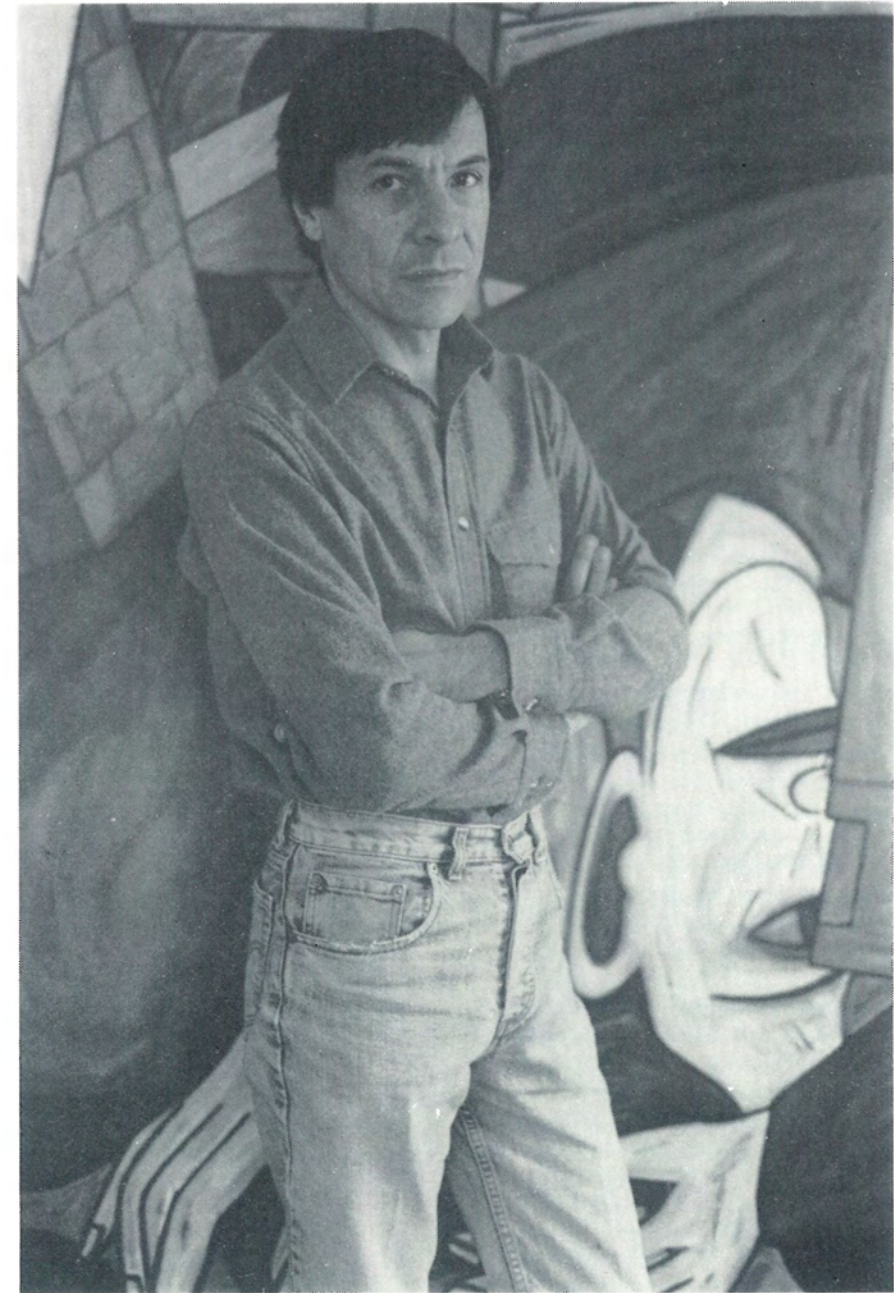


**EUAN HENG**  
SELECTED WORKS  
1977 – 1987

Latrobe Valley Arts Centre  
138 Commercial Road, Morwell  
25th June – 19th July, 1987



Photograph by Rosemary Adam

# EUAN HENG

SELECTED WORKS  
1977 - 1987

## FOREWORD

Euan Heng has been living and working in the Latrobe Valley for the past five years. He came here in 1982 to take up a lecturing position at the School of Visual Arts at the Gippsland Institute of Advanced Education.

