

EUREKA SCHOOL
JOHN REYNOLDS

John Reynolds
SCHOOL

(Inner Stone)

Every Landscape is located within
private person.



Dialogue between then and now

A visual roller-coaster

The Eureka School project began in 1990 when Fisher Gallery/Custer Leach in Portland extended an invitation to John Reynolds to undertake a 'large scale installation' in the 44 running metres of the large gallery.

At the time Reynolds was preparing to travel to Spain as part of the New Zealand contingent for the 'Distance looks Our Way' exhibition at the Saville Expo, but agreed to the exhibition on his return.

He toured the Spanish countryside allowing time to connect with beach Black Paintings, Velasquez's Las Meninas and the Prado's collection of Romanesque frescoes, but also to experience the culture that was eloquently expressed in the works of Casanoves and Federico Garcia Lorca.

Reynolds recorded his discoveries, insights and analysis in journals which were the basis for the exhibition and subsequently this publication. The eight weeks for Eureka School could be seen as a synthesis of that inspiration and the deep encounter with objects, art forms in Moorish Andalusia in southern Spain.

In 1993 Eureka School became huge painted and drawn journal pages containing fragments of architectural plans, details of classical mouldings, a tree of life, death or knowledge, a vibrant purple panel of random barely remembered gestures and a panel of carefully executed abstract colour lines, traces of objects which combine to explore a range of connections with social, historical and aesthetic issues.

The work has now an impressive provenance: initially created for the Fisher Gallery, placed first in the 1993 New-Cold War Awards and now in the collection of the Charwell Trust.

There was much discussion regarding the format of the publication and it was unanimously agreed that, since Eureka School has been so well recorded in its final format, this publication should explain a

different target. (See *Love and Awe*, contemporary Australian and New Zealand Art from the Chantwell Collection).

In preparation for the exhibition in 2001, Reynolds suggested that there be a catalogue, in which, he wrote "I would enjoy preparing a companion text (some visual notes) to your introduction. Notes rather than essay introductions."

Now in 2004, long after the original notes were written and buried in a folder, lying undiscovered until the writing of this introduction, the visual diary/catalogue eventuates.

This publication becomes a series of conversations: between Allan Smith and John Reynolds and between the work, the creation process, between time, now and then.

We thank all those who have waited patiently while this publication has been developed: Allan Smith and Creative New Zealand for their commitment to the *Eureka School* project and their patience in allowing us time to realize what has become a source book for *Eureka School* and consequently a very unique publication.

What *Love or Awe* ends in 2001 about the exhibition is equally true for the publication that we have created, that "ultimately the *Eureka School* project is a contemplation of the process of revelation, recognition and discovery. "To believe", as Wallace Stevens puts it, "without belief, beyond belief."

Photo credit:
Gavin

A dark romanticism with quotations

It is reasonable to suppose that our dark civilization will develop impulsive genius and impulsive passions of destruction! One is deluged by a social, simultaneously dynamic and confined as a system, in a complex culture that, necessarily, assumes a state of instability and fluidity of organization! The end would be that of a war which, after assuming a critical mass, a critical expansion of energy surging through internal force and nature's reflex, will collapse inward, starting out, at the moment of destruction, with just that magnitude of visible brilliance which an organism with great culture in their terminal phase!

George Orwell

Based on epic Romantic subject matter, *Dark*, rebound, *The Twilight of the Idols* and *The Fall of Manasse*, *Plato's Cave* and *Genesis* feature all big scale paintings by John Reynolds from the early 2000s. These almost-embarrassingly big mounted paintings hang up in no doubt that, for Reynolds, art is vital education, a hungering for knowledge, the poetic and philosophical from a skeptical present. The creative process continually re-ignites an uneasy drama played out between the queering intellect's "I also preparing one" dark shavings of an "original imagination."

