IN THIS ISSUE

1  A (semi-)Circular Practice
   an interview with Jan Davis
   Kate Ravenswood

3  Michael Schiltz: Navigating Space
   by Richard Wastell

6  Euan Heng: The Landscape of Art
   an artist's tale
   by Sheridan Palmer

8  Australia in Print
   • Acquisitions 1996 — 97 • Award Results • Exhibitions

15 Wayne Crothers: Dissolving Memory
   by Ralph Kiggell

16 The 1997 Print Council Commissioned Prints

19 Australia in Print (cont’d)

30 Chiang Mai Exchange
   Neil Clarke talks with Bhu Puapansakul

THE 1997 PRINT COUNCIL COMMISSIONED PRINTS

THE PRINT COUNCIL OF AUSTRALIA INC acknowledges the assistance received from the Department of Fine Art, RMIT
EUAN HENG: THE LANDSCAPE OF ART
an artist's tale

Sheridan Palmer

EUAN Heng's recent exhibition of drawings and prints at Australian Galleries in Melbourne revealed the backbone, the immediacy of construction, and the creative dynamics used to produce his unique visual dialogue. His drawings, which are not premeditated, result from the urgency to create an image in order to resolve the emotional quest concerning him. As Heng says, 'the work finishes itself', and with that each drawing unfolds into a story, and the artist's emotional biography is revealed at its completion. The lines are boldly confident, the act of placement being more important than the act of marking making as such. His figurative works on paper are compelling, as much for their technical accomplishment and draughtsmanship as they are for their compositional concepts.

The poignancy and impact that his images create are complex. Heng uses many devices, such as the use of allegory and iconography. Many questions spring to mind, and there are equally as many messages for man, and while you feel that you are getting close to solving the mysteries he sets before you, quite often you are thrown off at a tangent. This is the case in those works where the hare is used, such as in the drawing Cross Current (The Hare's Tale). Here Heng uses a compositional device, that of a mythical beast that has sprung out from the animalism in Indian miniature paintings or the bestial decorations used in medieval illuminated manuscripts or sculpture. This is the toll that Heng likes to use in his work, to throw you off track, to prevent you from following him too closely.

In the large triptych drawing Looking toward India the narrative is foiled by the left-hand image of the dove, but when seen as an appropriated image from Indian art and combined with the dramatics of response, this drawing develops into what

Euan Heng Oskar Welcomed, 1997
conte and charcoal on paper 82 x 76.5 cm

verges on a religious enigma. Or an ode to man's passage of life.

Heng returned to printmaking in 1991 after a long interval and has stated that he responds to the medium not in an exploratory way, but more for the sheer joy of cutting and for the intimacy of the art. Printmaking for Heng, and in particular the linocut, shares a not-dissimilar immediacy with that of drawing, but whereas his drawing is ultimately used as a vehicle towards resolving the pictorial concepts for his paintings, indeed as a faculty for 'studies', printmaking appears more of an autonomous medium for him and as such, provides a different creative response.

Essentially, Heng cannot dissociate the art of printmaking from its origin, the book, and for this reason he applies a stark cleanliness to the line and a graphic simplicity, a pared down directness to the image. Narrative tends to be less predominant for this reason, and so the message in his prints is often more convoluted, paradoxically hidden. This is evident in such linocuts as Normanby Livestock, a little tale about the rural home of Leger's parents, or Over My Shoulder; the latter print has a dual reference to his youth in industrialised Lanarkshire, in Scotland, and to his departure from the Latrobe Valley in Gippsland where he had lived for thirteen years. This location similarly shares an industrialised landscape with that of his childhood in the Clyde Valley. As Robert Nelson wrote of Heng's prints, he is not interested in 'mark making per se', but rather he enjoys creating a minimal image whilst hoping to maximise the impact of the message. His use of cubist and abstract pictorial language is also more keenly applied in his printmaking, and thus we find a purity within the economy of line, particularly in the prints Glasses, and Face.

In this exhibition one can clearly detect a further poetic development which is progressively replacing the austerity and the industrialised dramas or the angst-driven pursuits of the individual.
(components still evident in his drawing *Harvest*). In *Oskar Welcomed*,
the gentleness and affection captured through a gesture of the hand, the
simple but intense relationship and the protectiveness of man towards
his canine friend is beautifully captured and it is well received by
the viewer. This drawing is in fact a true ‘love story’, but with no
sentimental trivan attached. Equally, a
sadness in the eye, a melancholic
gaze can rivet the viewer motionless.
His portraits *Head I* and *Head II* are
very powerful works. The use of
tubular form and chromatic shading,
curvilinear angles and marvellous
areas of black Arp-like abstract
shapes, construct pictorially a purity
of figuration not often seen in
contemporary art practice here in
Australia. These ‘portraits’ perhaps
deal with Heng’s inquiry into his
sense of loss, of having moved away
from somewhere, of universal
displacement.
Heng’s homage to Leger, Picasso,
Stanley Spencer, Samuel Palmer, William
Blake, the German Expressionists and
others is openly traceable, and these
influences are a natural condition of his
European training. It is Heng’s cubist
tendency, his abstractional and sculptural
quality that keeps his art tied to another,
northern world, while into this style he
feeds images of Australia: the open,
vast landscape, where man is more
often than not alone, both physically
and psychologically, and in that
aloneness the struggle with the self
and with humanity tends to assume
magnified proportions.

Within his pictures the impassive
monumentality of his figures
camouflage the emotional charge
given to the narrative, so we are
continually dealing with paradoxes
and permutations. Heng, with his
European heritage offers us in his art
a latitudinal interpretation of man’s
state which is sometimes foiled by
the visual pun, sometimes politicised
by some modernist symbol. But Euan
Heng is not interested in overt
theorems or propaganda; his primary
criteria is to invest his art with poetic
but confrontational images of man
and his position in life as seen
through the landscape of art.

Euan Heng
**NORMANDY LIVESTOCK, 1997**
linocut 26.5 x 20.5 cm

... is a Melbourne writer and curator