Since moving here one of the main sources for his work has been the industrial landscape. Although Euan Heng sees his work within a regional context, like most other professional artists working in the Latrobe Valley his exposure has mainly been in the metropolitan centre of Melbourne and overseas.

It is opportune that the Latrobe Valley Arts Centre is able to mount a major exhibition of his work, selected from the period 1977–1987 to mark his tenth anniversary in Australia.

For making this project possible, I would like to thank the artist for his help and understanding. I would like to thank Chris Coventry for writing the essay, Greg Simmons for designing the catalogue and finally the collectors who have generously lent their paintings, prints and drawings.

Prue McColl  
Director  
L.V.A.C.

### THE STYLE IS THE MAN

The Chinese artist Kuo Jo-hsu wrote an essay in 1074 AD, *The Style is the Man*, in which he listed the ancient traditional Six Techniques of Painting.

“First, creating a vital tone and atmosphere; second, building structure by brushwork; third, depicting the forms of things as they are; fourth, appropriate colouring; fifth, composition, sixth, transcribing and copying.”

Above all the first, ‘Tone and Atmosphere’, he considered to be the most vital ingredient, and it was he thought born within the artist, unteachable and unlearnable; though he did not believe this to be mystical or magical, it was the “stamp of the mind”: “In all things that we say or do or think, or feel, our mind leaves its mark. So much more is this true of painting which comes from the feelings and thoughts of an artist and is recorded on silk or paper”.

This vital element in painting constantly appears in universal painting theory under various seemingly inadequate labels, always with the alibi that it is untranslatable: *stimmung*, atmosphere, soul, mood, feeling spirit, tone, etc. Like the Chinese, almost everyone implies that here lies the essence of painting and it comes from within the artist:

the artist’s soul, a gift from gods or fairies. Shrouded in mystery and disguised by myth, it remains the stuff of magic; even now the analogy between painting and alchemy has become a cliché. It is most likely that the spectacular resurrection of painting in the 1980’s was caused by the born-again desire of society for belief, magic, and myth.

Nowhere is the temptation to write a romance instead of a study – historical, theoretical, or critical – so compelling as it is in painting; and it usually comes down to romancing the artist, based on speculation about the artist’s personality. This has always been the most popular view of painting (even before the invention of psycho-analysis), with the attendant belief that painting is the product of abnormal behaviour, even neurosis.

“Everything great in the world comes from neurotics. They have composed our masterpieces. We enjoy lovely music, beautiful paintings, a thousand delicacies, but we have no idea of their cost to those who invented them in sleepless nights, spasmodic laughter, rashes, asthmas, epilepsies, and fear of death, which is worse than all the rest”.

(Marcel Proust, *Remembrance of Things Past*.)

The work of Euan Heng seemingly invites a study-by-artist analysis because it is largely concerned with autobiographical themes: he is an artist whose personal vision and personal life infuses his work. The artist here often portrays himself with the effect of a Freudian dream-image, presenting us with a persona, as if it were a means of publicly defining his psychological identity. One of Heng’s masters, Max Beckmann, said in a 1938 lecture, “I am immersed in the phenomenon of the individual ... What are you? What am I? These questions constantly persecute and torment me and perhaps also play a part in my art”.

Myths of madness and magic are based on critical inadequacy, but we are compelled to try because we are involved with our most intellectual sense, sight, which always demands an explanation. However, when writers speculate about art and artists, in search of the ‘true’ meanings of art, they frequently feel they have to justify what the artist does in terms that are not artistic, by harnessing art to other intellectual activities, to give it merit, seriousness, and authenticity. Thus most artists have been convinced that it is certain that writers will never get to the point.