To Romantic poets like Byron or Shelley the Prometheus who stole fire from heaven and endured torture for it, he represented the artistic type, suffering for his "vision takes all" assertions of creative independence. To claim Prometheus' experience as exemplary for artists today means to hold-out for the extreme and agonizing nature of the creative process, physical and spiritual. The title of *The Twilight of the Idols* comes from Nietzsche's late work in spite of the odds against the cultural mediocrity resulting from a "total intellect atrophy". In opposition to this atrophy Nietzsche upholds "the warlike in our souls [that] culture is unnatural" and he exalts the strong will, driven with its "ambitions and demanding

different target. One river and four continents, divided and free to find their own channels.

In preparation for the exhibition in 1999, Reynolds suggested that there be a catalogue, in which, he wrote 'I would enjoy preparing a companion volume - visual rather than text - introduction, notes rather than commentary.'

Now in 2005, long after the original ideas were received and tested in a fabric, laying undisturbed by the writing of this introduction, the visual diary/catalogue was born.

This publication becomes a series of conversations between Allan Smith and John Reynolds and between the work, the creation process, between time, now and then.

We thank all those who have waited patiently for this volume - Alan Smith, John Reynolds and Creative Arts Zealand for their commitment to the work and project and their patience in allowing us time to realize what has become a source book for Auckland School and consequently a very unique publication.

It takes a 'wild and woolly' eye about the exhibition to really look for the publication. It is here, and, that 'wild and woolly' the Auckland School project is a contemplation of the process of revelation, hope and discovery: "to believe", as Wallace Stevens puts it, "without belief, beyond belief".

Mark Taylor
Curator

A dark romanticism with quotations

It is reasonable to suppose that every high civilization will develop implicit stress and impulses toward self-destruction! One is delicately balanced, continuously dynamic and confined an aggregate as a complex culture and, necessarily, toward a state of instability and, finally, of conflagration! The model would be that of a star which, after attaining a critical mass, a critical equation of energy exchange between inward masses and outward forces, will collapse inward, flaring out, at the moment of destruction, with few that magnitude of visible brilliance which an associate with great culture in their terminal phase!

George Geyser

Based on epic Romantic subject matter, Prometheus Unbound, The Twilight of the Idols and the Staff of Moses, Plain's Cove and Plume School are all big scale paintings by John Reynolds from the early 1990s. These almost embracingly big-headed paintings leave us in no doubt that, for Reynolds, art is wild speculation, a longing for the sublime, the mythic and the metaphysical from a skeptical present. The creative process continually re-ignites an uneasy drama played out between the quivering individual's virtuous yearning and the dark shadings of an historical imagination.

By Romantic poets like Byron or Shelley, the Prometheus who stole fire from heaven and endured torture for his crime represented the artistic type, suffering for his "inner laws" all securities of creative independence. To claim Prometheus' experience as exemplary for artistic practice today means to hold out for the extreme and agonistic nature of the activity in psychological and spiritual terms. The title of the Twilight of the Idols comes from Nietzsche's late work in which he calls against the cultural mediocrity resulting from a 'spiritual instinct atrophy', in opposition to this atrophy Nietzsche upholds "the warlike in our souls [that] celebrates its naturalness" and he recalls the strong will, drunk with its own power and demanding

in the bars of the world.
(A series of my Trials (Epics))

a charcoal project (drawing)



1. Inaugural Alphabet

Large
Hollow
Sign

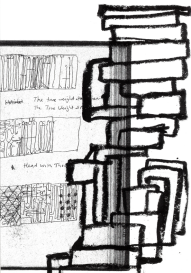
PACIFIC
MUSEUM
the glorious words

creative expression." This is an exorcism, an psychomagic, an self-destructive rage for wild furies and fatalistic disorientments. Such saturation wounds provide the full pull beneath Reynolds' ornate surfaces; the fear (behind the decorative mask).

