

The Stuff Of History

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History Painting: A preface

In 1801, Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres [1780–1867] won the Prix de Rome for history painting with a painting titled *Les Ambassadeurs d'Agamemnon et des principaux de l'armée grecque, précédés des hérauts, arrivent dans la tente d'Achille pour le prier de combattre* (Oil, 1.10 x 1.55m, 1801, École des Beaux Arts, Paris). Four years earlier he had come to Paris to work in the atelier of another formidable French painter, Jacques-Louis David [1748–1825], and was trained in the neo-classical tradition. The painting, with its lengthy title, was Ingres' solution to the topic set by the judges for the Prix de Rome: the students had to create drawings and then a preliminary oil sketch first of all and once the principal structure had been set, the students were required to follow this through over the next few weeks as they completed their fully resolved painting.

Ingres chose the moment when Agamemnon's envoys arrive at Achilles' tent to plead with him to join the war against the Trojans. The story comes from Homer's *Iliad* [Book IX] and Ingres represents the five principal figures in the composition – Odysseus, Phoenix and Ajax and Achilles and Patroclus – in a range of poses that draw their inspiration from earlier paintings and from classical sculptures. On one side we see the lissom semi-naked figure of Achilles, complete with lyre, half rising

from his seat; next to him is the fully naked Patroclus; they are matched against the battle-hardened Odysseus and the towering figure of Ajax and the aged figure of Phoenix. There is a didactic intention at work here – Ingres has found a visually persuasive way of recounting Homer's story; there is the attention to the accoutrements of classical times and the figures suggest that Ingres has looked attentively at exemplars from classical Greek and Roman sculpture.

At the same time, as Carol Ockman notes in her article "Profiling Homoeroticism: Ingres's Achilles Receiving the Ambassadors of Agamemnon",¹ Ingres is clearly distancing himself from the robust representation of heroic valour typified by his teacher David. Ockman states:

Ingres's purpose in emphasizing this [distance] ... was to represent the fact that in the distinctly postrevolutionary world, men, unlike women, could choose between *negotium* (action) and *otium* (leisure).

In line with the didactic intention, the moral high ground was clearly to be claimed by the war-toughened warriors, but Achilles and his putative lover, Patroclus, are treated with such sensuality and bravura by Ingres that their life of ease almost seems to be preferred. We are accustomed to the role that interpretation plays in the writing of history; likewise in this painting there's a modern interpretation that has a very contemporary meaning in the context of French culture at the time.

While Ingres, in a long career, would occasionally take an historical theme as the subject of his painting, it remains the case that his oeuvre is dominated by his desire to represent the world of leisure, pleasure and mythology and it was left to others to carry the flag for history painting in the nineteenth century. Indeed, during the 1830s and 1840s the French government commissioned large numbers of history paintings that went into public buildings all over France, although interest began to wane after 1850. John Berger claims that one of the reasons why the genre of portraiture began to decline was the invention of photography in 1839 and the same is true for history painting.² The ubiquity of photography meant that virtually every aspect of life – from birth to death and everything in between – would be recorded by the photographer over the next few generations and the traditional visual arts had to reinvent

themselves once photography became so well-established. In his book *The absolute bourgeois: artists and politics in France, 1848–1851*,³ T.J.Clark argues that few iconic images relating to the 1848 revolution galvanise the imagination in the way, say, that Jacques-Louis David's *The Death of Marat* did in 1793 for the Revolution of 1789 or Eugène Delacroix's [1798–1863] *Liberty leading the People* did in 1830. Between 1848 and 1851 artists struggled to find suitable visual solutions to celebrate the Republic and it is perhaps telling that one of the most conservative painters of the period, Ernest Meissonier [1815–1891], produced the emblematic image of the revolution, the tiny painting called *The Barricade, rue de la Mortellerie, June 1848* [1849, Oil on Canvas, 29 x 22 cm. Collection: The Louvre]. The painting seems almost like a caveat for would-be rioters – amidst the torn up cobblestones that form an ineffectual barricade in the narrow street lie the bloodied corpses of a group of revolutionaries. Given the triumph of the bourgeoisie during the ensuing two decades, this little painting stood as a stark warning to those who would oppose them. Eugène Delacroix saw the painting in March 1849 and said: "It's horrible in its truthfulness. Although one can't say that it isn't exact, perhaps it lacks a *je ne sais quoi* that makes out of an odious object a work of art."⁴

T.J.Clark believes that the artist who best represented the tensions of the period between 1848 and 1853 was Gustave Courbet [1819–1877]. This was particularly so in works such as the huge painting *The Burial at Ornans*, first shown in the annual Salon in 1851, only a few months before President Louis Napoéon's *coup d'état*. Courbet showed three paintings at the 1851 Salon – *The Burial*, *The Stonebreakers* and *Peasants returning from Flagey* – and Clark describes how a complex discourse is played out in the angry responses of Salon-goers. It centered upon the unstable ascension to power of the bourgeoisie during the period – Courbet's gritty paintings about rural life, the land and labor challenged the bourgeois claim to the rights of power. *The Burial at Ornans* is, in a very real sense, a battleground in which the bourgeoisie must play a part. Here on a non-descript piece of land (the new cemetery) a procession occurs in which the bourgeoisie have to rub shoulders in a tight press of humanity with a drunken and venal clergy, with stout working-class gravediggers, with landowners and their spouses as well as other rural figures. They hated this work for what it represented. It made them part of the crowd. The bourgeoisie were more comfortable with the myths of arcadian rural scenes and stories told in history paintings and sculptures because they

shored up the bourgeoisie's belief in their difference and destiny. Courbet brought them back down to earth and mixed it all up again. As Clark says:

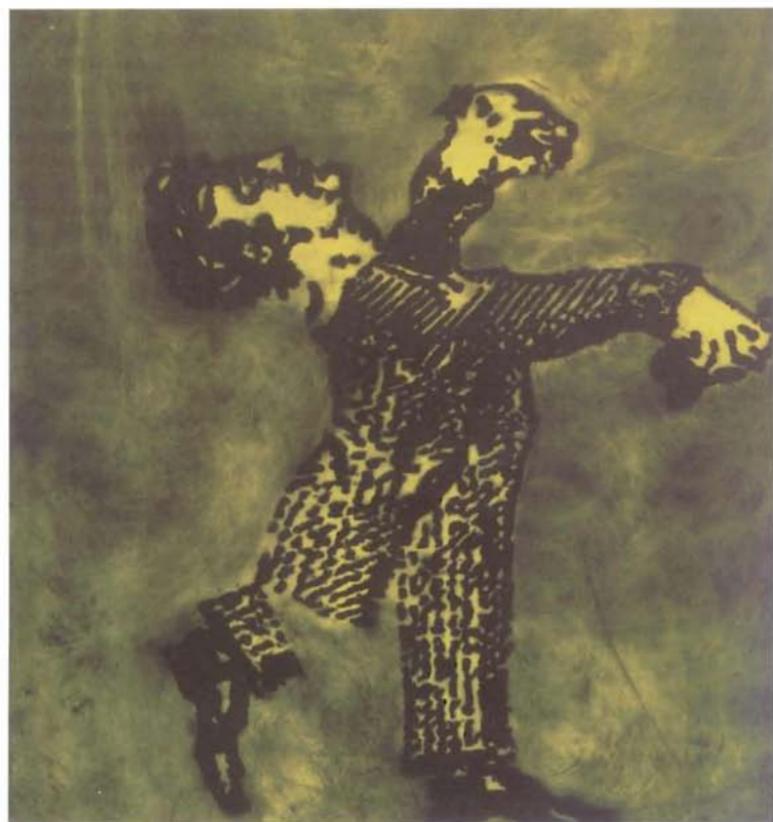
We know something by now of the fears which flushed the red faces of the bourgeois, and provoked the leer of the 'inebriated man of the people.' This was painting that disturbed an iceberg of theories and emotions: it was history painting, not of other people's history, but of one's own.⁵

