Untitled H* and *Double Covenant*, where contemporary artists who are already appropriators, Sherrie Levine and Philip Taffe respectively, are re-appropriated. In *Lever* the claim to the authenticity of an absent presence, an experience of the artist to which the work refers, in the Richard Long text is de-authenticated, and its meaning reconstituted as the pure *effect* of the signifier as it circulates in the public sphere.

Tillers' work is simultaneously a reflection of a global economy in its totalising heterogeneity and a catalyst distinguishing groups of consumers and contexts. A Tillers using Levine or Taffe will be received differently in a New York gallery and a gallery in Sydney, and again by publics *au fait* with current developments in the art world and those which are not. This is not to say that one response is more legitimate than the other, just that they are different – a spectator who is not aware of the references may pay more attention to the traces of painting activity which is emphasised by the deconstruction of the image into a grid of canvasboards and an integral part of the process of production, whereas the *au fait* viewer may miss this aspect of the work and see it as pure strategy and parasitism. Tillers' approach is to construct the conditions for an awareness of positionality, the relations of power, economics and society in the construction of publics for culture.

It would be wrong to suppose that the appropriations from different artists can be reduced to a single strategy or subjective motivation. What is necessary is a mobile and specific reading of each work. The relation of de Chirico to Aboriginal art in *Antipodean Manifesto* is different to the relation of the Baselitz 'new type of man' to the Aboriginal 'meeting place' mozaic by Michael Nelson Tjakamarra in the Federation Pavilion; while both works are concerned with the representation of origin in the context of multinationalism and simulation. Different again is the juxtaposition of Polke and Schnabel in *Conquest of Space*: while both are 'postmodernists', Polke is an artist whose history is the resistance to the hegemony of art from the US in Europe; by contrast, Schnabel is an American artist who omnivorously devours and regurgitates art from Europe and elsewhere. As their point of conjunction, synthesis

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and reinscription Tillers is a subjectivity. This subjectivity is not the humanist authentic and sole origin of its products, but it is a subjectivity nonetheless, a subjectivity which will have to be rethought according to different models, as 'readerly' (Barthes), as the carrier of the 'social imaginary' (Castoriadis), or as a 'desiring machine' (Deleuze and Guattari).

Subjectivity is the concern of the painting *Quest: I the Speaker*, 1988. Here the images used are not of the moment. On the left panel the inverted image of buildings is from a postcard of the Basilica of Saint Francis of Assisi where the colours are off-register, an image Tillers has used elsewhere. The right panel is a quotation from a painting by the late Colin McCahon, a New Zealand artist of the generation of Barnett Newman and Mark Rothko – yet to most of us, here in London, obscure – whose paintings figured the sublime not as spectacular colour fields but as language, literally, as words from the Bible – as Tillers says, quoting from God – in this case from Ecclesiastes. According to Walter Benjamin, Holy Writ is where text is supposed to be identical to truth: it is where an origin is given for the dissemination of languages, and a guarantee of correspondence, of identity in translation. The reiteration of the biblical text bespeaks the sublime as the desire for origin. The Ecclesiastes text acts both as an origin of dissemination and as itself disseminated. McCahon and Tillers take their places in a line of scribes, of copiers and translators. The 'I' situated in time and place as the origin of the voice – the self taking the place of, displacing, God – is disseminated in writing, reproduced and repainted. Each element of the painting marks a displacement of its origin. The column with radiating lines in metallic paint from Arakawa suggests an image of consciousness as origin, demarcating the space around itself, the God-like 'I', while at the same time evoking the broken columns of de Chirico, the ruins of just this Cartesian subjectivity. The church is upside down, translated from a tourist postcard and marking its source in the off-register reproduction. In this painting Tillers evokes the inadequacy, the pathos of presentation. Kant at times defines the relation to the sublime as a presentation inadequate to that which is nevertheless presented. Thus in the same gesture Tillers evokes the sublime, origin, authenticity, presence and religious experience and questions their very possibility in this age of mechanical reproduction, painting a *vanitas* amid the postmodern cornucopia.

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NOTES

1. Carl Andre and Hollis Frampton, *12 Dialogues 1962-1963*, The Press of Nova Scotia College of Art and Design and New York University Press, 1980, p.30.
  2. *Ibid.* p.25.
  3. Rosalind Krauss, 'Photography's Discursive Spaces', *Art Journal*, XLII, Winter 1982, reprinted in *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths*, Cambridge, Mass., The MIT Press, 1985, p.133.
  4. Rene Daumal, *Mount Analogue*, trans. Roger Shattuck, Harmondsworth, Penguin Books, 1986, p. 34.
  5. *Borges: A Reader*, ed. Monegal and Reid, New York, Dutton, 1981, p.118.
  6. *Art & Text*, No. 6, Winter 1982, p.57.
  7. See Paul Feyerabend, *Against Method*, London, Verso, 1978; and 'Science as Art', *Art & Text*, Double Issue Nos.12 & 13, Summer 1983-Autumn 1984.
  8. See 'The Antipodean Manifesto' in Bernard Smith, *The Antipodean Manifesto: Essays in Art and History*, Melbourne, Oxford University Press, 1976, pp.165-67; and Robert Hughes, *The Art of Australia*, Harmondsworth, Penguin Books, 1970, pp.246-50.
  9. 'Antipodality' in *Art & Text*, No.6, Winter 1982, p.50.
  10. 'In Perpetual Mourning', *ZG/Art & Text*, Summer 1984, New York, reprinted in *Imants Tillers*, exhibition catalogue, Venice Biennale, 1986.
  11. See Leo Steinberg, *Other Criteria*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1972, pp.82-91; Douglas Crimp, 'On the Museum's Ruins', *October*, No.13, Summer 1980.
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UNTITLED 1978  
photomechanical reproduction, acrylic on 2 canvases  
73" x 104" each  
Coll: Australian National Gallery, Canberra

# THE LIFE-MOTIF

INTERVIEW WITH IMANTS TILLERS

BY JENNIFER SLATYER

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JS: The earliest work in this exhibition, *Untitled* 1978, consists of two divergent photo-mechanical reproductions on canvas (one could call them 'simulations') of a painting, *Summer*, painted in 1909 by the Australian landscape painter Hans Heysen. Is this a seminal work for you?

IT: Yes. In *Untitled* the complexity and confusion of my earlier concerns were distilled into an extremely clear and simple statement. From that time on I was able to view my work from a different vantage point.