Talking about his work *The Fall of Medusa*, Reynolds acknowledges a fascination with what he calls the "tectonic horror" of Géricault's famous painting as if it is re-read by Julian Barnes in his novel *A History of the World in 10 1/2 Chapters*. In his reconstruction of the history of Géricault's painting Julian Barnes fuses a story of violence, cannibalism and the will to survive, with a discussion of an artist's cutting up and re-arranging given material to produce the intended intensity of a new work. Stormy creation of destruction, immersion and starker erosion. Reynolds, too, employs high drama, iconoclastic diatribe and psychological trauma as threatening elements in his theatre of epic hyperbole. In the flyer accompanying the epic *Sea* (Rockford Gallery exhibition *The Twilight of the Idols and the Fall of the Medusa* Reynolds quoted from Barnes' text: "How hopelessly we signal how dark the sky; how big the waves. We are all lost at sea, washed between hope and despair, hailing something that may never come to rescue us."

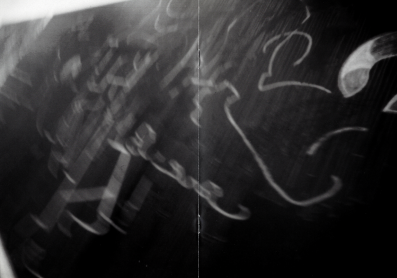
In the same year as the *Twilight of the Idols* exhibition, John Reynolds provided drawings for one of his brother Patrick Reynolds' postcards. The postcard juxtaposed a photograph of an idyllic New Zealand scene of Pahrakawanui and sandy beach, with lines from Allen Curnock's poem "Landed in Unknown Seas". Curnock's poem deals with a history of blood and murder partially concealed beneath the foreign appellation "Golden Bay" which replaced the original name, "Whidore's Bay". In an essay of the same year, Alex Calder argued that Curnock's poem, which constitutes part events in real "the state of blood that writes an island story", attends to the many acts of violence that accompany the imposition of order and meaning on unruly materials in the writing of poems as well as in the writing of history.¹





Discussing the way creative processes assemble contradictory strategies for survival and uncertain control of volatile material, Reynolds says that "when Bataille declares "To the King of the Wood, Zero, a criminal," he is locating a second, anarchic spirit as the heart of the art-making process – the machinations of a kind of transgressive vertigo." He carries this thought further by referring to an article from *The Guardian* in which Roy Lichtenstein talks about his plundering of imagery from Picasso and Matisse: "Lichtenstein could not accept the term appropriation or even pastiche – he used the term cannibalism. He talked of Picasso's treatment of Gao Shoulin as a form of cannibalism, without any sense of irony." This view of engagement with tradition recalls Harold Bloom's classic, tormented readings of the agonistic dialectic between a gifted artist in the present and his or her great precursors. In these terms, a necessary transgression is at stake as the artist, in recent artist tries to ward an independence from tradition by violently over-coming and remaking the art of the past. This involves a form of territorial dispute at a fundamental level, of influence as theft, of imitation as aggression. The right to access the psychic energies and almost magical properties of a set of images must be forcefully established and these properties are torn from the artist as he or she proves inadequate to them.

An observation from Katherine Mansfield also appeared in Reynolds' 2002 exhibition flyer. Mansfield evokes the presence of a malevolent character playing across the local landscape: "There is no twilight in our New Zealand days, but a curious half hour, when everything appears grotesque and it brightens us – as though the savage spirit of the country walks abroad and sneered at what it saw." And one of Mansfield's chrysothemum, so close to them the chronic heart of Reynolds' painting *The Twilight of the Gods*, appears in this same flyer along with McCahon's version of Manierre's tower as a dash turbulence, hovering over a desolate plain. Mansfield's words and the allusion to McCahon started the exhibition gave that Reynolds' remarking of the McCahonian, brooding Romantic tradition was



LĂGRIMA

TRISTE

DOLOROSA

intended to call up and figure a place and a psyche oppressed by a sense of dread, by an uneasy return of buried psychological content gone bad. Sinister undercurrents shift and flow beneath the proscribing beauty of Reynolds' New Zealand landscape. As Vincent Ward or Jane Campion have made commonplace in the rhetoric of New Zealand film, the other side of our aching, misty landscape beauty is the massive and unpedicled weight of repressed emotion.