Shifting ground

The year before Ingres won the Prix de Rome for history painting, Louis de Freycinet [1779–1842] joined Nicholas Baudin's [1754–1803] French expedition to Australia as a cartographer/surveyor. The two ships, under Baudin's command, the *Géographe* and the *Naturaliste* left Le Havre in France in October, 1800 and were away charting Australia's coastline for over four years. Although Baudin was not regarded as a good commander the expedition included some quite remarkable scientific collecting and observations which would later be recorded in François Péron's [1775–1810] *Voyage de découvertes aux terres australes*, published in 1807, and subsequently in Freycinet's further editions following Péron's untimely death [*Voyage de découvertes aux terres australes* (Paris, 1807–1816)].

The expedition spent several months in Tasmania in 1802 and the encounter with indigenous Tasmanians was regarded as peaceful and respectful. Nicholas Martin Petit [1777–1804], one of two artists/illustrators who remained on the expedition as it made it to Australia, produced a series of intriguing images of the indigenous Tasmanians that give some sense of their lives in what was such an extremely harsh environment. As with Ingres, Petit trained with Jacques-Louis David in the mid-1890s and would have received rigorous instruction from the master artist on how to represent the human figure. As the distinguished art historian, Albert Boime has shown in *The Academy and French Painting in Nineteenth Century France*,⁶ a neo-classical training that emphasised line and tone observed first of all from classical Greek and Roman sculpture led to a quite specific form of life drawing and painting. Ingres' *Ambassadors* is exemplary in this regard.

What's so interesting about the Nicholas Martin Petit works in Tasmania is that on the voyage the artist was required to take an empirical position



Michael Schlitz *Castanet Man* 2004

with regard to the representation of the figure, every bit as much as he had to with the specimens that came on board, even though the peoples that he encountered differed dramatically from the idealised southern European figures upon whom he modelled his world-view. To this end, when Petit drew the sketch for the *Tasmanian Aboriginal Woman carrying her child* [1802. Pencil, pen and ink, watercolour and gouache, 30 x 17.5. Collection: Musée d'Histoire Naturelle, Le Havre], he is assiduous in his observation of the extreme lack of body fat on his model and, when it comes to the depiction of the lower part of the legs of the woman, he gets it absolutely right. But, as he represents the complete figure, he reverts to type and despite he and Péron recognising the differences, the woman is given the rounded hips and thighs of a European female fed a diet high in carbohydrates. François Péron inscribed the following note for the engraver on the work in order to stress the importance of emphasising the lack of body fat.

No 17/ Make the line simple/ carefully keep/ the general forms but/
retouch the essential faults;/ the spindly forms of the/ limbs being a
characteristic of this race, it's necessary/ to observe this with great care.⁷

Bernard Smith, in *Imagining the Pacific*, argues that as familiarity with the new environment increased, so a new kind of representational style emerged – one which Smith describes as ‘empirical naturalism.’⁸ Here, however, we can see a French-trained artist finding it difficult to break with the classical mould.

On the way up the East Coast of Tasmania, as Baudin's expedition was leaving, the Freycinet Peninsula and Cape Baudin were added to the charts. Louis de Freycinet got back to Paris in 1805 and spent the ensuing eleven years publishing the account of the voyage before once again heading south to Australia via Rio de Janeiro in 1817, this time commanding the French vessel *l'Uranie*. This voyage became something of a *scandale* insofar as Freycinet's twenty-two year old wife Rose [née Pinon, 1794–1832] was taken on board at Toulon, dressed as a sailor, and spent the following three years with her husband as they voyaged in the southern Atlantic and Pacific only to be fetched up in the Falkland Isles when *l'Uranie* was wrecked; fortunately a substantial amount of the scientific collection was salvaged.



Her presence as part of the ship's company can be seen in a charming watercolour and ink sketch by Alphonse Pellion [fl.1817–1820] that would eventually be published in the profusely illustrated *Voyage autour du monde: entrepris par ordre du roi ... exécuté sur les corvettes de S.M. l'Uranie et la Physicienne, pendant les années 1817, 1818, 1819 et 1820*.⁹ In the sketch Mme Freycinet can be seen on the right hand side of the image in the middle ground, standing outside a conical tent with a female servant beside her.¹⁰ The scene was captured at Shark Bay in Western Australia during the period in 1818 when l'*Uranie*'s crew was surveying the coastline between Geographe and Shark Bays. The scene which includes Mme Freycinet reading by the tent is a hive of activity: there are several large tents and there is evidence of providoring going on, although by all accounts it was a barren piece of land. As with so many of these sketches, this one was handed over to the engravers upon the voyagers' return to France but, because of the scandal that had surrounded the stowaway, in the official version of the voyage Mme Freycinet's image and that of her servant were omitted from the engraving¹¹ – effectively they disappeared her from the annals of history although she and her husband were feted in Parisian society up until her death from cholera in 1832 and her comprehensive journal of the voyage was later edited and published in 1927.¹²

She wasn't the only lively raconteur on the voyage: along with Alphonse Pellion, there was another inventive and irrepressible artist, Jacques Arago [1790–1855] on board l'*Uranie*. Arago is perhaps best known for his representations of the peoples of Hawaii, including their art of tattooing, and also for his book *Voyage autour du monde*.¹³ But he also produced a consistent body of other illustrations that were incorporated into the *Atlas*, including the wonderfully quirky image of an encounter that Freycinet and part of the ship's troupe had with a hostile group of naked aborigines at Shark Bay in the same couple of weeks when Pellion sketched Mme Freycinet in the camp on the foreshore.

