EUAN HENG

PAINTINGS AND LINOCUTS

1993–1995

MELBOURNE July–August 1995

Gary Catalano

AUSTRALIAN GALLERIES
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Front cover
4 Hombre: The Last Great Western  1994  oil on linen  121 x 152 cm

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7 Dwelling  1994  oil on linen  40 x 40 cm
When Euan Heng talks about the various stages his paintings have gone through and traces the way in which their elements have been shifted to and fro, he often singles out one of those elements and refers to it as a foil. By and large, a foil is something he has introduced late in the piece in order to fill a compositional hole and thereby lock the rest of the painting in place.

As Heng likes to invest everything he paints with a maximum clarity, it is easy to be drawn in by these foils and give them much more prominence than they may deserve. Indeed, it is almost inevitable that we should construct narratives around them and view them as signposts which point unerringly to the true meaning of the work.

In our sense, this is what Heng intends. As his use of the term would suggest, his foils are meant to work like foils or red herrings: when they manage to send us off in one direction in pursuit of meaning, they leave him free to go in another direction in the same pursuit, un molested and unhindered.

Heng's conception of how meaning is embodied in a work of art owes much to the old (and at times somewhat neglected) distinction between subject matter and content. He frequently makes just this distinction in conversation and habitually describes content as something that an artist wins from, or finds in, his subject matter. Unlike subject matter, the content of a work can never be determined before its creation.

In view of all this, it is hardly surprising that Heng does not care to specify what content his works may have. When questioned directly on this matter, he offers only the most tentative suggestions and says that they could be about the experience of leaving one's country and of crossing a border to somewhere else. But then he smiles and says that leaving one's country is much like leaving one's youth.

Heng's country is Scotland — or, more particularly, its south-western corner centred on the Clyde Valley and the industrial and mining towns of Lanarkshire. Although he doesn't profess to be a walking encyclopedia on the subject, whenever he talks about Lanarkshire he does so in such a way that its history — especially its industrial history — comes vividly alive. The ghosts of Richard Arkwright and Robert Owen pass before one's eyes.

But artists also choose the country from which they derive. In most cases this actually turns out to be a succession of countries, for as an artist's interests change so do his or her allegiances. Their passports, so to speak, have something new on every page.

I doubt whether this can be said of Heng, whose work hasn't undergone any radical change since about 1982. In that year he produced Char Man and thereby forged his affiliations with the world of early twentieth-century Parisian modernism. That world, as remote as it is dazzling, could be said to be his country. For all his love of such British artists as L. S. Lowry (of whom there are clear traces in such
developed appreciation of the comic potentialities of human vanity.

His paintings indicate as much, for they are particularly alert to the things people do in order to make a good impression on others. Unlike many figurative artists, who see nothing remarkable in the fact that people wear clothes, Heng always makes sure that the suits and ties his figures wear are expressively significant.

These articles of clothing initially hide the artist and the daring of his figure drawing. It is only after you have been looking at his figures for some time that you begin to understand how sharply they depart from appearances.

I think these liberties are crucial to the expressive effect of Heng's paintings. Because of their porcelain comeliness, their subtly exaggerated facial features and, perhaps most importantly, their oddly proportioned limbs, Heng's figures are felt to be alien to things like mantelpieces. If only by implication, the dramas in which they are engaged are dramas over which they have no control.

Heng takes infinite pains over each painting and will go to any lengths in order to ensure that it is right. When he comes to tune it to the pitch he wants it to possess, no adjustment is too small or inconsequential. He wants everything to be perfect and to sound exactly the right note.

Heng says that sometimes relatively minor changes will have quite dramatic consequences for the painting as a whole. As an illustration of this, he points to the rope in Topple Tumble, which originally ran from one hand to the other in a straight line and then stopped directly before the figure's groin. The more Heng looked at this particular configuration, the more he realised that he did not want the rope to be in any way phallic.

But when he moved the rope to its current location, he found that he not only got rid of these unwanted associations, for something else had also entered the painting. In introducing a loop into the course of the rope, he also introduced an element that echoed the larger circular movement within the painting. Along with the foil-like hat, the trim of which chimes with the vertical of the telegraph pole, the loop improved the work immeasurably and made it into a much more unified composition.