Reynolds' tear-rictorial world, however, is altogether more flickering and phosphorescent in quality, and more sickly sweet in aroma than what one finds in either *Blindfield* or *McCabe*, or in Vincent Ward's *Vigil* for that matter. Reynolds' annotated and inscribed panels are, in tenor and sensibility, much closer to the post-romantic and symbolist flexibility of B. K. Ruysschaert's *Das Doornik* than they are to the stately, slowly building, Hieronymusque landscape sequences of *McCabe*. One might also say that in contrast to *McCabe*, who resembles a Protestant Reformational preacher expounding the severity of the Word from his stony pulpit, Reynolds' taste for mixed and exotic content, an overwrought calligraphy and an erudition materially stark from the impressionist expostion of a *Causerie-Retromodernist* folk in which the persuasive power of imagery and the sensual impact of orchestrated spectacle triumph over more sober styles of exposition.



Everything about the way he conjures the empty hallucinations and textual shimmerers of *Plato's Cave* makes it clear that what really attracts Reynolds to the parable of the cave is not the aspiration to leave behind the deception of shadows for the world of the pure idea. Rather it is the seductive, opportunistic and magic nature of life in the cave that really interests him; the sense of doomed prisoners in-chains-casting Platonic shadows on the rock wall, warmed by a fire that symbolizes truth, imagination and the sleep of reason.

Gerhard Richter, 1922-1990

3. 1. 89

Art is the pure manifestation of religiosity
of the ability to believe, longing for
'God'.

15. 9. 89

Art is watched, cynical, stupid, helpless
confusing - a mirror of our spiritual
poverty, our abandonment, forlornness.

We have lost big ideas, utopias, any
sense of faith, anything that endows
meaning.

... Calculated, made for sale, not so
are repetitions of all varieties, all
shades, little outblown ideologies, the
most stupid lies.

① The Mundane Alphabet

Three walls
Müller & Spandl-Baum

(to Mundane Alphabet)
(spandlbaum)



to 'written' mundane alphabet

- looking for story, not the story itself
& not other 'lies'

to the human world.

② Garden School

(and school? Garden School?)

simple vertical building



Abstract (stair) system (vertical building)

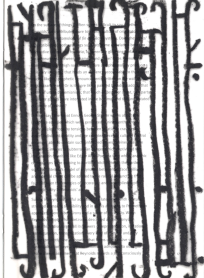
→ vertical (stair) as white for letters & letters

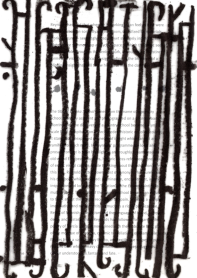
vertical (stair) as white for letters & letters

Reynolds has said that when he is writing, it can feel as if he were "tumbling about in some Byzantine glass, transfixed by materials, strokes, figures - seemingly obscure, yet strangely insistent." His *Plater's Case* summons up a psychic space in which the tragic poet must stumble through a blinding mist, encountering isolated forms and visions of occult design leading to the brilliance of a blinding insight that will throw him back into the darkness where he began.



The title of *Garota Isotro* comes from the name of a primary school found by accident and photographed on a country road near Barroville. The discovery of a country school becomes a small-scale local re-enactment of Archimedes' "Isotroic cry of discovery: it stands for unexpected moments of insight which fan out and readily into much more. In Reynolds' programme the local and personal content is seen highlighted and roughly ornamented by old-world European allusions, Isotroic cross-references, and a burst of poetic visual caprice. While thinking about the exhibition carrying this title, Reynolds jotted down a list of synonyms for 'Isotro' in his notebook which included: illumination, enchantment, insight, inspiration and location. The 'location' of the *Garota* painting is multi-layered. The name of the country school became an excuse to think about the artist's recent trip to Spain, Spain as a complex imaginative and mythic world as much as a ritely physical one. Notes of Spanish Catholicism and the language of blood, sorrow, death and ecstasy which Reynolds had followed for years in the poetry of Garcia Lorca, is now joined with the elaborate floor plan of the mosque of Córdoba, cosmic transpositions of blank tile work, figures from a sixth century fresco, and tessellated-like stripes in purple, red and blue whose heavy chromatic omniscience suggests colour understood as fantasy and fate.