In this image, *Nouvelle Hollande: Baie des Chiens marins. Presqu'île Péron. Entrevue avec les sauvages*,¹⁴ Arago depicts the moment when the meeting is perhaps at its potentially most explosive: Freycinet is stepping forward tentatively holding out two gifts of what appears to be linen and one of the aboriginal men stretches out a spear to gather up the presents while the remainder of the tribe dance threateningly. Behind Freycinet, four of the ship's entourage appear in a line behind one another: Arago,



Michael Schlitz *Head Doctor* 2004

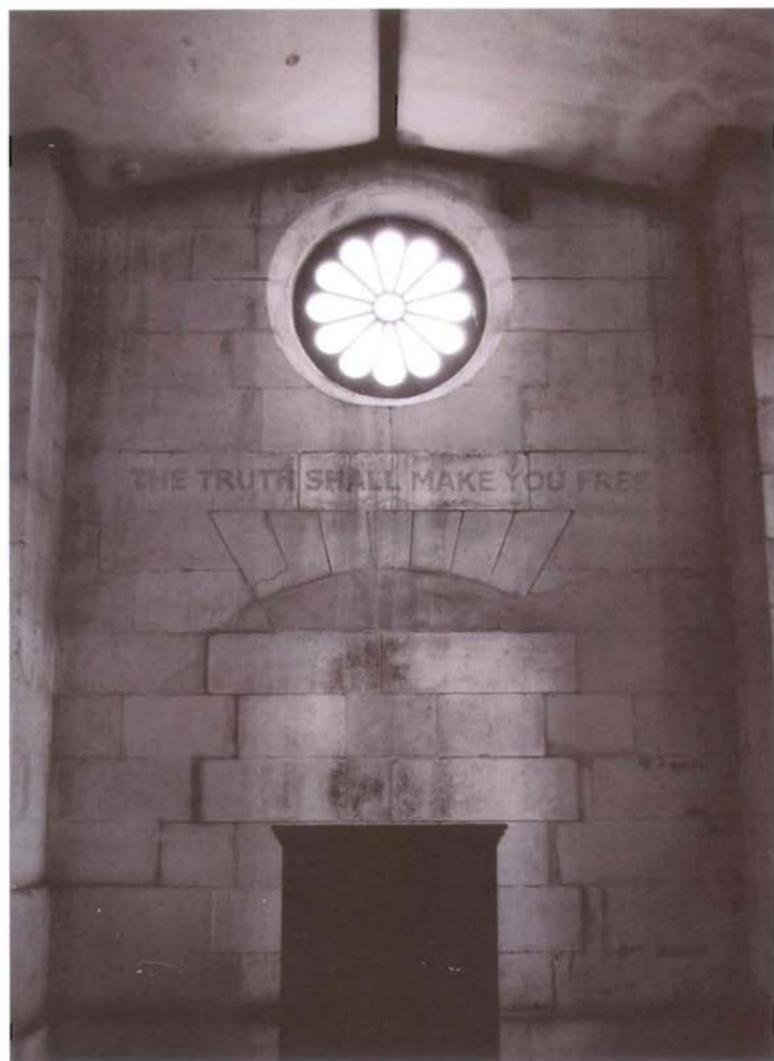
on tip toes, can be seen with hands held up clacking a pair of castanets, while the marine, immediately behind has a musket shouldered but at the ready; there are two other sailors appearing to emerge from the tent at the left hand edge of the image. In the hilly background can be seen a further group of aboriginal figures. It's a striking work because one senses that on both sides the only way to communicate a host of differing feelings – anger, fear, determination, humour, good-will, defensiveness and aggression – is through visual gestures: that is the simplest and most expressive language between two uncomprehending cultures at a moment of crisis such as this.

Material culture

Arago's striking image found its way into the *Atlas* and comes to represent a particular but highly charged historical event. It's a document that will sustain a surprising amount of analysis and, indeed, it has been the subject of an intense period of investigation for Michael Schlitz since he first discovered it in 1999.

In this exhibition he has created one work that represents the site without any figures in the scene – neutral space. Then, in a series of highly individual prints he has begun to explore and extend the repertoire of gestures inspired by those in the Arago image. In order to assure the angry indigenous group that their intentions were peaceful, the Frenchmen danced and sang in what they thought was an unthreatening way and *Castanet Man*, for instance, is Michael Schlitz's interpretation of Arago's delightfully preposterous self-portrait as he clicks out a distracting rhythm.

As a group of prints, this modern series becomes a compelling imagining of what it must have been like to have been in such a surreal situation – confounded by language's inability to make meaning clear, the protagonists in this mime scene, as in any theatrical situation, make every gesture larger than life. *Castanet Man's* hands and feet become an exaggerated focus of attention; the star-gazing *Astronomer* loses his neck as if the head is on a pivot, and the triangulated body becomes its tripod; the four-headed *Head Doctor* focuses attention on Freycinet's equally preposterous head gear; the *Ventriloquist* brings together an interpretation of the leading aboriginal man in Arago's image and the head of the soldier shouldering arms. Here, it's as if the indigenous



Brigita Ozolins *The Truth* 2008

Australian man is putting words into the European's mouth – it was probably the phrase "Go Away!" (or something considerably more down-to-earth) which was recounted in the journals.

And finally a diptych is dominated by a single leg and boot exiting left in one image and another exiting right in the second image. There's nothing, really, in the empty space that remains except a ghostly scratching in the left hand print that might be the remnants of the stook of rifles in Arago's illustration and what looks like an equally wraithlike figure of an animal spirit in the other. The art historian will find the words to build the word picture to examine the meaning of this encounter; so Michael Schlitz brings to bear all of his own skills in order to tease out what this meeting might have meant to the protagonists.

Tasmania

Returning from a voyage to Antarctica in 1987 – a journey during which she was incapacitated following a fall on Heard Island – the renowned artist, Bea Maddock sketched the topographical coastline of Tasmania from South-West Cape to Storm Bay through her cabin window. In the ensuing painting she created, *Trouwerner The white ships came from the West and the Sea of Darkness* [1992, encaustic with pigment, wash and cord, 4 canvases, total length 8 metres. Collection: Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery], there is just a slight void on the far left hand side of the work: the entry point from the sea of darkness to this beautiful haven. The rest is the coast line as seen from a few kilometres off-shore. The painting is conceived in the tradition of map-making topographies, some of which employ captions to signify points of interest; in her painting, she is much more insistent as she inscribes onto the canvas 524 indigenous place names in "Trouwerner" – one of the traditional names for the island now known as Tasmania. Far from *terra nullius* the observer sees plumes of smoke spiralling up from points scattered across the south-western landscape. It is an occupied land that is ironically about to be "occupied", a place where everyone must bear allegiance to the ruler of a kingdom at the opposite end of the earth. Not to do so will involve incarceration and possibly death.

In some ways the inscription of the place names in *Trouwerner ...* is rather like an incantation of the catechism. In Maddock's case, in order to 'read' and understand this landscape (the subject) it is necessary to

repeat over and over again the signifiers of the island's pre-colonial history – words that have effectively been erased in the ensuing mythologies of colonialism. Only then can one begin to understand how complex that interweaving of pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial imagining really is. Artists sometimes find incredibly simple ways of expressing this.

In some ways there is a similar form of incantation in recent work by Julie Gough. In two of the works in this exhibition, *The Missing* [2008] and *The Wait* [2008] a crude form of abacus is employed – in the former, the steps of a ladder are replaced with steel rods upon each of which have been strung ten warrener shells; in the latter a simple wooden chair frame has several brass rods stretched across the seat and the back of the frame. The rods carry a selection of black crow and warrener shells. In *The Missing* the uprights of the ladder resemble spears and in a very simple way, the rungs with their tokens might remind one of lost family over generations, or steps into the past. In a recent statement about the exhibition *Fugitive* in which these works appeared, Julie Gough had the following to say:

The objects that make this exhibition: spears, strung shells on wire, coal on rope, antlers, chairs, books represent my own and my family's patience, our waiting for our different, darker, Indigenous past to be rendered. The works stir between the absences in the records and our presence in places and with people from the early 1800s that were not only tribal or remote.¹⁵