Heng is quite emphatic about what is being depicted in Topple Tumble and insists that the figure is not involved in a tug-of-war with an unseen opponent. Yet there is, at least in his eyes, something hovering just beyond the frame of the painting, though he won't state unequivocally what that is and simply suggests that it could be art. And art, he has long suspected, may well be futile.

It is reasonable to assume that a measure of Heng's ambivalence about art has leaked into Hats off for Jack, a painting with some autobiographical significance in that it pays homage to a Scottish painter who influenced him during his student years at Duncan. Heng has another reason to be grateful to Jack Knox, for it was he who first encouraged him to look closely at Léger.

Of course, it is Léger who is implicated in Homme: The Last Great Western, though not quite in the way that one would think. It's true that the background is reminiscent of Léger; and it's also true that the bull is rendered in a manner which conjures up associations with his style. But what of the expansively posturing figure astride the bull? As some viewers will no doubt know, it derives not from Léger but from an 1854 painting by Courbet, in which he depicts himself meeting his patron on a walk through the countryside.

On one of its levels of meaning, Homme: The Last Great Western is a kind of joke at Léger's expense. While it enables Heng to acknowledge that he is subservient to Léger — is mastered by him, so to speak — it also enables him to suggest that the Frenchman is in turn mastered by another (and somewhat tougher) homme. Like countless other people, Heng has come to the conclusion that Picasso is the last great western artist.

Heng's work has always been notable for its rigour and its control. Much of the art that possesses these qualities proves to be rather frigid or sterile, but such is not the case where his concerns are for all their knowingsness when it comes to matters of style, his paintings are quite clearly the product of a genuinely strange and aberrant imagination.
2. (El) Rover 1994 oil on linen 102 x 102 cm

1. Topple Tumble 1994 oil on linen 102 x 102 cm
8  Hats off for Jack 1994 oil on linen 46 x 46 cm

12

5  Cairn 1994 oil on linen 91 x 96 cm

13
4  Estuary  1994  oil on linen  68 x 84 cm

6  Where the Mountain meets the Sea  1994  oil on linen  97 x 91 cm
9  Colony 1995  oil on linen  86 x 66 cm

17  Youth 1995
drawing
image size 17 x 14 cm (irregular)

17  Youth 1995
drawing
image size 17 x 14 cm (irregular)

Edition: 20, black ink
Guaranteed: 300 gsm. 22 x 15 cm
Signed: Sam Heng (pencil) I.I.
Inscribed: edition 1/20 to 20/20 (pencil) I.I.
3 artist’s proofs, as in edition
Inscribed: A/P (III) to BHB (pencil) I.I.
Printed by Sam Heng
Profile 1995
Ink
Image size: 23.5 x 20.5 cm (irregular)

Adiice: 15, black ink
Guarino Biblo 300 gsm 28 x 25 cm
Signed: Euan Ueng (pencil) LR
Inscribed: edition 11/15 (pencil) LL
3 artist's proofs, as in edition
Inscribed: A/P III to III/III (pencil) LL
Printed by Euan Ueng

Head 1994
Ink
Image size: 17 x 20 cm (irregular)

Adiice: 20, black ink
Guarino Biblo 300 gsm 24 x 23 cm
Signed: Euan Ueng (pencil) LR
Inscribed: edition 10/20 (pencil) LL
3 artist's proofs, as in edition
Inscribed: A/P III to III/III (pencil) LL
Printed by Euan Ueng
Cannibal 1994
linocut
image size: 34 x 21 cm (irregular)

edition: 15, black ink
Guano Bichos 300 gsm 43 x 28 cm
Signed Evan Heng (pencil) LR
inscribed, edition 1/15 to 15/15 (pencil) LL
3 artist’s proofs, as in edition
inscribed AP III to III (pencil) LL
printed by Evan Heng