JS: In 1979, the English artist Robin Coombes noted in the catalogue for the 3rd Biennale of Sydney that the real quality of this work rested in your ability to demonstrate a sense of irony which is used to question the nature of painting and mechanical reproductive processes. According to Coombes, by taking as your source a poor reproduction of an original Heysen, itself a provincial landscape and by further enlarging it many times, that you had shown "in a truly original fashion that an extremely dull image devoid of interesting incident can yield an unlikely and fresh insight into painting, but without the use of actual paint." And further, he felt that by making two nearly identical versions, the value and purpose of art-reproduction (especially in the service of banality) is sharply questioned. However, the two versions aren't identical – they differ in colour and contrast. What is the origin of their difference?

IT: The difference is due to the age and source of the respective reproductions. The one which is in soft focus and purplish in hue is from a print from the 1950's obtained on my first trip as a child to the Art Gallery of New South Wales in Sydney. The other one is from an exhibition catalogue of the 1970's. However, I didn't intend this work to be a comment on the

mood or graphic style of particular decades, nor a critique of the mediocrity of the so-called 'Australian landscape tradition'. Nor did I simply want to represent or 'appropriate' Heysen's work – not that 'appropriation' was a word with any currency then. It was a sense of *indifference* to it as an image, that caused me to use it. Robin Coombes was close to the mark when he referred to my enlargement of Heysen's image as "a neutral surface or vehicle (not dissimilar in feeling to the basic geometries of reductive abstract art) to which we can apply many interpretations." My *Untitled* was conceived in the spirit of Arakawa's famous canvas of 1969, also *Untitled*, which was inscribed: "*I have decided to leave this canvas completely blank.*" Here, of course, as the intention is defeated by its announcement, the painting denies the very statement it consists of. The effect is similar to the allusion to a specific but hidden content in Mel Ramsden's *Secret Painting* 1967-8. This painting consists of two panels. One is blank and the other contains the pronouncement: "*The content of this painting is invisible; the character and dimension of the content are to be kept permanently secret known only to the artist.*"

JS: Another painting which has influenced you greatly comes from 1969 too – Sigmar Polke's *Höhere Wesen befehlen: rechte obere Ecke schwarz malen!* This painting consists solely of the words (translated) "*Higher Beings Command: leave the top right hand corner black!*" and a black top right hand corner.

IT: The Polke painting is important to me because it reiterates Duchamp's insight that "to all appearances, the artist acts like a mediumistic being who, from the labyrinth beyond time and space, seeks his way out to a clearing." But in Polke's painting the artist is nothing *but* a medium – there is no content

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other than that which is commanded by 'higher beings'. Needless to say these 'higher beings' direct him to do something incredibly mundane, even banal.

JS: There is a personal connection for you too with Polke. We met him and Achim Duchow (as a duo) in 1975 at the Sao Paulo Bienal in Brazil where Polke was representing West Germany with Baselitz and Palermo and you were representing Australia with George Baldessin.

IT: On meeting Polke I was impressed by his "okkulte Intelligenzen" – exemplified by the fact that he apparently had no need for books, as his brain was in direct contact with a higher intelligence but also his rather cavalier attitude to the authority of American art and artists. I still remember their first words to me: "You look weird." (I had thought that they were the weird ones.) "Why?" I asked. "Look in the mirror!" My work at the Bienal *Conversations with the Bride* was a maze of small freestanding images at eye-level with mirrors on each reverse face. There were 112 mirrors to look in. I had included mirrors in this work because in Jorge Luis Borges' parable *Tlon, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius* Bioy Casares had recalled that one of the heresiarchs of Uqbar had declared that "mirrors and copulation are abominable, because they increase the number of men" in the world. *Tlon, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius* was of great importance to me then as it expanded on the idea of a novel in the first person in which the narrator would omit or disfigure the facts and indulge in various contradictions which would permit a few readers to perceive, as Borges describes it, "an atrocious or banal reality". But even more fascinating was the idea of a fantastic world (that of Tlon) intruding secretly into the world of reality and then subtly and irrevocably displacing the real. This

was achieved in Borges' fiction by following a plan of exhibiting a world which was not *too* incompatible with the real, like Polke's elusive and arcane paintings of the 60's which are neither quite "Pop" nor "minimal" yet somehow could be related to both.

JS: So thirteen years later Polke's "atrocious and banal reality" certainly seems to have taken precedence in the artworld over the "art of the real". Even so, artists such as Carl Andre who were influential on your work in the early 70's have continued to influence you despite their exit from the centre stage.

IT: It was Andre's idea of making works from mass-produced "democratic" industrial materials that led me to adopt canvasboards as the material support for my paintings in the first place. Canvasboards are of course, mass-produced for amateur painters. Originally I used *Rowneys*, then *Daler* and now mostly *Frederix* brand canvasboards. Since 1981 I have consumed over 17,000 panels. Andre also influenced my decision to exhibit my paintings de-composed into *Stacks* – stacks of single-panel paintings where the characteristics of weight, volume, number and mass dominate those of colour, form and imagery. I have recently acknowledged my debt to Andre more directly in several floorpieces made from vitreous enamel on steel, a medium which I first investigated as a solution to the problem of decorating the curved interior of the Dome of the Federation Pavilion.

JS: We are all familiar with Andre's famous defence of minimalism, in which he declared that the environment already contained too many objects and now "requires significant blankness... some *tabula rasa*, some space that suggests significant exhaustion." He stated that when signs occupy every surface, then there is no place for new signs. The Australian critic, Terence Maloon has suggested that in 1983 you

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changed the minimalist grid into its antithesis: instead of being a locus of significant blankness, it began to support a profusion of overlaid, scrambled imagery. However, as he observed, the image-overload (the return of the repressed) produced an oddly similar effect to the "significant exhaustion" of classical minimalism. The excess of imagery canceled itself out and caused the viewer to blank out in response. So it seems you've heeded Andre's call for "significant blankness" but what was Polke's attitude to Andre?