In the work *Incident reports* [2008] three traditional spears pierce a simple but elegant bookshelf upon which stand 61 simulated books also crafted out of timber. Burnt into the the spines of these books are the names of various places where there were known to have been violent incidents that occurred in which indigenous Tasmanians were involved during the colonial period. For the most part this aspect of colonial history goes pretty well unrecognised – it too is disappeared from the public account and it takes artists as well as historians to forage in the archives, to read the two line report in a nineteenth century newspaper, to sift through letters and journals in order to try to make sense of the culture and society of this early period in the State's history. It is contested ground too – Stuart Macintyre, writing for the Evatt Foundation about the meaning of the "History Wars" which is the subject of his acclaimed book *The history wars*,¹⁶ has made the point that "history is not revealed to us in tablets of stone, it has to be created from the remains of the past. It is not fixed

and final but a form of knowledge that is constantly being supplemented and reworked. Research and rewriting is an essential aspect of any academic discipline.¹⁷

Julie Gough's works in this exhibition are part of a body of objects that are a kind of historical and autobiographical unfolding. She writes that "[the works] offer me a means to register my own siting at this moment in the search, the unravelling and slow comprehension of colonial contact."¹⁸ It isn't an easy quest: history is so often written from a position of power and while much can be unravelled by investigating the artefacts of material culture, in the case of indigenous Tasmanians so little of that material culture remains. Works of art give some leads: for instance history painter Benjamin Duterreau [1767–1851], when he crafted the plaster bust of the woman who was to be the last surviving, full-blooded Tasmanian, *Trucanini* [1836],¹⁹ included a double string shell necklace made up of warrener shells, and several of the males and females in Duterreau's *The Conciliation* [1840, oil on canvas, 121 x 170.5. Collection: Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery] also wear double strings of shells around their necks while the majority of the men carry spears. These examples offer insights into what it must have been like for the indigenous Tasmanians but for the rest, much of the work demands visualisation – familiarising oneself with the country – every bit as much as it demands the skills of archival research.

Incarceration

Shortly after George Augustus Robinson had persuaded the remaining 300 indigenous Tasmanians living on the Tasmanian mainland to move to Flinders Island [1834] – a race that was almost wiped out in the space of a little more than a generation – one of the earliest literary figures of Tasmania, Henry Savery [1794–1842] was committed once again to prison – this time at Port Arthur. A businessman, Henry Savery had fallen into debt in 1824–1825 in Bristol, England and was sentenced to death for forgery in the Bristol Assize on the 4th April, 1825. According to E. Morris Miller in *Australia's First Two Novels: origins and backgrounds*²⁰ Savery's sentence was commuted to transportation for life and he was sent to Tasmania. Employed variously in the Colonial Secretary's Office and then the Treasury, Savery again went to jail in 1828. Released in 1830, by then, according to Miller, he had begun writing his autobiographical



Colin Langridge *Eternal Recurrence* 2008

novel, *Quintus Servinton* which was first published in Tasmania in 1831. The book recounted his life both in England and Tasmania in a loosely camouflaged novel.²¹

In 1838, Savery again got into debt and was charged and was jailed for forgery. He died at Port Arthur on the Tasman Peninsula and was buried on the Isle of the Dead on February 8, 1842.²²

In 2007, Brigita Ozolins was selected to be included in the Port Arthur Project, an exhibition of installations curated by Noel Frankham and Julia Clark for the *Ten Days on the Island Festival*,²³ and was also awarded an Arts Tasmania Cultural Residency on the Port Arthur site at that time. Savery became her subject and during the residency she reflected on what it must have been like for this prisoner, incarcerated in a prison that seemed as though it was at the end of the earth. As with Bea Maddock and Julie Gough, the idea of a kind of incantation emerged in the preparation of the performance.

The performance occurred in the extraordinary chapel with its banked wooden cells designed to prevent the prisoners fraternising with one another but allowing them to see the priest at the simple pulpit. Above the pulpit sits a circular window, and between this and the pulpit the words "THE TRUTH SHALL MAKE YOU FREE" were etched into the stone. The performance, over a number of days involved her sitting at a colonial writing desk penning the words "The Truth shall make you free" over and over again onto the pages of a copy of Savery's novel – the words that must have been imprinted onto the brains of the many hundreds of convicts who would have entered the chapel.

The five digital images in this exhibition extend the meditation on incarceration – the central image is of the chapel and is seen from the viewpoint that Savery might have experienced from one of the wooden stalls. The immediate flanking images are of water and of clouds – two constants at Port Arthur, sky for dreams; water for escape. In the fourth image, an orb sits like an all-seeing glass eye against the backdrop of a dolerite cliff (another constant in the Tasman Peninsula landscape). Etched onto the orb are numbers – perhaps scraps of forged documents or numbers from a ledger that might have contributed to Savery's downfall. In the final image, Brigita Ozolins has photographed a page

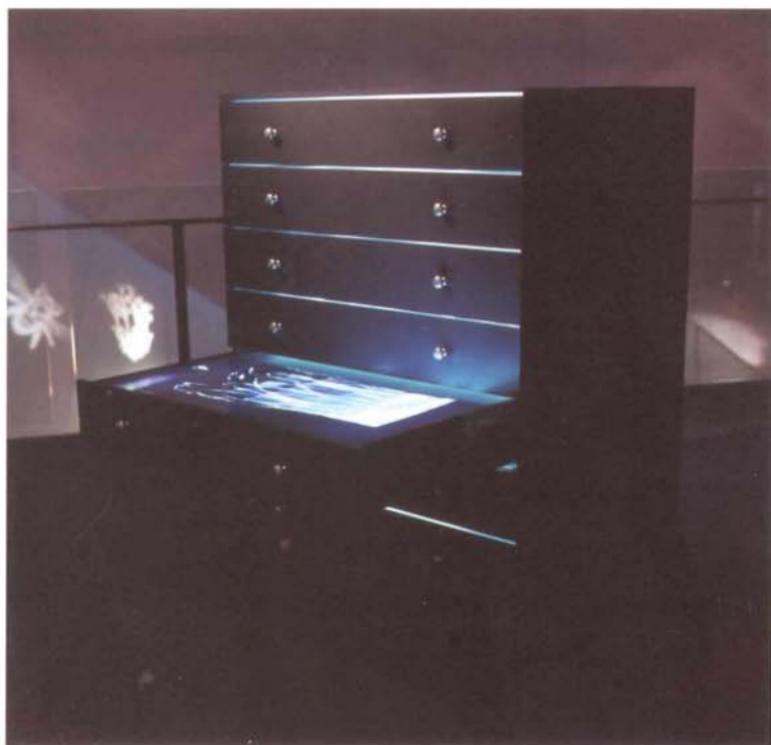


from one of Savery's letters onto which she has projected a dark stain – the stain, perhaps, brought about by his attempted suicide in 1828; the stain on his character; or the stain of a blighted life. What is so intriguing about these images is that they seem to compress so much content into such a restricted amount of space – a kind of prison house.

Also for the Port Arthur Project, Colin Langridge crafted a clinker built dinghy in the traditional manner – a vessel in which to escape from this model prison. But there was a catch: the dinghy was built in a cell and there was no way out. It seemed like an essay on hope and despair and, indeed, another incantation fashioned out of repetitive work.