On the surface of things it often seems difficult to say whether Reynolds' art contributes more to a taste culture of celebratory flourish or to a symptomatology of *fin de siècle* hysteria. Does the work's susceptibility to both readings suggests some correlation between decorative excess and hysteria, between the glittering surface and social nervousness, between ornament and crime? Does Reynolds' summoning up of high-romantic gesture and physiognomy produce a visionary language that holds an audience accountable to their inner voices, like the prophetic announcements written on the wall at King Belshazzar's feast? Or is it more like a painted backdrop adding that cache of urban colonization, that touch of designer angst, to a party of dinner guests more interested in the bar menu and the understated etiquette of fashion?

In his essay "The Sexual Osmosis", George Steiner writes about the imposter energies which were generated in nineteenth-century *fin de siècle* Europe by tensions between inevitable longings to assert individual identity and the complex forces of cultural control no longer able to contain such unfulfilled desires. Steiner cites the "prophetic images of subconscious danger" which captivated the imagination of writers like Edgar Allan Poe at a time when "manic compulsions were venting in a critical place beneath the garden surface." Steiner's model of a dynamic between surface brilliance and internal chaos can be applied to the radical disjuncture that falls between the energies of decoration and the implied depths of irrationality in Reynolds' art.

Surely, in Reynolds' willful adoption of a late-nineteenth century, stressed Romantic sensibility and in all his allusions to Promethean appetites, there is both irony and a sense of security. When Reynolds adopts what Nietzsche he described as the Dionysian state which "discharges all its powers of representation, imitation, transfiguration, transmutation, every kind of mimicry and play acting conjointly" he is showing that forms of excessive self-theatricalization have a type of diminished adequacy to our age. (I have always assumed that Reynolds regards a self-conscious body

anachronistic and excessive aesthetic as an appropriate way of responding to our own sense of (in or after) crisis. One aspect of this crisis may be said to concern the following subject: wandering amidst the over-blown rhetoric and burnt-out media (languages that make up contemporary visual culture, surrounded and confusingly mirrored by a world of image saturation and decay).

Ryan's himself puts it in this way: "The desire to the chaotic belittlement of the artist as a sporting (Boo-Quixote figure, a silhouette against an "empty flaring sunset", and ready to turn any reality no matter how banal into a "planned and painted illusion" as Nabokov would have it, Arnold Kiefer also portrays the artist as a cousin of the doomed hero of self-importance, as an unlikely, slightly ludicrous figure. He is shown in a flag, a gawping yolk-man equipped with palette and wings. And if this carries a little absurd, according to Platonov, ultimately Cavalleri/Quixote emerges from parody to become "paragon"."

Alan Watts

1957/58



1. George Dickson, "The Uncertain", *Anthropology Today: some reflections on the condition of history*, London, 1970, p. 26.

2. Vladimir Nabokov, *Invitation to a Beheading and The Great Gatsby*, trans. Dmitri Nabokov, Harmondsworth, 1961, pp. 84, 85, 86.

3. John Berger quoted in Alan Watts, "The Beloved of the Gods and The Fall of the Medusa: Two Paintings by Arnold Kiefer", *Two Decades of Art*, London, 1970, unpaginated.

4. Alan Watts, "Zen and Signification in the Poetry of Alan Kiefer", *Intention & Symbol*, 1970, pp. 11-12.

5. From the artist's self-commentary (as quoted) cited by the author, *Intention*, 1970; all other statements are from the same source.

6. George Dickson p. 23.

7. Vladimir Nabokov, p. 77.

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... that hunt for ideas
which is, sometimes, like
picking up dead birds.
- Harold Kroger.