IT: Polke's attitude is clearest in his painting *Carl Andre in Delft* 1969 in which he equates Andre's elegant checkerboards to Delft tiles. It is also evident in works such as *Mit gelben Quadraten* 1968 and *Mit weissen Quadraten* 1968 where in both cases the ground onto which "the white and yellow squares" are painted is a cheap, standard-issue blanket – definitely not the sort of material Andre would choose. Polke, like his contemporaries Richter and Baselitz, railed against the influence of American art in the 60's – "the voices of authority", "the higher beings" – with a rage not unlike that of the atheist who shakes his fist at God's throne in the heavens shouting "I do not believe in you!" – blasphemies that are worth uttering only because they take His name in vain.

JS: Donald Kuspit, in reviewing your first solo show in New York at the Bess Cutler Gallery in 1984, likewise reacted angrily with a scathing review in *Art in America*. He was apparently outraged by your savage parody of the artists he revered then, mentioning Chia, de Chirico, Schnabel, Salle and Dokoupil in particular. He wrote: "taken together, the paintings in this exhibition constitute a super parody which reveals the limits of parody: the joke may have been on the joker. This is partly because Tillers' methods

of parody are far from subtle. His slapstick use of a uniform painterliness reduces partially painterly images to the point of absurdity, though he claims he simply "re-articulates" images he admires". And later he says "Tillers seems to believe that authenticity and authority are merely a matter of fashion, and manipulated taste, a kind of gallery-directed conspiracy of art history-making. *Call of Continuity* 1984 shows a figure from a Dokoupil painting literally drumming up another ghostly expressionist figure." Kuspit goes so far as to claim that, "what postmodernist Tillers is in effect attempting is a ruthless extinction not only of a kind of painting, but of an entire aspect of human experience." Does this mammoth declamation represent an accurate portrayal of your project?

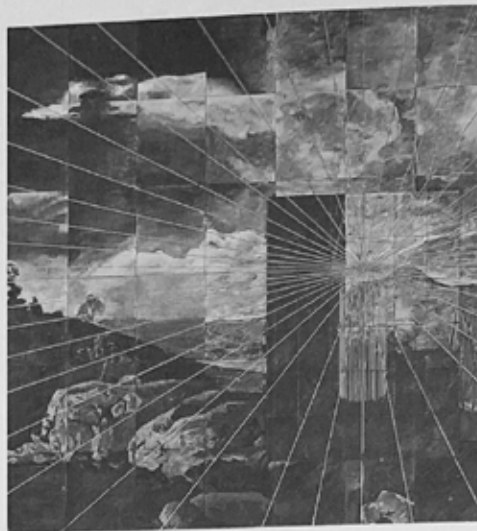
IT: I feel that Kuspit's outburst was a response only to the outermost, superficial layers of my work. As the Danish artist, Per Kirkeby has pointed out, all paintings consist of the laying of layer upon layer. Sometimes these layers are 'synchronous', with all the layers aiming at the same picture – where the underpainting and following layers fall precisely on top of each other. At other times they are "unsynchronous", with each new layer forming a new autonomous picture. This is easily understood when it comes to Pica-bia's or Salle's "puzzle pictures". Furthermore these 'unsynchronous' paintings are like "geological strata with cracks and discordances. But each new layer is always infected and coloured by the underlying one. Thus it is with all pictures, there are many layers and with good reason an analysis nearly always deals only with the last." To quote at length from his essay *Caption* contained in his anthology *Selected essays from Bravura* 1982:

"The problem is how can one talk of what one cannot

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KANGAROO BLANK 1988  
acrylic, gouache, oilstick on 78  
boards  
87" x 77"



see – the overpainted or wiped-off layers. The answer is that they exist nevertheless, taken up into the visible layers by a rubbing-off, but the problem, on the whole, is how one deals with the visible layer. The angle-sure, viewpoint-seeking and in the worst sense 'analytic' intercourse with the picture. This method does not call up the invisible layers. The invocatory tone of intercourse is the 'synthetic', which does not seek results immediately but treats the picture sensually and then allows the apparently most unreasonable associations to grow. In this way invisible layers in oneself are invoked, and this is the only kind of invisible layer which allows itself to be invoked."

I have adopted this slow "synthetic" approach in relation to all my sources – in 1984 it was to Chia, de Chirico, Schnabel, Salle and Dokoupil. All the artists Kuspit names. In this way I attempted to invoke the invisible layers of myself, to discover my own unique subjectivity. Unfortunately Kuspit did not respond to the paintings themselves but rather to a hidden agenda – a threatening ideology (opposing the very possibility of a personal subjectivity) which he mistakenly imagined lay behind my works.

JS: Which artists would you invoke now, in 1988?

IT: Alfred Jensen, Sherrie Levine, Edgar Heap of Birds and Colin McCahon.

JS: Why McCahon?

IT: The power and poetry of his paintings and the fact that he dares to quote from God. (Like Polke, he too has obeyed the commands of higher beings and painted several of his top right-hand corners black.) As a painter in a distant provincial setting (antipodean New Zealand) he compensates for his innate powerlessness by the inherent power of his quota-

tions. Also I relate to McCahon's role as not only a painter but also (in relation to his sources) as an anthologist, collector and translator. As the New Zealand critic Wystan Curnow observed, McCahon was mindful of "the book of his own work", as year by year his collections of quotations grew. He was concerned with how the addition of this or that text reinforced or complicated the story so far. But all-encompassing books are destined to remain unfinished. So in 1987 McCahon died 'mid-sentence' just as the author René Daumal died earlier this century, departing his great allegory of life, *Mount Analogue*, literally mid-sentence while still in the process of collecting 'peradams' on the uphill ascent.

JS: McCahon's "book of his own work" sounds remarkably like your own concept of the *Book of Power* in which you see your work in terms of a huge all-inclusive book where each canvasboard panel is a page in the book and each page is numbered consecutively from one to infinity. In fact at this moment you are at the page marked 17187 and there is a long way to go. Did this idea come from McCahon?

IT: No, it's purely coincidental. It's actually Mallarmé's idea, who wrote in 1895: "Everything, in the world, exists to end up in a book." As Curnow points out, the process of 'quotation' in McCahon is simply the extraction of signs from one context and their transference into another. I can relate to that. I like the poetry of 'translation'. 'To translate' can mean a lot of things: 1. bear away, convey or remove from one person, place or condition to another, to transfer, transport 2. to turn from one language into another 3. to interpret, explain, to express one thing in terms of another 4. to change in form, appearance or substance, to transmute, to transform. I much prefer these meanings to those of that other word recently de-

VISIBLE SUSPENSION 1981  
acrylic on canvas  
52" x 76"



valued by overuse 'appropriation'.