In 2003, Colin Langridge spent time in France investigating traditional craft trades such as coopering; trades that require the craftsman to conjure up an image of the ideal object to be made, and then to execute it with absolute precision – not once but over and over again. In this exhibition, Colin Langridge has continued with the theme of the rowing skiff where the skills of the boat builder are addressed. There is only one work, *Eternal Recurrence* [2008] in which the artist has replicated the form of a timber skiff twice and suspended both in mid-air, *face à face*. The matching skiffs are quite beautiful as a sculptural form, taking on the shape of a shell – a place of comfort, a haven. But it is the matching forms that are at the conceptual heart of this project. The idea comes from a thought in Friedrich Nietzsche's *The Gay Science* [1882]:

What if a demon crept after you one day or night in your loneliest solitude and said to you: 'This life, as you have lived it, you will have to live it again and again, times without number; and there will be nothing new in it, but every pain and every joy and every thought and sigh and all the unspeakably small and great in your life must return to you, and everything in the same series and sequence – and in the same way this spider and this moonlight among the trees, and in the same way this moment and I myself. The eternal hour-glass of existence will be turned again and again – and you with it, you dust of dust!' – Would you not throw yourself down and gnash your teeth and curse the demon who thus spoke? ... Or how well disposed towards yourself and towards life would you have to become to have no greater desire than for this ultimate eternal sanction and seal?²⁴



Anne Ferran *Spill* 2002

It's a challenging idea and yet in many ways it exemplifies the lot of the craftsman in the nineteenth century, committed to the precise articulation of an ideal model each time he or she begins a new work. But by the mid-century, many of the crafts were succumbing to the onslaught of mass production (another but more mind-numbing form of repetitive work). The mechanisation of the lace industry in Northern France was one such case where this occurred. According to Anne Brennan, whose work, *Twice Removed* [2004] is in the exhibition, the developments in lace-making in Calais came about as a result of English engineers, mechanics and artisans migrating to France in the early nineteenth century. Thriving up until the 1848 revolution, the lace-makers of Calais saw their livelihood in ruins as the industry was all-but closed down during 1848. Now without income the families sought assistance from the British Government to emigrate.²⁵

During 1848, around 700 émigrés were organised to move to Australia from France and they were re-settled in Adelaide, Bathurst and Maitland. One of the conditions of their emigration was that they were not permitted to ply their trade as industrial lace-makers and their ties to the craft were severed. Anne Brennan's *Twice removed: a chronology* is a simple but eloquent work about the passage of time and the act of remembering. There are three small lace works linking the lace-makers of Calais (1848) to the Maitland Mechanics Institute – the building in which the Maitland Regional Art Gallery is housed (1909) – and to (2004), the year of the exhibition. Three works with the signature dates condense a century and a half of life lived in the new country – one where perhaps only a few family heirlooms link the current generation to a craft practice that became a revolutionary driver of mass-production in the mid-nineteenth century.

Anne Ferran has two works in *The Stuff of History* – the first is a beautiful lace bonnet that was designed for the exhibition *Twice Removed*, a collaborative show with Anne Brennan held at the Maitland Regional Art Gallery [2004]. The bonnet was modelled by a number of young women in a series of photographic portraits that she made [2004] that seem to hark back to a time when this was a daily form of head-dress for their French and English forebears. They cover the heads of several of the mourners in the *Burial at Ornans* by Courbet, for instance, and they remind us of a particular moment in Australia's



Geoff Parr *The Scientific Artist* 1986

immigration history that has its roots in the same revolution that spurred Courbet to produce his *chefs d'oeuvre*.

Her second work, *Spill* [2002] forms part of a suite of works for which she has become renowned. *Spill* consists of an elegant seven-drawer chest in which are placed a series of duraclear transparencies. The images are photograms of C20 and C19 women's and children's clothing captured as beautiful, transparent gossamer on light boxes. Fluorescent light spills out of the chest when the drawers are closed and, when a drawer is opened, the flimsy undergarments and dresses seem to represent the bodies of the women and children that wore them.

It was as a result of a residency in 1998 at the Rouse Hill Estate on the outskirts of Sydney that she conceived of the idea that has driven this body of work. In her application for the residency she stated that she wanted to create a kind of 'x-ray' of the Georgian residency – to get under its skin, so to speak; to reveal its inner, its secret and its forgotten history. In particular, she wanted to speak about the lives of the women and children who peopled these spaces.

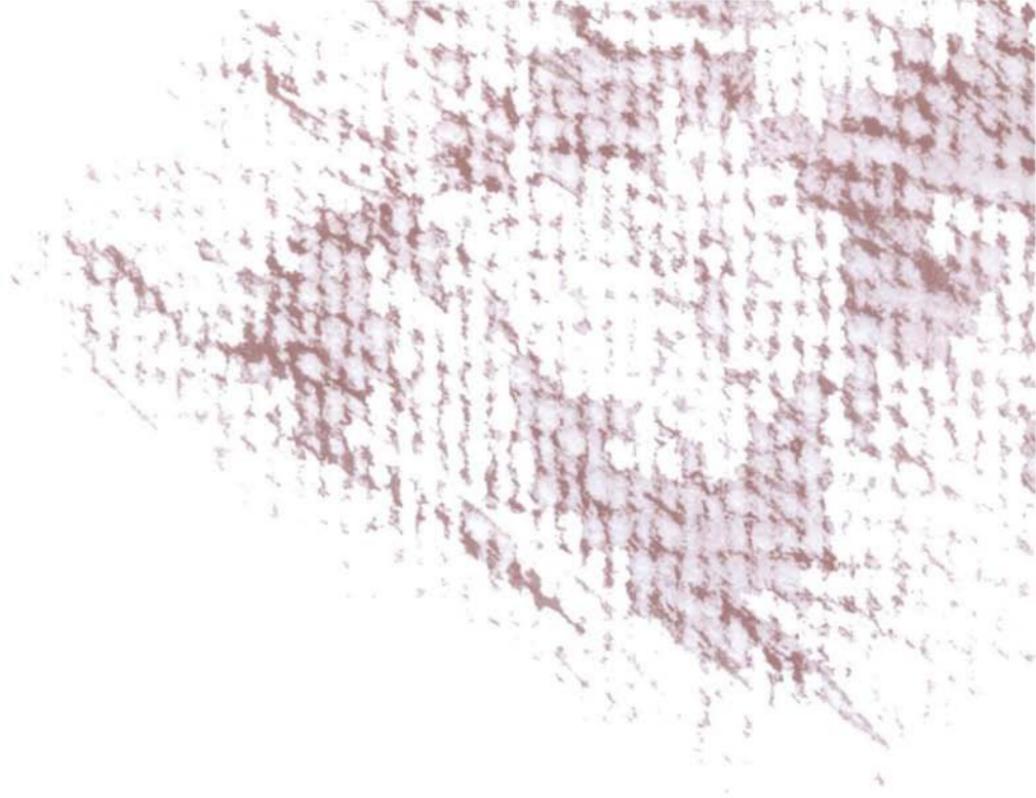
Rouse Hill was founded in 1813 by Richard Rouse [1774–1852] and was kept in the family for six generations before being taken over by the Historic Houses Trust of New South Wales. Once Anne Ferran had begun to familiarise herself with the historical artefacts in the house she started to conceive of the idea of working with the clothing stored away in wardrobes and chests. It became a metaphor for the hidden history of the women and children, tucked away from sight – disappeared again. The solution she found was to render a room at Rouse Hill completely light-proof. Having selected the clothing to be represented, she was able to lay the clothing on the light-sensitive photographic paper, expose it to light and then have the exposed paper developed. The results were quite extraordinary and because the clothing is laid onto the paper, the image is actually of the underside of the dress or undergarments – as if the artist has got under the skin. The clothing also seems, by some strange quirk of light, to become embodied with the presence of those who wore them – as if the images are not just indexes of the fabric but indexes of the women and children themselves.