The real problem with most of these views is that they fail to solicit us to look at the paintings, they blind us with ideas that explain but do not activate our imagination because they do not connect with our mind’s-eye, or correlate with the way our mind sorts and structures perception, what we see: the mind’s internal representations. The fact is, almost no one looks at paintings; we are glimpsers and it takes a lot of looking to understand a painting; it requires something of the same stuff that it took to make it; the will to imagination.

Fundamentally the viewer needs to understand something of the ‘normal’ process of thinking in painting. It is true that anxiety plays its part; not the angst of a psychotic personality pouring out the romantic, subjective, unconsciously structured art of myth, but the anxiety of the artist under pressure to invent his or her art. It did not interest Picasso that Cézanne painted apples and hills; what interested him was Cézanne’s anxiety to get it right.

It is a particular feature of Modernism that its heroes are portrayed as angst – ridden by their drive to make new art, with the romantic notion of reinventing painting. Euan Heng suffers from this dilemma, which is basically

metaphysical insecurity caused by the constant strain between the rational self and the instinctual self. The dilemma is what-to-paint and how-to-paint.

The style of Heng’s paintings is connected to Post-Impressionism, that is to say, he is influenced by the masters of that school and adheres to some of its theory, the liturgy of “a flat surface covered with colours arranged in a certain way”. Most likely the connection is through the hybrids of that school in Britain with its queer relationship with academic drawing. Heng’s painting has absorbed the off-spring of Post-Impressionism, Fauvism, Synthetic Cubism, and Expressionism, and their prime influence, universal primitivism.

All these modes feature the elements of flat decorativeness, but that includes devices for representing volume: marks, patterning and, above all, colour. It is the marriage of colour and drawing, giving them both equal opportunity for expression and representation, that so differentiates this mode of painting from academicism with its insistence on the primacy of drawing.

The reason colour and drawing are so successfully married in these paintings lies in the post-impressionist procedure of drawing with colour, using pastels, a difficult medium that few can claim to have mastered. Heng can, and it is because he knows the secret is tone.

Tone is often neglected in colourist painting, for the sake of colour, in the mistaken attempt to let the purity of the colour do the work; to negate the effect of tonality that makes illusions of volume, space, and texture in the effort to overthrow the dominance of drawing, by attempting to divorce tone from colour.

Heng’s command of tone informs all his work. His ability to compose with tone over a wide range of the light-dark scale in colour suggests that influence of British Post-Impressionism; his “rigorous Tonksian” schooling in drawing would have enhanced this ability, but it is likely much of the skill was acquired through design training. This supposition explains the graphic strength of all these pictures, that is to say, how well designed they are. The composition, the orchestration of the colour, the placement of the shapes, the measurement of space, all are cemented by the arrangement of tones.

In the prints, the black and white media, tone is taken for granted, but even here the ability

## EUAN HENG

to use and control the full tonal scale is rare. Heng is a master of tone, technically and expressively. He is, too, a master printer, attaining the deepest blacks through to the whitest lights by his ability to draw, the touch, that effects the cutting and the inking; but in the end the real impact of the prints comes from design, where the tones are placed for the contrast of quantities of black and white.

The drawing of Euan Heng may seem to be dictated by style, with its heavy mannerisms of design that comes close to mere decoration and often borders on cartooning. The work is undeniably funny; it is comedy, and these are enjoyable pictures, because they are beautiful and humorous. But they are also serious pictures, because of their mastery of means. And it is in the drawing you will find answers about the content and meaning of Euan Heng's work.

The drawing is obviously connected to the schools of primitivism, but within that grammar and vocabulary that was often corrupted by formalist doctrine, Heng has continually struggled to find real meaning. In this, the most fundamental of all drawing modes, he has sought to express and represent ideas about his world. It is a universal language, where representation is based on the cognitive inclination in our perception of appearances: our mind's-eye thinks to work out and remember how things look by representational codes, by simplifying and idealising, schematising and exaggerating form. It is a language of exaggerated likeness. So the highly stylised pictorial manner of Heng's work is concerned with defining form identity. Faces (often his own) are reinvented and pushed to extremes of simplification, as a new code of physiognomic identification, to solve the purely perceptual and psychological problems inherent in likeness making. It is a kind of drawing about drawing: a style that reflects on the nature of representation itself.