JS: In the current exhibition your most recent work *Quest: I the Speaker* 1988 is large painting made up of 170 canvasboard panels. The superficial look of this work comes from several readily identifiable sources: for example, the right-hand side consists of an adaptation of McCahon's painting *Untitled (is there anything of which one can say, Look this is new?)* 1982; and the gold radiating column – a distinctive Arakawa device – is superimposed over the inverted Basilica of St. Francis of Assisi, the image of the Basilica being a familiar one to viewers of your earlier works from the Assisi series. We can also see a process of layering and a concern with the 'fundamental truth' of painting as Kirkeby characterised it – "the laying of layer upon layer" in this and another related work *Kangaroo Blank* (fig.1) in which the Assisi landscape has been displaced by Stubbs' imaginary Australian landscape.

IT: Yes, *Quest, I the Speaker* (and for that matter *Kangaroo Blank*) relate to the two paintings I first exhibited in London at the Serpentine Gallery in 1982 as part of the exhibition *Eureka! Artists from Australia*. This pair of almost identical canvases was entitled *One Painting, Cleaving* and was subsequently shown in a modified form at *Documenta 7* in Kassel where they were exhibited in a changed configuration and renamed *Two Paintings, Hidden from view*. The same pair has now coincidentally returned to London in a slightly different form, as part of the exhibition *Stories of Australian Art* at the Commonwealth Institute during April and May. These are part of a series of paintings based on a particular view of the Basilica of St. Francis at Assisi containing Giotto's famous cycle of frescoes on the life of St. Francis and assorted sacred relics – a mecca for art historians.

The view itself comes from a tourist postcard which had been distorted as a result of 'mis-registration' in the process of photo-mechanical reproduction. The attraction for me to this straightforward technical mistake was not in its matter-of-fact banality but in its rich allegorical potential. I called this extensive series of works *One Painting* as I was fascinated at the time with the idea of a series which consisted of one obstinately recurring image or conversely, a series of 'precise variations' (like in late de Chirico) on a single theme. But as I anticipated in 1982 "the *one painting* is also *cleaving* and other images appear in the gap (the *triangle of doubt*).” These images have been proliferating exponentially ever since, fixed on the canvasboard pages of my *Book of Power*.

JS: Was the history of *One Painting* before this 'conceptual cleavage' a process of accumulation of 'invisible' layers?

IT: Yes, right from the start each painting consisted of several distinct pictures superimposed over each other, with the last layer always being the out-of-register Basilica. The first version was painted in 1980 and called *The Modern Picture (Worlds in Collision)*. I had the first layer of this painting photographed and would sometimes invoke this 'painting which no longer exists' in place of subsequent layers or versions. The first such version 'which no longer exists' appeared in *Art in America* in January 1981.

JS: In *Two Paintings, Hidden from view* what exactly is hidden from view?

IT: Two moods, a deeper reality beyond appearances but also literally two other pictures. One was based on a Latvian social-realist style illustration of sisters ironing ribbons and the other a stylised model of German origin demonstrating the disintegration of

VISIBLE SUSPENSION 1981  
acrylic on canvas  
52" x 76"



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cell structures at a microscopic level. To me they also suggested two different 'world pictures' and I wanted to record the transition of each image to its outer layer – the Basilica – so I recorded this silent evolving drama over a period of 12 months with a polaroid camera. The inevitable conclusion was as satisfying as the title of Duchamp's study of the endgame in chess: *Sister Squares in Opposition, reconciled*.

JS: In recording the hybrid states of these two canvases which in their transitional phase were called *Visible Suspension* (see fig.2 and fig.3), you seem intent on demonstrating the existence of the invisible layers in order to undermine the priority of the last, visible layer.

IT: Yes that's true. But it also reflected a lack of faith in the act of painting itself. I did not have the self-assurance of an artist like Kirkeby who knows that the invisible layers are there but has no need to 'prove' it. Here I had spent an entire year painting many pictures but in the end I only had 3 modestly scaled near-identical canvases of an out-of-register Basilica and some polaroids to show for my considerable efforts. With the current canvasboard works I have dispensed with the need to record the successive vanishing layers of imagery and the idiosyncratic trajectories of specific canvasboard panels back and forth from painting to painting as new works take shape or evaporate. It is a private drama. Also I imagine that each new composite canvasboard painting is really like another layer of the one all-encompassing painting (the *One Painting*) whose visible layer is continually changing like a palimpsest, according to the changing focus of my point of consciousness from one moment to the next. Yet each new layer is also a fresh reworking of a deeper struc-

ture. As Kirkeby has said (and again I'll quote at length):

"the ruthless accumulation of 'structure' reworkings leads to one meeting one's motif. One's life-motif, so to speak. That which one has and does not know that one has it. A sort of geology, as when, in a constant process, sedimentation and erosion makes the earth we live on like it is now, without any meaning in itself in a rational sense, but accepted as that upon which we live in this life. But just as sedimentation has no particular purpose, neither can painterly structures have one. But under way the 'accidental' nears something resembling this temporary life. That which we read as the motif." Ultimately, the *One Painting* is the motif. The process of accumulating layers maps the search for a motif. In the Assisi series the motif was chosen – its outer form determined *a priori* (even though it was accidentally obtained) but with the canvasboard works I do not know where or onto what new artistic outbreak my attention will settle, tied as my method is (by necessity and a certain incurable restlessness) to the idiosyncracies of an artworld whose trajectory defies prediction. T.S. Eliot in his *Four Quartets* wrote:

*'We shall not cease from exploration  
And the end of our exploring  
will be to arrive where we started  
and know the place for the first time.'*

# MAMMON OR MILLENNIAL EDEN?

INTERVIEW WITH IMANTS TILLERS\*

BY PAUL FOSS

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*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?

Yes. 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. 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.

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 Nina 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)

THE NINE SHOTS 1985  
oil on 91 canvas boards  
130" x 105"



FEDERATION PAVILION  
at opening on 1st January 1988

FEDERATION PAVILION  
Interior of Dome, detail

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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".

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, 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 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.

Why do you say that?