Anne Ferran continued this body of work until 2002 when she was awarded a residency at the National Museum of Australia. *Spill* was the result and in this work she has given the objects even more transparency and gossamer thinness by employing the duraclear transparencies which allow the viewer to actually see through the material. It is a compelling body of work that brings the private domain of women and children in the mid-nineteenth century out into the public sphere – the sphere traditionally occupied by men.

Anne Ferran's work acts as a telling foil to the final work in the exhibition – *The Scientific Artist* [1986] by Geoff Parr. The work is dominated by a nearly 3 metre high monochrome drawing on canvas depicting a section of bush rendered with extraordinary precision; next to that is a fanciful drawing – a cut-out almost – of a half-human/half-animal figure; and next to that is a precisely executed drawing of a primitive tent made of bark – bark that could have been pulled off the forest floor of the first drawing. Next to the tall drawing stand two light boxes with cibachrome transparencies. The photographs depict a self portrait of the artist standing in a densely packed but orderly studio. All of the accoutrements of the scientific artist/illustrator are there – the stuffed animals, pattern books, a drawing table with brushes, pencils and charcoal and right in the foreground a four pole set of surveyor's chains – an instrument designed to divide up geographic space into precisely ordered lots: mapping, charting, indexing, recording, ordering – control. *The Scientific Artist* is a powerful visualisation of the colonial desire to bring about an orderly settlement of what was understood to be inchoate space – somewhere imperfect and vague. As with *Spill*, this work gets under the skin, it somehow refuses to comply, just as Courbet's painting refused to comply with the bourgeois vision in 1850.

This is an exhibition about the stuff of history: the way material things – images, books, artifacts, hidden objects – provide clues or triggers to other ways of seeing, other ways of thinking, other ways of interpretation. Above all it relies upon the skills of artists to visualise and to make visual aspects of a past that perhaps can't be harnessed by words. And in turn, just like the *Ambassadors* and the *Burial* and the *Baie des Chiens-marins*, they will become that stuff, that material from which future generations will draw their own conclusions about events and histories that happened long ago.

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 39 Art Gallery, 2004



Biographies

Michael Schlitz

Michael Schlitz came to Tasmania in 1996 to undertake a Bachelor of Fine Arts with Honours having completed a Bachelor of Creative Arts at the University of Southern Queensland in 1991. Subsequently he went on to complete a Master of Fine Arts at the Tasmanian School of Art, University of Tasmania, and he currently teaches in the printmaking studio at the School. A printmaker, Michael Schlitz has had a longstanding interest in how historical events might be treated from a visual perspective and how people respond to the landscape and to place. Since the early 1990s he has lectured in printmaking and drawing and has had nine solo exhibitions in Queensland and Tasmania.

In 2001, he was awarded an Asialink residency and worked at the Nagawawa Art Park on Awaji Island in Japan and began studies into traditional forms of woodblock printing. His most recent solo exhibition *The Nature of Things* was shown at Bett Gallery Hobart in 2006.

He is represented by Bett Gallery Hobart.



Michael Schlitz *Ventriloquist* 2004



Julie Gough

Julie Gough is currently on research leave from James Cook University and is undertaking various fellowships received in 2007 and 2008. She moved to Tasmania in 1994 to undertake a Bachelor of Fine Arts with Honours degree at the Tasmanian School of Art, University of Tasmania, having already completed a Bachelor of Arts and a Bachelor of Visual Arts in Western Australia. *The move to Tasmania coincided with her desire to research and to understand the context of her indigenous background.* Since then she has been preoccupied with what she describes as “a rhythmic form of remembering of [Tasmania’s] colonial-contact inheritance”.

Since completing her honours degree she has gone on to be awarded a PhD from the University of Tasmania in 2001 and prior to the completion of this she was awarded a prestigious Samstag scholarship and undertook an MA in Fine Arts at Goldsmiths College, in London. In 2002 she was a lecturer in Aboriginal Studies at the University of Tasmania before moving to Victoria to take up a curatorship in indigenous art at the National Gallery of Victoria.

Since 1996 she has had eight solo exhibitions and has been invited to exhibit in many group exhibitions both in Australia and overseas. She has received a number of awards and residencies and her work is represented in many of Australia’s public art galleries.

She is represented by Bett Gallery Hobart.



Julie Gough *The missing* 2008

Brigita Ozolins

Brigita Ozolins is an artist and academic who lives and works in Hobart. Her art examines the convergence of language, knowledge, history and identity and fuses her interests in the book, the word and the library. Her best known works can be confronting as they involve the systemic destruction of books, accompanied by repetitive writing performances. This may seem surprising given her early training as a librarian.

In the 1970s, Brigita studied the classics at Monash University and in the 1980s worked as a librarian and arts administrator. In the mid 90s she returned to study at the University of Tasmania's School of Art, where she now teaches art theory and digital imaging. She completed her PhD in 2004 at the same institution and her thesis, which explores the links between language, bureaucracy and subjectivity through installation, was awarded the Dean's commendation.

Since 1995, Brigita has exhibited regularly in solo and group exhibitions, including commissions for the State Library of Tasmania and the National Library of Latvia. She has received numerous artist grants and has undertaken residencies in London, Paris, Gorge Cottage in Launceston, and Port Arthur, Tasmania.



Brigita Ozolins *Orb* 2008



Colin Langridge

Colin Langridge graduated from Curtin University, Western Australia with a Bachelor of Fine Art in 1991 and in 1998 enrolled in a Bachelor of Fine Arts with Honours at the Tasmanian School of Art, University of Tasmania. Following this he completed a Master of Fine Arts [2002] and a PhD [2008] – both at the University of Tasmania. He has had a longstanding interest in what sculptures mean and has crafted many works that have a visual connection to the world of utilitarian things although his sculptures remain resolutely sculptural. His work has been shown in a number of survey exhibitions including *The Shape of Air* at the Plimsoll Gallery, University of Tasmania [2002], *The Helen Lemprière Sculpture Prize* [2006] and the site-specific *Port Arthur Project* on the Tasman Peninsula [2007].

Colin Langridge has curated several theme-based exhibitions including *Liminal* [2008] for the Carnegie Gallery and has been awarded residencies at the University of Tasmania's McCulloch Studio in Paris and the British School in Rome. He is currently teaching in the sculpture studio at the Tasmanian School of Art.



Colin Langridge *Aspiration* 2007 [Not exhibited]



Anne Brennan

Anne Brennan has worked at the School of Art at the Australian National University since 1995 and is an artist and writer. She has written extensively for visual arts journals and catalogues both locally and overseas, with a special interest in craft theory and design. Her other major research interests address memory, history and self-representation. She has undertaken a number of projects in museums including the work *Twice Removed*, a collaborative exhibition with Sydney artist Anne Ferran in 2004, dealing with a mass migration to Maitland, NSW, of nineteenth century mechanics and artisans who had worked in the mechanised lace industry in Calais. Work from this show is featured in the current exhibition.