It is the extreme self-consciousness about style that makes this art so risky, and therefore (reflected in changes of style) anxious to avoid the big put-down of being called merely decorative. The drawing code must have meaning, and that comes from accuracy, that is, when it hits the spot in your mind's-eye you recognise the code, not from verisimilitude, but the essential form, which comes from the continual effort to blur and obscure, edit and simplify details by limiting or containing the multiplicity of possible readings to get the

intended meaning across. When style corresponds to likeness, the vocabulary of over-sized eyes, magnified brows and thrusting jaws has the purpose of representing the identity of form, which is about ideas and feelings rather than mere mannered style.

"Drawing honestly does not mean affirming a thing which is true in nature, but, instead, using pictorial idioms which do not disguise one's thoughts."

(Gauguin)

Euan Heng, like many artists who perfect their means, is always in danger of 'spoiling' his art by confusing his goals (a common mode of our society). Looking at the anxious, ambitious development of his work, we might rightly despair over, even resent, the possibility that he might kill the best aspect of his art. There is an apparent struggle between the concepts of theatre and medium in painting; he has flirted with undermining the essence of his art, which is theatre, in the effort to assert painting.

Within the discipline of his theatre of design, in all Heng's work, it is the sense of song that fills the 'tone and atmosphere' of the pictures. The Char Man may be taken as Heng's archetypal character (himself), the worker, not grimy from work, nor is the work place (the studio), the factory; it is church-like, clean, artificial, and theatrical. The comic hero remains the same, as the paintings move from narrative to icon: they are visual songs, from ballads and ditties to anthems and hymns. The Char Man sings a song of secular liturgy that looks like gladness and triumph. These nostalgic songs might be from Tin Pan Alley, Looney Tunes, or Kurt Weill, like rock and roll, but hopefully Mack-the-Knife gets to murder Mickey Mouse (and Augustus John).

Finally, though, Heng might echo Brecht:

"I can compete with the ultra-modernists in hunting for new forms and experimenting with my feelings, but I keep realizing that the essence of art is simplicity, grandeur, and sensitivity, and that the essence of its form is coolness."

Christopher Coventry  
Melbourne,  
May 1987.

- 1945 Born Oban, Scotland
- 1960-69 Merchant Seaman and various other occupations.
- 1970-75 Diploma and Post Diploma study at Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art, Dundee, Scotland.
- 1977 Arrived Australia.

### Solo Exhibitions:

- 1974 Prints, Stirling Gallery, Stirling, U.K.
- 1976 Paintings, Prints, Stirling Gallery, U.K.
- 1979 Paintings, Prints, and Drawings, Arts Council Gallery, Canberra, A.C.T.
- 1980 Paintings, Prints, and Drawings, Editions Gallery, Melbourne, Victoria.
- 1984 Paintings, Prints, Australian Galleries, Melbourne, Victoria.
- 1985 Paintings, Drawings, Australian Galleries, Melbourne, Victoria.
- 1986 Paintings and Drawings, Switchback Gallery, Gippsland Institute of Advanced Education.
- 1986 Six Paintings on loan, Coal Corporation of Victoria, Traralgon, Victoria.
- 1987 Euan Heng 1977-1987, Paintings, Prints, and Drawings, Larrobe Valley Arts Centre, Morwell, Victoria.

### Shared Exhibitions:

- 1980/81 Works on Paper (with Arthur Wicks), Uberumberka Gallery, Armidale College of Advanced Education, Orange Civic Centre Gallery, Mitchell College of Advanced Education, Bathurst, and Tamworth Regional Gallery, Tamworth, N.S.W.

### Group Exhibitions:

- 1973 International Print Exchange, Compass Gallery, Scotland, Montpellier Ecole Des Beaux Arts, Illinois State University, and Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art.

