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After Venice, Tillers finds the space

Art Review

By PHYLLIS WOOLCOCK

THEY are, of course, made for each other. I mean the paintings of Sydney painter Imants Tillers and the walls of the central gallery at the Queensland Art Gallery.

Tillers, whose six paintings have started an Australian tour here direct from representing Australia at the Venice Biennale, admits that in Venice things were a trifle cramped. Not that the Venetians are to blame for this situation. We have no permanent place of our own for a representative there.

By the next Biennale in 1988 the Visual Arts Board hopes to have arranged for the building of a permanent special pavilion in Venice in celebration of Australia's Bicentennial Year.

One of Australia's most highly regarded young contemporary artists, Tillers is a special case when it comes to space. His *Heart of the Wood* painting is 280 x 648 cm and comprises 388 canvas boards of a standard size 25 x 38 cm. And most of his paintings are around this size.

It is the scale of his work and the beauty of his painted surfaces with their infinite variety which first hit you as you enter.

He told me: "Basically, I want to make beautiful images and other aspects are secondary." And I believe this.

But, also basically, he reminds us of the reproductions of our Australian childhood and the way we saw the world's great art through the mechanical process of reproduction before we had any chance of seeing the original. This was the natural order of seeing for Australians.

In the catalogue for the Venice Biennale the artist refers to the purchase of Pollock's *Blue Poles* and how having this immensely high quality painting results in "the inversion of the normal state of affairs — that of artists outside Australia 'recreating' works of art that are here."

He also refers to Enzo Cucchi's painting *The Wind of the Black Roosters*, 1982, which was later bought by the Australian National Gallery, as an event which "undermines our sense of protection from 'originals' from their aura, their surface and their authority."

His own six paintings offer no such protection. In a sense they are "reborn images, textured, surfaced and capable of realising the actuality of their reality".

In his approach to his work, Tillers is described as selecting images of largely high art painting and then drawing a grid over torn out reproductions so that each gridded section can be enlarged by copying on to a small canvas board. These are then ar-



IMANTS TILLERS with his painting *Heart of the Wood* at the Queensland Art Gallery.

anged to form much larger paintings and, while retaining their original imagery, are transformed into new works.

Stacked and numbered, the board pieces can be stored in Tillers' home studio before exhibitions. Put together for exhibitions, they can be decomposed and stacked after the exhibition is over — a process which could easily lend itself to ideas of sculpture.

While Tillers transforms, varies and reconstitutes images rather than makes them, talking to him you realise that his particular kind of "appropriation" springs from a wealth of ideas and behind each painting is a different idea.

Both title and subject of *Mt Analogue* came from a story or parable about mountain climbing written in the thirties by Rene Daumal. Tillers wanted a 19th Century painter to match the idea and found it in Von Guerard's original painting of Mt Kosciusko with its moonlight over mountains and rocks. This is one of his most compelling paintings and I believe has been bought by the State gallery which owns Von Guerard's original.

Tillers goes through a process of identification with the image and then tries to emphasise that. Each painting is also a step to other paintings. He

found making *Heart of the Wood* traumatic, the next painting made the references to death more overt than in the entirely explicit Kiefer spired work.

In this, *I am the Door*, Polke (wasn't he the one who claimed to defy mechanical reproduction?) the death of Pagannini provide the central image but he has introduced a Carl Andre door. While Andre fails to excite me either on the floor or raised door level, I like the underlays which Tillers used here very much. He has used metallic color pewter and gold which give a shimmering light to the light touches already given to this particular scenario of doom.

The *Psychic for Yves Klein* is a kind of memory to the French painter who died in 1960. His love of blue was well known and has been emphasised in this painting. *The Kondratiev Wave*, an evocation of Richter, can be enjoyed without knowing that Kondratiev was a Russian who believed that all things come in cycles.

The enshrinement of Giorgio de Chirico (*Hyperborean and the Speluncar*) is only on Tillers' "transformations" and dazzling exercise in color in which a touch of humor adds intellectual stimulation.