



Imants Tillers: The Philosophy of Doubt

This exhibition is part of a new body-of-work which I have called *Metafisica Australe*. This body-of-work attempts to find common ground between contemporary Western Desert painting and the metaphysical paintings of the 20th Century Italian master, Giorgio de Chirico. It continues the premise of the exhibition *Dreamings: Aboriginal Australian art meets de Chirico* curated by Ian McLean and Erica Izett at the Carlo Bilotti Museum in Rome in 2014, in which seven of my works (from 1986 – 2014) formed a kind of bridge between the 20 works by Giorgio de Chirico, which are on permanent display in the museum, and the exhibition of Western Desert paintings from the Sordello Missana collection from Antibes, France.

The work *The Porous Vessel* 2015 was included last year in another exhibition featuring the Sordello Missana collection, *Living Waters* at the Musée océanographique de Monaco. As Ian McLean writes in the catalogue: “*The Porous Vessel* 2015 takes its departure from the 'water-parquet' motif – as de Chirico called it – that features in several of his works after the mid-1930s (*The Mysterious Bathers* series). De Chirico had appropriated it from the herringbone-patterned parquet in his Rome apartment. He made the association with water while watching reflections of people walking across a highly polished parquet floor. To him these reflections in the flash of polish mysteriously interacted with the parquet to evoke swimmers in a pool. When Tillers first saw de Chirico's 'water-parquet' it immediately reminded him of Aboriginal painting, making him wonder if

the artist had seen examples of Aboriginal art – especially given the association de Chirico made with water. What really got Tillers interested was later seeing recent paintings by the Western Desert painter Bobby West Tjupurrula (b. 1958) and it is one of these paintings, *Snake Dreaming at Wilkinkarra* 2014, an important Pintupi waterhole in the desert, that *The Porous Vessel* directly references. Bobby West it seemed had appropriated de Chirico's water-parquet. In actual fact he had become an exponent of a recent genre in Papunya Tula painting that heightened the abstract optical effects of water and sand dune motifs of traditional Western Desert art, which probably originated in the patterns of incised pearl shells.”

The nine works in this exhibition all feature quotations of Bobby West Tjupurrula's zig-zag motif, wholly or in part. *The Porous Vessel*, *Nature Speaks: FR*, and *Nature Speaks: FT* are the purest examples. In *In Praise of Doubt* it occurs as a detail in one of de Chirico's *metaphysical interiors* together with a painting by Rex Batterbee of Mt. Hermannsburg. *Nature Speaks: FV* has a fragment of the zig-zag sky with Albert Namatjira's version of the same mountain (as Batterbee's) painted pre-1947.

The Blue Pacific also features the 'Aboriginal sky' and the rest is based on the famous painting by Arthur Streeton, *The Blue Pacific* 1890, which is now on display in the National Gallery in London. Streeton also infamously painted several superb paintings of Venice which were dismissed in his day as 'not being Australian enough'. I wanted to explore this notion of 'not being Australian enough' in one's subject matter and this is partly the reason that a third of the works in my exhibition feature views of Venice. *Heysen's Venice* is based on Hans Heysen's 1902 watercolour and seems like a beautiful aberration for an artist known for his paintings of eucalypts. Giorgio de Chirico was of course perfectly at home in Venice so both *The Solid Mandala* and *Isle of Reversible Destiny* draw on this large oeuvre of paintings of Venice. In both works the subject is the Island of St. George.

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