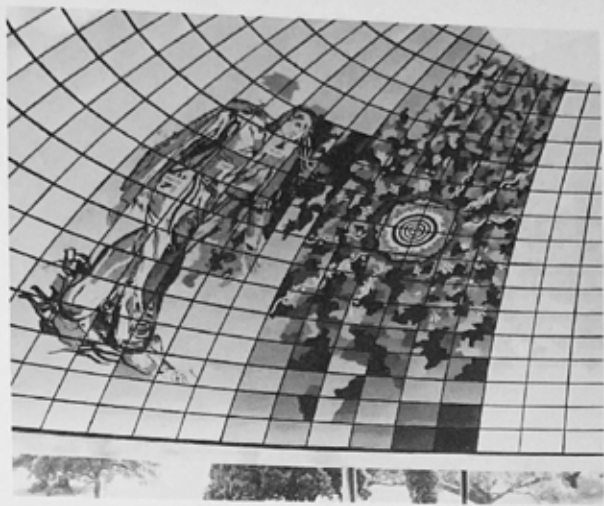
First, because of the utopian closing off of options which the montage suggests. Let us not forget that Australia began its history as a utopian experiment, almost at the same time it started as a penal colony; that utopian ideal has remained a dominant aspect of the national character and the national 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

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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.

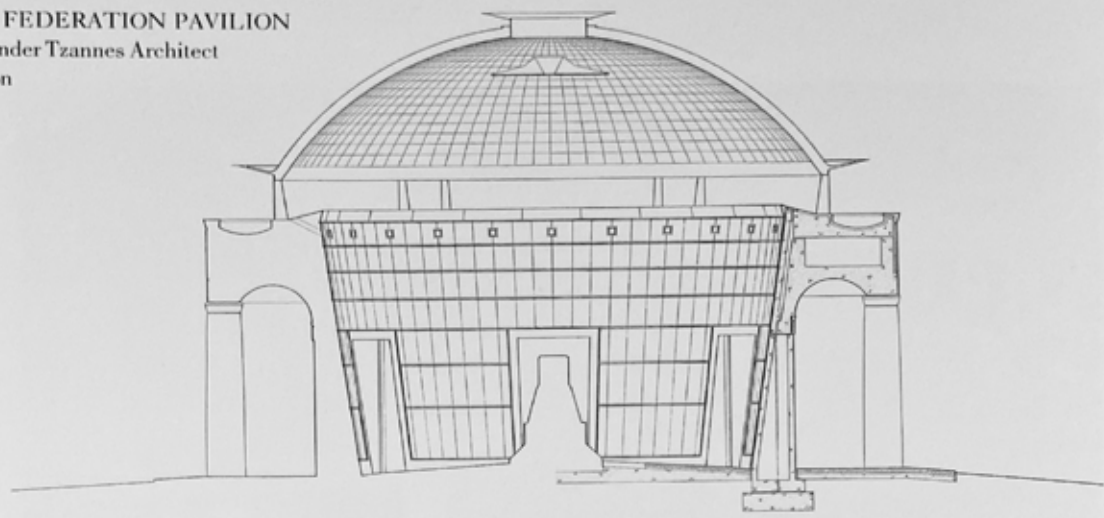
My painting is totally opposed to that of the Antipodeans or the great landscape tradition, the sort of idea of Australia being promoted by the likes of Peter Fuller. I just flicked through his recent book, *Images of God*, and there's a great quote from Fred Williams, where he says that after visiting 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.

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.

*Nine Shots* was the first image where I directly quoted from an Aboriginal painting. I saw it as a dangerous activity, 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 but 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.

If you look at your quotation practice as a whole, one moment you seem to be playing off the more conceptual (and 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



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with Aboriginality, which is one of the world's most cherished signs of extant originality: the dead heart of Australia. To quote Barthes, "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.

Let's conclude by discussing the operations you have used in order to realise your ideas for the Pavilion.

I'm interested 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 Michael Nelson Tjakamarra?

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.

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 element 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 an 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...

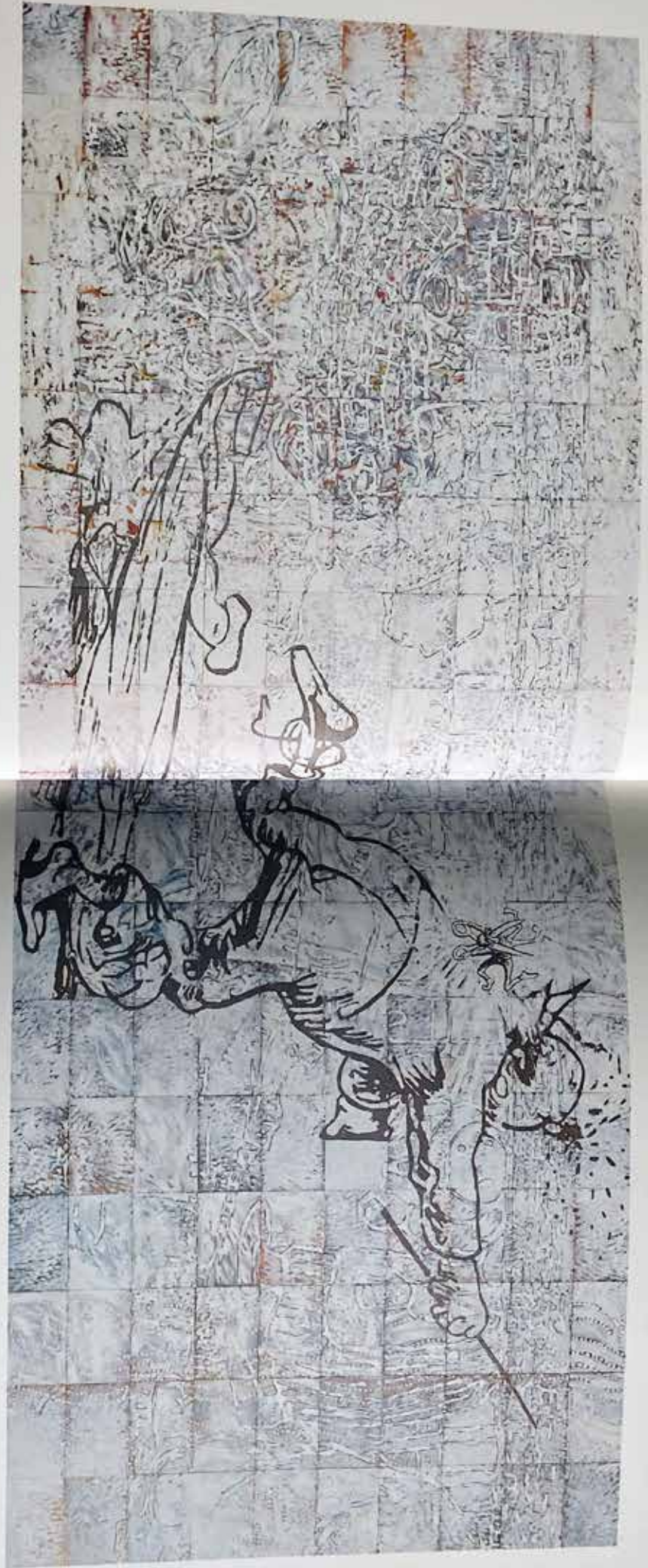
The taking up of Johns' hatch brushstroke is a great idea. It means that you could abandon the system of boards entirely from now on if you wished.