- 1974 Scottish Young Contemporaries, McLellan Galleries, Glasgow.
- 1975 "Trees", Stirling Gallery, Stirling, U.K.
- 1976 Pernod Scottish Art, Art Centre, Edinburgh.
- 1977 Ten Years, Dundee Young Painters, Dundee Museum and Art Gallery, Dundee.
- 1983 Seven Painters Different View Points, University of Melbourne Art Gallery.
- 1983 International Print Exhibit: 1983, Republic of Cina Taipei City Museum, Taiwan, China.
- 1984 Contemporary Australian Printmakers, Queensland College of Art Gallery, Brisbane.
- 1984 Contemporary Australian Printmakers, Harbourfront Gallery, Toronto, Canada, Pratt Graphic Centre, New York, U.S.A.
- 1984 Australian Printmakers (Victoria) - Aichi Prefectural Museum of Fine Arts, Toyohashi City Museum of Fine Arts, Ogisu Memorial Museum of Inazawa City, Japan.
- 1985/86 The Relief Print: Dundee Art Gallery and Museum, Dundee, Scottish Arts Council Exhibition touring the U.K.
- 1985/86 Australian Print 85: Memphis Brooks Museum, Memphis in May Festival and touring the U.S.A.

### AWARDS, PRIZES, SCHOLARSHIPS, COMMISSIONS:

- 1973 Pat Homes Memorial Prize (Drawing)
- 1973 B.M.K. Travelling Award (Paris)
- 1974 G.T.V. Prize (Printmaking)
- 1976 A Pernod Prize (Painting)
- 1976 Scottish Arts Council short term bursary for study at Kirktower House Print Workshop, Montrose.
- 1984 Commissioned Member Print, Print Council of Australia.

## COLLECTIONS:

Australian National Gallery, Canberra  
Bendigo Art Gallery, Victoria  
Latrobe Valley Arts Centre, Victoria  
Mornington Peninsula Arts Centre, Victoria  
Box Hill Municipal Collection, Victoria  
Bathurst Art Gallery, N.S.W.  
Wagga Wagga Regional Gallery, N.S.W.  
Naracorte Art Gallery, S.A.  
Print Council of Australia, Melbourne.  
Art Bank  
Parliament House Construction Authority,  
A.C.T.  
Hamilton Collection, Victorian Education  
Department  
Griffith University, Queensland.  
Riverina College of Advanced Education,  
N.S.W.  
Gippsland Institute of Advanced Education,  
Victoria  
Box Hill College of TAFE, Victoria  
Kings Park High School, Melbourne  
Latrobe Valley Schools Art Foundation,  
Victoria  
Scottish Arts Council Collection.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

Wood, Lillian, *Directory of Australian  
Printmakers*, Lansdowne Press, 1982.  
Clarke, Betty, *Seven Painters: Different View  
Points*, University of Melbourne, June, 1983,  
(catalogue).  
Thorpe, David, *Euan Heng, Australian  
Galleries*, Melbourne, 1984, (catalogue intro.).  
Gallery Commentary, *Art and Australia*,  
Winter, 1986, Vol.23, No.4.  
Rooney, Robert, *Realism All But Forgotten*,  
*Weekend Australian*, June, 1983.  
Carmichael, Rod, *The Look of Real Things*,  
Melbourne, *The Sun*, June, 1983.



"Ferryman", 1981/82

## CATALOGUE

Measurements in centimetres. Height  
before width.