Fool 1994
linocut
image size: 36 x 22 cm (irregular)

edition: 15, black ink
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3 artist’s proofs, as in edition
inscribed AP III to III (pencil) LL
printed by Evan Heng
19 Decoy 1995
linocut
image size 42 x 23 cm (irregular)
edition: 20, black ink
Owens Bibas 300 gsm  48 x 28 cm
Signed Euan Heng (pencil) L.r.
inscribed, edition 1/20 to 20/20 (pencil) L.l.
3 artist's proofs, as in edition
inscribed A/P IV to V/V (pencil) L.l.
pinned by Euan Heng

11 Ornithologist 1993
linocut
image size 51 x 34 cm (irregular)
edition: 30, black ink
Owens Bibas 300 gsm  56 x 42 cm
Signed Euan Heng (pencil) L.r.
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5 artist's proofs, as in edition
inscribed A/P IV to V/V (pencil) L.l.
pinned by Euan Heng
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licorice
image size 36 x 28 cm (irregular)
edition: 20, black ink
Guarro Bihlo 300 gsm 41 x 33 cm
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3 artist's proofs, as in edition
inscribed A/P I/III to II/III (pencil) LL.
printed by Euan Hong

21 Champion 1995
licorice
image size 28 x 24 cm (irregular)
edition: 20, black ink
Guarro Bihlo 300 gsm 32 x 27 cm
Signed Euan Hong (pencil) L.r.
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3 artist's proofs, as in edition
inscribed A/P I/III to II/III (pencil) LL.
printed by Euan Hong
BIOGRAPHY
1945 Born Chan, Scotland
1960-70 Various occupations, including four years as merchant seaman travelling worldwide
1974 Diploma of Art, Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art, Dundee
1975 Post Diploma, FJCA, Dundee
1995 Master of Arts, RMIT, Melbourne. Other activities of the artist include teaching. Currently Senior Lecturer in Printmaking, Gippsland School of Art, Monash University

SOLO EXHIBITIONS
1974, 76 Stirling Gallery, Stirling, Scotland
1979 Arts Council Gallery, Canberra
1980 Editions Gallery, Melbourne
1984, 85 Australian Galleries, Melbourne
90, 92, 95
1987 Latrobe Valley Arts Centre, Morwell
1988, 89 70 Arden Street Gallery, Melbourne
1991 Cycle Paintings and Works on Paper, Latrobe Valley Arts Centre, Morwell
1992 Australian Galleries, Sydney
Greenhill Galleries, Perth
1995 McCullough Art Gallery, Melbourne

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS
1973 International Print Exchange, Compass Gallery, Scotland, Monpellerie Ecalde des Beaux Arts, Illinois State University, and Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art
1974 Scottish Young Contemporaries, McLean Galleries, Glasgow
1975 Trees, Stirling Gallery, Stirling, Scotland
1976 Period 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, Melbourne
1983 International Print Exhibit, Taipei Fine Arts Museum, Taiwan
1984 Contemporary Australian Printmakers, Queensland College of Art Gallery, Brisbane
1984 Contemporary Australian Printmakers, Harbourfront Gallery, Toronto, Canada, Pratt Graphic Centre, New York, USA
1984 Australian Printmakers (Victoria), Aichi Prefectural Museum of Fine Arts, Osaka Memorial Museum of Inazumi City, Japan
1985/86 The Relief Print, Dundee Art Gallery and Museum, Dundee, Scottish Arts Council Exhibition touring Scotland
1985/86 Australian Print 85, Memphis Brooks Museum and touring the USA
1988 The October Show, LVAC, Morwell
1988 100 x 100, Print Council of Australia Bicentennial Touring Exhibition
1990 Contemporary Gippsland Artists, LVAC, Morwell, and touring Australia
1990 Modern and Contemporary Australian Watercolours and Gouaches, John Bockley Fine Art, Melbourne
1991 Indo-Eco, Latrobe Valley Arts Centre (LVAC) Morwell, Sale Regional Gallery, Sale, Linden Gallery, Melbourne
1991 At-Tension To The Line (contemporary Australian Inscription), Greenhill Galleries, Perth
1992 Recently Seen, McCullough Art Gallery, Melbourne
1993 Eucalbar, Geelong Art Gallery, Geelong
1994 Margaret Street Endowment, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
1994 Mixed Impressions, Ivan Dougherty Gallery, University of NSW, Sydney