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.

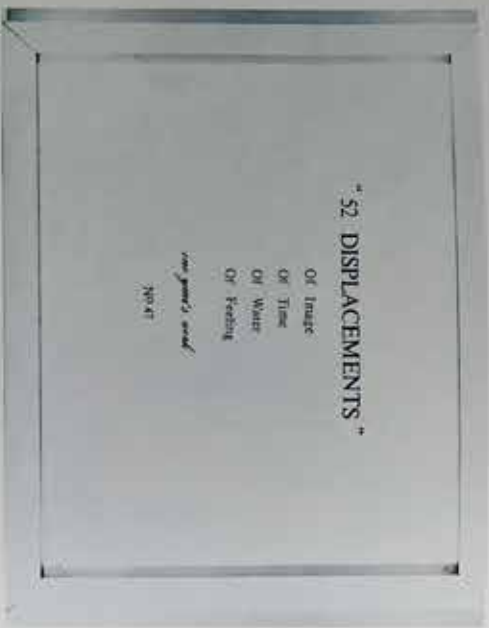
Thanks very much, Imants. I feel we've both learnt a lot about each other's work from this discussion.

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SPHIRT OF PLACE 1983  
acrylic on 170 canvas boards  
No. 1078-1247  
100" x 255"  
Coll: John Kadoh



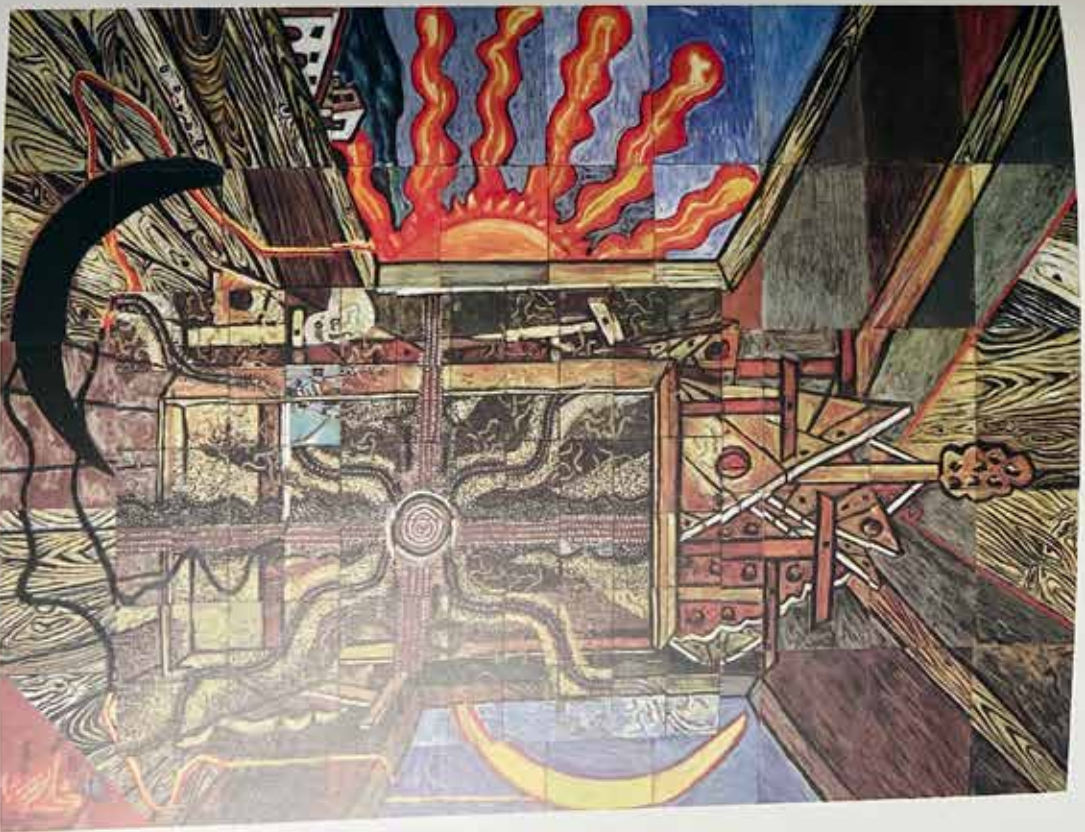




52. DISPLACEMENTS (one year's work, 1979-80)  
9 components of a 52-part work in gouache on canvas,  
accompanying by separate framed texts of similar format  
13.5" x 11.7"; varying dimensions  
Galle Art Gallery of NSW, Sydney (6); Marianne Baillet,  
Melbourne (2); Jennifer Slavier, Sydney (1)



THE VORTEX 1984  
acrylic, watercolor, charcoal on 144 canvas board  
No. 3590-3733  
160" x 135"  
Galerie Boes Cadley Gallery, New York



ANTIPODEAN MANIFESTO 1986  
oil, collage, acrylic on 116 canvas board  
No. 9611-9726  
100" x 75"  
Galerie Boes Cadley Gallery, New York



MOUNT ANALOGUE, 1985  
acrylic, acrylic on 165-cm-square board  
No. 7416, 7589  
1107 x 2257  
©2011 Australian National Gallery, Canberra



CONQUEST OF SPACE 1987  
oil, oilstick, acrylic on 104 canvas boards  
No. 11155 - 11258  
130" x 120"  
Courtesy: Beas Culler Gallery, New York



A LOCAL MIRAGE 1987  
acrylic, gouache on 36 canvas boards  
No. 11773 - 11808  
90" x 60"  
Call: The artist