### PAINTINGS – OIL ON CANVAS

1. Connoisseur, 1977  
66 x 51  
Coll. Ly & Graeme Smith
2. Mad Dogs and Englishmen, 1977/78  
70 x 70  
Coll. Jean & Ron Haste.
3. Explorer, 1979/80  
100 x 92  
Coll. Ly & Graeme Smith
4. Irish Queen, 1980  
77 x 77  
Coll. Ly & Graeme Smith
5. Glimpses, 1980  
102 x 62  
Coll. Bebe & Bruce Jarrat
6. Glimpses II, 1980  
82 x 52  
Coll. Ly & Graeme Smith
7. Jamboree, 1981/82  
76 x 76  
Coll. Bernadette & Sid Palazzi
8. Ferryman, 1981/82  
122 x 122  
Coll. Stuart Purves
9. Glass Factory, 1982  
152.5 x 152.5  
Australian Galleries
10. Babel (Morwell Version), 1983  
167 x 66  
Coll. Catherine Heng
11. Char Man, 1983  
122 x 122  
Coll. The Artist
12. Prelude to the Dance, 1984  
183 x 11  
Coll. Jan & Rod Forbes
13. Eric's Girl, 1984  
122 x 122  
Coll. Jackie Nichols & Geoff Dupree
14. Jeeralang Still Life, 1985  
152.5 x 152.5  
Coll. The Artist
15. Jeeralang Still Life II, 1985  
197 x 91  
Coll. L.V.A.C.
16. Worker, 1986/87  
122 x 122  
Coll. The Artist
17. Char Fall, 1987  
152.5 x 152.5  
Coll. The Artist
18. March Friday Falling, 1987  
213 x 152.5  
Coll. The Artist
19. Only Strangers Travel, 1987  
183 x 152.5  
Coll. The Artist

### WORKS ON PAPER

20. Glimpses (Study), 1979  
45 x 31. Conte on paper  
Coll. Bebe & Bruce Jarrat
21. Bandage Mountain Sunrise, 1979  
36 x 35. Pastel on paper  
Coll. Audrey Heng
22. Mocking Bird (Study), 1981  
49 x 28. Conte on paper  
Coll. Ly & Graeme Smith
23. Glass Factory (Study), 1982  
50 x 49. Pastel on paper  
Coll. The Artist
24. Char Girl (Study), 1984  
76 x 76. Pastel on paper  
Coll. Stuart Purves
25. Jeeralang Still Life (Study), 1985  
76 x 76. Pastel on paper  
Coll. The Artist
26. Jeeralang Still Life II (Study), 1985  
76 x 76. Pastel on paper  
Coll. The Artist
28. Char Fall III (Study), 1986  
77 x 77. Oil Pastel on paper  
Coll. Sally Smart & Chris Coventry
29. March Friday Falling (Study), 1986  
92 x 77. Oil Pastel on paper  
Coll. The Artist
30. Only Strangers Travel (Study), 1986  
92 x 77. Oil Pastel on paper  
Coll. The Artist
31. Harvest (Study), 1987  
76 x 56. Oil on paper  
Coll. The Artist
32. Shelter (Study), 1987  
76 x 56. Oil on paper  
Coll. The Artist

PRINTS – Unless stated all works printed by artist. All prints in the collection of Catherine Heng.

Etching & Aquatints

- 33. Serenade, 1979  
32.2 x 8.3  
Ed. 10
- 34. In Your Own Backyard, 1979  
53 x 27  
Ed. 10
- 35. Two in the Bush, 1979  
45 x 24  
Ed. 10
- 36. Explorer, 1980  
36 x 25 (Shaped Plate)  
Ed. 10
- 37. Bandage Mountain Hat Trick, 1980  
35 x 16 (Shaped Plate)  
Ed. 10
- 38. Head Piece, 1980  
45 x 27. (Shaped Plate)  
Ed. 10
- 39. Char Cow, 1982  
30 x 30. (3 plates)  
Ed. 2 Proofs  
Printer. Dianne Fogwell



"Jamboree", 1981/82

LITHOGRAPHS

- 40. Dog, 1982  
24.3 x 16.2  
Ed. 10  
Printer. Kaye Green

LINO CUTS

- 41. Char Cow, 1982  
56 x 27.2  
Ed. 3 Proofs
- 42. Eric's Girl, 1983  
30 x 30  
Ed. 35
- 43. Prelude to the Dance, 1983  
60.2 x 44  
Ed. 50
- 44. Isis, 1983  
37.3 x 28  
Ed. 20
- 45. Lovers, 1984  
40.3 x 40.3  
Ed. 20
- 46. Head, 1985  
30 x 30  
Ed. 20

Front Cover: "Connoisseur", 1977  
Back Cover: "March Friday Falling", 1987