Secure the Shadow, another collaboration with Anne Ferran, was the outcome of a residency in the Hyde Park Barracks, Sydney in 1995. In 1997, Anne Brennan made a soundwork for the Australian War Memorial as part of *Archives and the Everyday*, a project linking artists to significant archives and collections in Canberra. She is currently undertaking research for a book that explores questions of memory, history and place through the story of her mother's birthplace in Ukraine.



Anne Brennan 1909 2004



Annie Ferran

Anne Ferran has been exhibiting nationally and internationally since the early 1980s when she was part of a 'new wave' of Australian women artists utilizing photography. A graduate of Sydney University (she has a Bachelor of Arts and a Bachelor of Arts [Visual Arts]), she has also completed a Master of Fine Arts at the College of Fine Arts at the University of New South Wales. She teaches at the Sydney College of the Arts at the Sydney University.

Her photographs and installations have been shown in many of the important theme exhibitions in Australia during the past twenty years. A prolific artist, she has had 19 solo exhibitions since 1984 and her work will be the subject of an important solo show at the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery in December, 2008. For a number of years now she has spent extensive periods of time either undertaking residencies or returning to particular historical sites that often have charged but forgotten histories. Notable have been her collaborations with Anne Brennan at Sydney's Hyde Park Barracks in 1994-95 and Maitland Regional Gallery in 2004. She has also produced a major body of work that has been drawn together under the title *In the ground, on the air* – a study of the women and children in the Convict Female Factories at South Hobart and Ross in Tasmania.

She is represented by Sutton Gallery, Melbourne and Stills Gallery, Sydney.