CONTINENT OF LIGHT 1985  
oil, oilstick, acrylic on 49 canvas boards  
No. 4623 - 4671  
70" x 105"  
Country: Yvonne Comley, Sydney

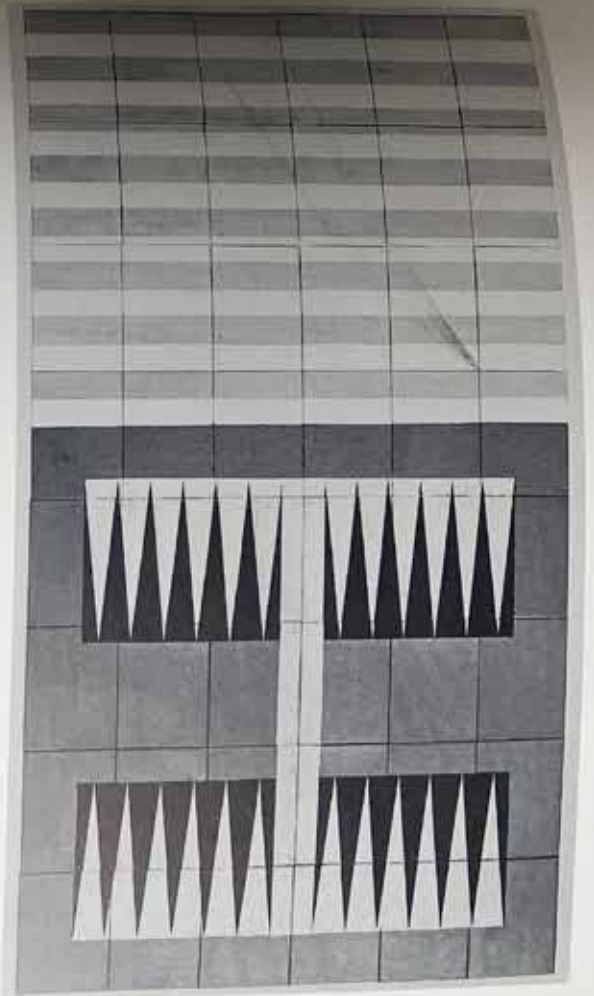


ATMOSPHERIC RESEMBLANCES 1988  
acrylic, gouache on 48 canvas boards  
No. 16515 - 16592  
30" x 50"  
Country: Galerie Susan W. yss, Zurich





THE SHINING CUCKOO 1987  
stainless retained on 240 steel panels  
No. 13563 - 13802  
92 x 120"  
Call The artist



UNTTLEED II 1987  
acrylic, gouache on 48 canvas boards  
No. 15985 - 16032  
87 x 50"  
Country: Yandl/Crossley, Sydney



## IMANTS TILLERS

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### SELECTED SOLO EXHIBITIONS SINCE 1980

- 1980** Realities, Melbourne  
Institute of Modern Art, Brisbane (1980/1982)  
National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne; exhibition catalogue, Peter Myers, *Survey 13: Imants Tillers*.  
Q Space Annex, Brisbane (1980/1981)
- 1981** n-space, Sydney  
Watters Gallery, Sydney  
Art Projects, Melbourne (1981/ 1982)
- 1983** Yuill/Crowley, Sydney (1983/1984/1985/1986/1987/1988)  
Matt's Gallery, London; exhibition catalogue, Paul Taylor, *White Aborigines*  
Reconnaissance, Melbourne
- 1984** Bess Cutler Gallery, New York (1984/1985/1987)
- 1986** 42nd Venice Biennale; exhibition catalogue, Kerry Crowley, *Imants Tillers*
- 1987** *Paintings for Venice: Australia at the 42nd Venice Biennale*, Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane;  
Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, Melbourne; Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide.  
Vollum Center Gallery, Reed College, Portland;  
exhibition catalogue, John S. Weber, *Australian Appropriations: The Recent Paintings of Imants Tillers*  
Galerie Susan Wyss, Zürich
- 1988** Third Eye Gallery, Glasgow; Orchard Gallery, Derry;  
exhibition catalogue, Michael Newman, Paul Foss, Jennifer Slatyer, *Imants Tillers, 1978-1988*  
National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne  
Wellington Art Gallery, Wellington

### SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 1981** *Australian Perspecta 1981: A Biennial Survey of Contemporary Australian Art*, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney; Bernice Murphy, *Australian Perspecta 1981*  
*John McCaughey Memorial Prize*, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
- 1982** *Eureka! Artists from Australia*, Serpentine Gallery, London; Sue Grayson and Sandy Nairne, *Eureka! Artists from Australia*  
*Documenta 7*, Kassel; Rudi Fuchs, *Documenta 7*  
*Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, George Paton Gallery, University of Melbourne; Judy Annear, *Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*
- 1983** *Tall Poppies: An Exhibition of Five Pictures*, University Art Gallery, Melbourne University, Melbourne;  
Paul Taylor, *Tall Poppies*
- 1984** *Form → Image ← Sign: Survey of Contemporary Art, no.3*, Art Gallery of Western Australia, Perth; Tony Bond, *Form → Image ← Sign*
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- An Australian Accent: Three Artists*, P.S. 1, New York; The Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington D.C.; Art Gallery of Western Australia, Perth; Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney; John Kaldor, *An Australian Accent*
- 1985** *Visual Tension*, Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, Melbourne; Ashley Crawford, *Visual Tension*  
*Two Worlds Collide: Cultural Convergence in Aboriginal and White Australian Art*, Artspace, Sydney  
*Dot and Circle: A Retrospective Survey of the Aboriginal Acrylic Paintings of the Western Desert*, Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology Gallery, Melbourne; Janet Maughan and Jenny Zimmer, *Dot and Circle*
- 1986** *How much beauty can I stand?* Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, Melbourne  
*Contemporary Issues III: Works from the collection of Robert and Nancy Kaye*, Holman Hall Art Gallery, Trenton State College, New Jersey; Lois Fichner-Rathus, *Contemporary Issues III*  
*6th Biennale of Sydney: Origins, Originality + Beyond*, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney; Nick Waterlow, *Origins, Originality + Beyond*
- 1987** *State of the Art*, Institute of Contemporary Arts, London; Sandy Nairne, *State of the Art*  
*Avant Garde in the Eighties*, Los Angeles County Museum, Los Angeles; Howard Fox, *Avant Garde in the Eighties*  
*Australia: Art and the West*, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney  
*Painters and Sculptors, Diversity in Australian Art*, Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane; Michel Sourgnès, *Painters and Sculptors, Diversity in Australian Art*  
*Contemporary Australian Art*, Museum of Modern Art, Saitama, Japan; Michel Sourgnès, *Contemporary Australian Art*  
*Field to Figuration: Australian Art 1960-1986*, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne; Robert Lindsay, *Field to Figuration*  
*The Australian Bicentennial Perspecta*, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney; Art Gallery of Western Australia, Perth; Frankfurter Kunstverein, Frankfurt; Württembergische Kunstverein, Stuttgart; Anthony Bond, *The Australian Bicentennial Perspecta*  
*What is this thing called Science?* Melbourne University Gallery, University of Melbourne, Melbourne  
*Hybrid products*, S.L. Simpson Gallery, Toronto
- 1988** *Heroics*, Walter Philips Gallery, The Banff Centre, School of Fine Arts, Banff, Canada; Daina Augaitis and Helga Pakasaar, *Heroics*  
*Edge to Edge: Australian Contemporary Art to Japan*, National Museum of Art, Osaka; Nagoya City Museum, Nagoya; Hokkaido Museum, Sapporo  
*Contemporary Australian Painting Exhibition*, Auckland City Art Gallery, Auckland; Wellington Art Gallery, Wellington; Andrew Bogle, *Contemporary Australian Painting Exhibition*  
*Stories of Australian Art*, Commonwealth Institute, London  
*Australian Biennale*, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney; National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne; Nick Waterlow, *Australian Biennale*
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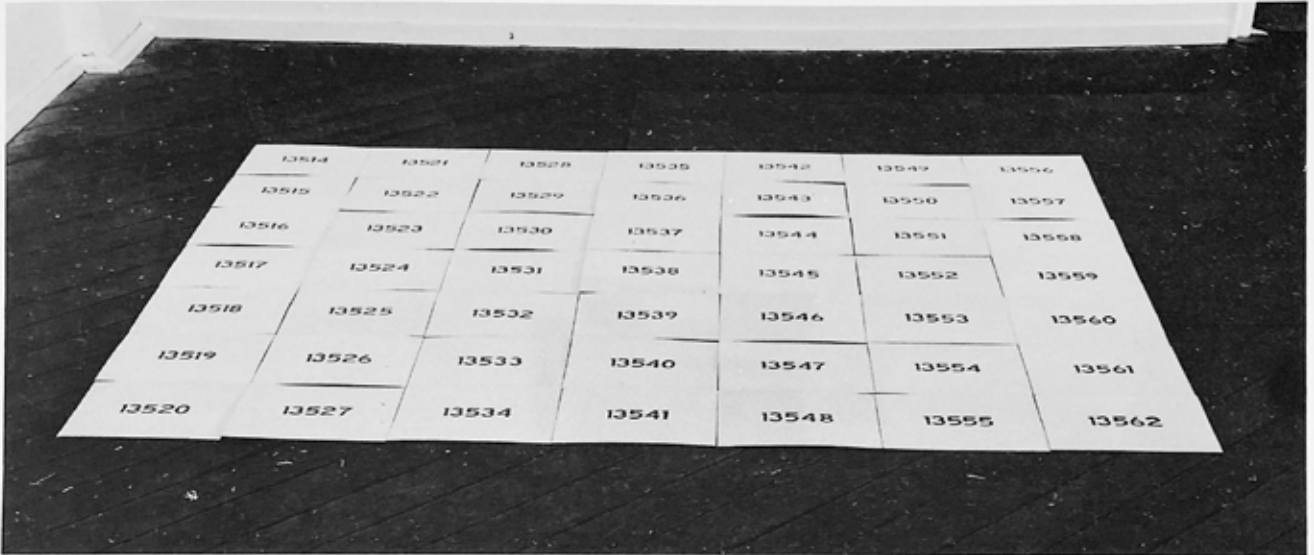
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- 1983** Michael Archer, "We are not all in the same boat", *Art Monthly*, no.72, December 1983, London  
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- 1984** Eric Gibson, "An Australian Accent?", *The New Criterion*, September 1984, New York  
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Thomas McEvelley, "On the Manner of Addressing Clouds", *Artforum*, Summer 1984, New York  
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Ken Sofer, "Views from Down Under", *Artnews*, December 1984, New York  
Imants Tillers, "In Perpetual Mourning", *ZG/Art and Text*, Summer 1984, New York
- 1985** Nicholas Baume, "Original Sin", *Studio*, August/September 1985, Sydney  
Donald Kuspit, "Imants Tillers", *Art in America*, March 1985, New York  
Robert Nickas, "Inversion, Perversion, Subversion", *Figura*, no.6, Autumn 1985, Seville  
Robert Nickas, "Hunger for Words", *New Observations*, no.29, New York  
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William Feaver, "Venice: A Laser-Friendly Biennale", *Artnews*, September 1986  
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Robert Nickas, "Inversion, Perversion, Subversion", *Figura*, no.6, Autumn 1985, Seville  
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- Terence Maloon, "Imants Tillers and the Museum without Walls", *Studio International*, December 1986, London
- Thomas McEvelley, "Biennale of Sydney", *Artforum*, November 1986, New York
- Ronald Millen, "Venice Biennale and Past Futures", *Art and Australia*, Summer 1986, Sydney
- Catherine Millet, "Venise: l'art et l'alchimie et l'alchimie des prix", *Art Press*, September 1986, Paris
- Michael Newman, "Mysteries and Mercenaries – The Venice Biennale 1986", *Artscribe*, September/October 1986, London
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- 1987** Paul Foss, "Mammon or Millennial Eden: Interview with Imants Tillers", *Art and Text*, no.22, March 1987, Sydney
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- Jeffrey Rian, "Imants Tillers", *Art in America*, November 1987, New York
- 1988** Susan Hiller, *The Myth of Primitivism*, Methuen, 1988, London
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METAL RUG 1987  
vitreous enamel on 49 steel panels  
No. 13514 - 13562  
77" x 98"  
Courtesy Yuill/Crowley, Sydney

**Imants Tillers:**

7 April – 22 May, 1988

Exhibition touring to  
Third Eye Centre, Glasgow  
Orchard Gallery, Derry

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