AWARDS/COMMISSIONS
1971 Pat Homes Memorial Prize (Drawing)
1973 BMK Travelling Award (Paris)
1974 Post-Graduate Scholarship
1974 GIV Prize (Printmaking)
1978 A Ferrod Prize (Scotland) Painting
1976 Scottish Arts Council Short Term Bursary
1984 Commissioned Member Print Edition, Print Council of Australia
1988 Commissioned Print Edition, 100 x 100 Bicentennial Project, Print Council of Australia
Bensley, Karen and Hansen, David, 'Contemporary Gippsland Artists', Latrobe Valley Arts Centre, Morwell, August 1990

Adam, Rosemary, 'Cycle', Latrobe Valley Arts Centre, Morwell, October 1991

Nelson, Roberts, 'Euan Heng and the Archaeology of the Modern', Inprint, Print Council of Australia, July 1991

Carabag, Gary, 'Euan Heng', Australian Galleries, Melbourne, 1995

Catalogue/merchandise:

Clarke, Barry, 'Seven Painters: Different View Points', University of Melbourne, June 1983

International Print Exhibition', Taipei Fine Arts Museum, Taiwan, 1983

'The October Show', Latrobe Valley Arts Centre, Morwell, 1988

Dunbar, Lesley, '100 x 100', Print Council of Australia, 1989

Scherer, Rodney and Hansen, David, 'Indo-Eco', Latrobe Valley Arts Centre, Morwell, April 1991


Carew, Ann, 'Escalator', Geelong Art Gallery, March 1993

Heathcote, Christopher, 'A Fresh Direction', Art Monthly Australia, no. 57, March 1993

Hill, Peter, 'Euan Heng', Asian Art News, vol. 4, no. 4, July/August 1994

Interviews

Hill, Peter, 'Rich Narrative Behind Heng Imagery', Age, September 1990

Carabag, Gary, 'Something Here: An Interview with Euan Heng', Art Monthly Australia, no. 35, November 1992

Reviews

Gage, Edward, 'Art Gallery', The Scotsman, September 1974

Clair, Emilio, 'Pictures and Private Enterprise', Glasgow Herald, September 1974

Ferguson, William, 'Art' Times Educational Supplement, Scotland, October 1974

Clough, Juliet, 'Art', Times Educational Supplement, Scotland, December 1975

Ferguson, William, 'Perpetual Winners on Show', Times Educational Supplement, Scotland, 1976

Rooney, Robert, 'Realism: All But Forgotten', Weekend Australian, June 1983

Carmichael, Rod, 'The Look of Real Things', Sun, Melbourne, June 1983

Baron, Soria, 'Print and Print Artists Compared', Canberra Times, 1984

Heyes, Jeanie, 'Individual Look at Industry', Latrobe Valley Express, July 1987

Rooney, Robert, 'Once an Englishman', Weekend Australian, April 1988

Carabag, Gary, 'When Construction is the Key', Age, April 1988

Carabag, Gary, 'Heng's Deep Emotional Resonances', Age, September 1989

Carabag, Gary 'Blake Questions Today's Artists', Age, December 1989

Heathcote, Christopher, 'Lucid, Stirring Pictures that Linger in the Mind', Age, June 1992

Duth, Louise, 'Hard Questions' Artlink, vol. 12, no. 2, 1992

Watson, Bonny, 'Surrealists with Attitude', Sydney Morning Herald, 28 June 1992

France, Christine, 'Dark Expressions of Self-Alteration', Weekend Australian, August 1992

Brumfield, David, 'Un中俄', West Australian, 26 September 1992

Heathcote, Christopher, 'Unassuming Pictures from an Alcove at an Imaginary Exhibition', Age, 30 September 1992

Heathcote, Christopher, 'Imagined Worlds provide the Inspiration for a New Movement', Age, 9 December 1992

Heathcote, Christopher, 'Lightheather Paintings and Sculpture get Year into Gear', Age, Melbourne, 3 February 1993
# LIST OF WORKS

## PAINTINGS

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All works are illustrated. Painting measurements depth x width (unframed). Linocut measurements depth x width paper size (unframed). Paintings 1–10 signed and dated on reverse. Linocuts 11–22 signed and dated lower right.