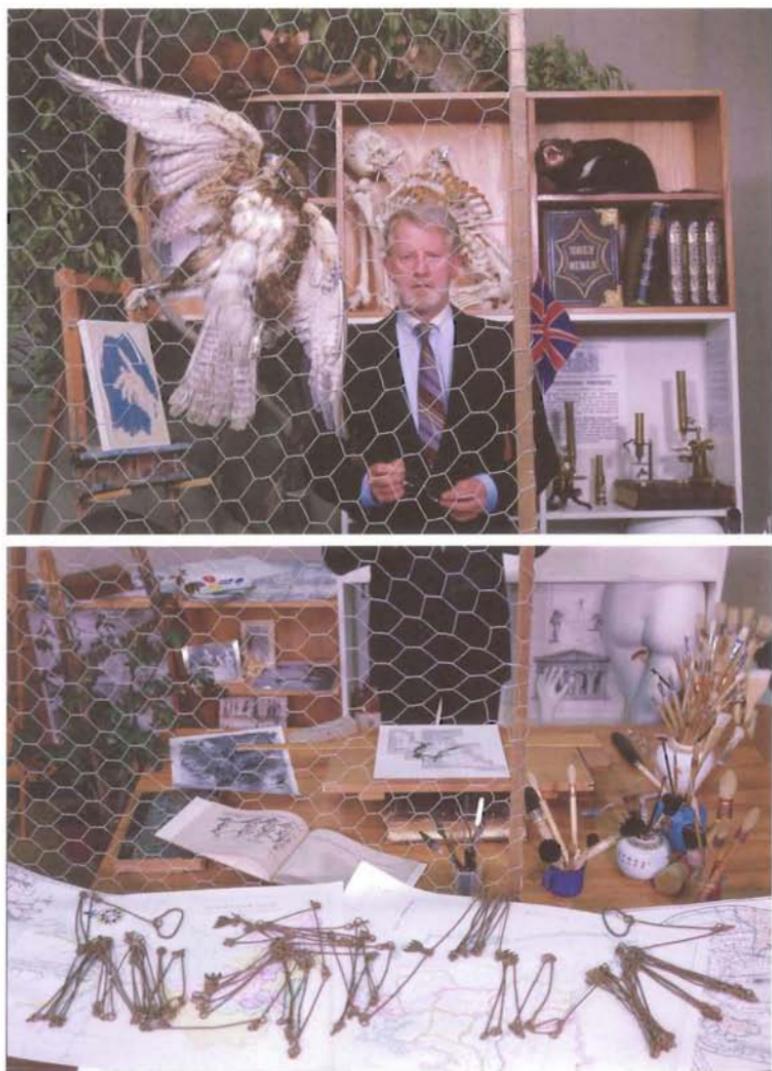


Anne Ferran *Cap* 2004

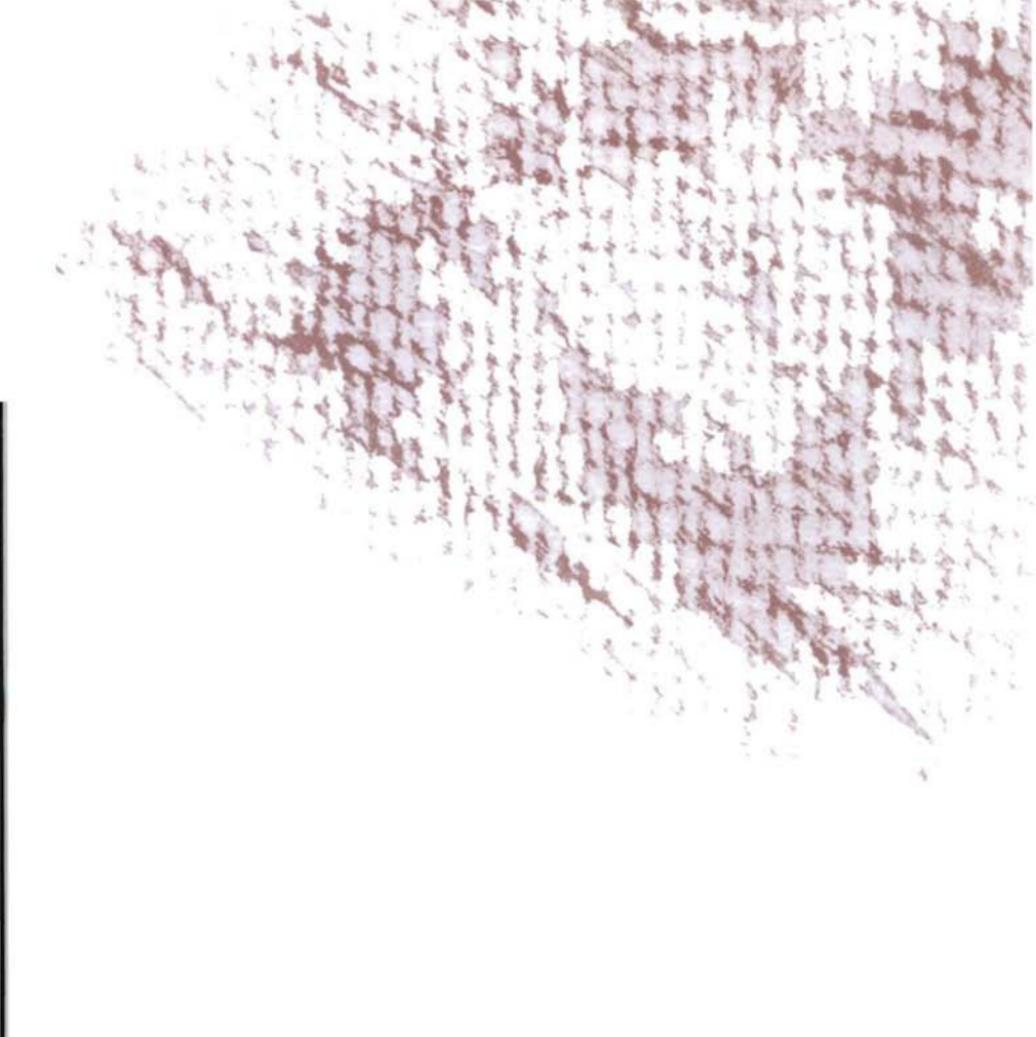
Geoff Parr

A long-time resident of Tasmania, Geoff Parr taught at the Tasmanian School of Art for 35 years, retiring in the late 1990s. He is now Professor Emeritus of Art and an Honorary Research Associate at the Tasmanian School of Art, University of Tasmania. During the 1970s Parr was a member of the Lake Pedder Action Committee, the United Tasmania Group, and the Council of the Australian Conservation Foundation and along with several other colleagues at the Art School, in 1983 he was one of those arrested and charged, while protesting against the Lower Gordon Scheme. Widely regarded as a distinguished photographer and painter during his academic career, he has more recently turned to digital imaging, receiving Australian Research Council funding for research conducted at the Tasmanian School of Art, University of Tasmania. He was one of the earliest members of the Visual Arts Board of the Australia Council in the 1970s and more recently has served as Chairman of Contemporary Art Services Tasmania, a position that he held until early in 2008.

He has been represented in numerous solo and group exhibitions including *Australian Perspecta* at the Art Gallery of New South Wales in 1983 and *Balance 1990: views, visions, influences* at the Queensland Art Gallery in 1990. More recently he was represented in *Haven* at the Long Gallery, Hobart in 2004. His work was the subject of an important survey exhibition at the Carnegie Gallery in 2006. In 2008 he was awarded a Member of the Order of Australia medal [AM] in recognition of his services to tertiary art education and to the visual arts in Australia. He lives and works in Hobart and he is represented by Criterion Gallery.



Geoff Parr *The Scientific Artist* 1986 [detail]



List of Works

*Measurements in centimetres
(H x W x D)*



Anne Brennan

Twice Removed: A Chronology 2004

3 Vitrines: Tops: 540 x 380 x 150; Bases: 54 x 38 x 86

1848: torchon lace, 4 x 6;

1909: halas needlepoint lace, 4 x 6;

2004: filet lace with torchon edging; 4 x 6

Credits: Vitrines made by Trout Design, Canberra

Lacemakers: Jill Waite (1848); Marie Laurie (1909); Sheila Price (2004)

Collection: The Artist

Anne Ferran

Spill 2002

Duraclears, acrylic, plywood, fluorescent lights

146 x 108 x 78

Courtesy: Stills Gallery, Sydney and Sutton Gallery Melbourne

Cap 2004

Lace

24 x 24 x 10

Collection: The Artist



Julie Gough

The missing 2008

Burnt tea tree stick ladder with steel rods & warrener shells

190 x 48 x 35

Courtesy: The Big River Collection

Incident reports 2008

Found Tasmanian oak bookshelf, tea tree stocks, burnt Tasmanian oak

240 x 90 x 19

Courtesy: The Big River Collection

The wait 2008

Found chair, brass rods with black crow & maireener shells

85.5 x 42 x 40

Courtesy: The Artist

Killymoon 2008

Fingal Valley coal necklace on dropped Northern Midlands antlers

200 x 133 x 35

Courtesy: Bett Gallery Hobart

Colin Langridge

Eternal Recurrence 2008

Tasmanian oak, steel

200 x 300 x 100

Collection: The Artist

Brigita Ozolins

Orb 2008

Digital Print on Hahnemuhle paper
90 x 116

Deep water 2008

Digital Print on Hahnemuhle paper
90 x 116

The Truth 2008

Digital Print on Hahnemuhle paper
90 x 116

Clouds 2008

Digital Print on Hahnemuhle paper
90 x 116

Stain 2008

Digital Print on Hahnemuhle paper
90 x 116
Collection: The Artist

Geoff Parr

The Scientific Artist 1986

Drawings on canvas, transparencies on light boxes, paint on canvas
Variable dimensions
Collection: The Artist



Michael Schlitz

After the Meeting (large version) 2004

Drypoint etching with additional
off-set plate on paper, unframed

Diptych: 56 x 76 & 79 x 88.5

Limited edition of 10

Future Boy 2004

Drypoint etching with hand-colour plate on paper, unframed
88 x 78.5

Limited edition of 10

Time Boy 2004

Drypoint etching with hand-colour plate on paper, unframed
76 x 56

Limited edition of 10

Astronomer 2nd State 2004

Drypoint etching with rolled colour plate on paper, unframed
76 x 89

Limited edition of 4

Ventriloquist 2004

Drypoint etching with rolled, colour plate on paper, unframed
99 x 80

Limited edition of 10

Head Doctor 2004

Drypoint etching on paper, unframed
89 x 78

Limited edition of 10

Castanet Man 2004

Drypoint etching with rolled, colour plate on paper, unframed
88 x 78.5

Limited edition of 10

Unknown Sailor 2004

Drypoint etching with hand-colour plate on paper, unframed
80 x 91

Limited edition of 10

Collection: The Artist

Acknowledgements

The Stuff of History is the third in a suite of satellite exhibitions that the Plimsoll Gallery has been mounting alongside the series of solo survey exhibitions that have been exhibited at the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery during the past three years. The exhibitions at the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery came out of research related to an Australian Research Council linkage grant between the University of Tasmania and the TMAG. The researchers were Jeff Malpas, Paul Zika, Maria Kunda, Jonathan Holmes, David Hansen and Craig Judd.

This exhibition relates the work of Anne Ferran, who is the subject of the next TMAG survey exhibition in December 2008, to that of a number of other artists who employ various visual strategies to comment upon historical events and material from colonial times.

The curator wishes to thank the participating artists – Anne Brennan, Anne Ferran, Julie Gough, Colin Langridge, Brigita Ozolins, Geoff Parr and Michael Schlitz - for their generous support. Thanks also go to Sutton Gallery, Melbourne and Stills Gallery, Sydney, (representing Anne Ferran), Criterion Gallery, Hobart (representing Geoff Parr), Bett Gallery Hobart (representing Julie Gough and Michael Schlitz) and the Big River Collection (for the loan of works by Julie Gough).

Thanks also to the photographers: Anne Ferran [her work and the work of Anne Brennan]; Gerrard Dixon [Colin Langridge's *Aspiration*]; and Jack Bett [Julie Gough and Michael Schlitz].

The exhibition would not have been possible without the important contributions of the following people: Sarah Owen for her graphic design expertise; Sophie Machin & Paul Ancher for their inspired design and Paul Zika for his advice and curatorial skills. No exhibition at the Plimsoll Gallery can be mounted without the dedication, generosity and sheer professionalism of its coordinator, Pat Brassington. Thanks to her for her invaluable support and to the Committee members who contribute countless hours of assistance to mount exhibitions for the Plimsoll Gallery.

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Graphic Designers: Sophie Machin and Paul Ancher

Exhibition Co-ordinator: Pat Brassington

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