

Balancing act at Art House Gallery 2006

A magnificent selection of works on paper are on display at the Art House Gallery, Rushcutters Bay, Sydney from May 3 to 27. The exhibition by Belinda Fox, entitled, *Balancing Act*, incorporates artwork on the same grand scale as her '*Searchlight*' and '*Shadow of a Doubt*' imagery exhibited last year in the same venue¹. The great imposing structures that form her unique printmaking and Indian ink compositions have darkened further, as has the subject matter. Her balance is wavering and within this exhibition one sees the artist tumbling further into the void.

The current frightful state of world affairs is a possible key to her tempestuous images. The balancing act politicians, and individuals play to compose themselves for another day, is imaged in the opposing personal and Buddhist symbology enacted upon these rich paper surfaces. Within '*Tug of War I and II*' the childlike figures are seen battling on a blood drenched field. These figures could just as easily symbolise the current diplomacy between the Australian Prime Minister and his counterpart in Indonesia over the disputed lands of West Papua, the larger world encompassing battles between the US and Afghanistan, Iraq, and now Iran, or more personal disputes.

The works can be split into two segments the backgrounds, or set within which the play is enacted and the actors who like Balinese puppets score points regarding innocence, guilt, and terror. The backgrounds of the works incorporate imagery reminiscent of weathered, possibly bloodied, decaying walls, referencing aged, detailed, and opulent Italian or Chinese wall patterns. Flying Putti from an Andrea Pozzo ceiling, or depictions of Buddha, border a maelstrom of rococo swirls. The imagery hints of a decaying culture and society crumbling before our eyes. Partial depictions of guns are snugly nestled in the seared, stained paper, like a raised scar in a fold of skin.

Birds, and helicopters - symbols both present in Fox's previous works - fly effortlessly across the paper with very different payloads to deliver within '*Gentle Persuasion II*', and '*Arrival*' 2006. Reality is the infinity of all possible worlds. Does one choose; hope/doubt, presence/absence, to cover or reveal. These options and many more are exemplified in the possibilities of the bird. Is the bird the hopeful phoenix? Can we rise with it from the flame of war, and boding shadows of a bleak future? Or is the bird an echo of an Austro-Hungarian eagle? A possible standard bearer for divisive national rhetoric and war? The artist wants the observer to think and decide.

Hopefulness and innocence are also revealed in Belinda Fox's artwork. There are repeated personal references to childhood objects and games like, tug-of-war, tic-tac-toe, space-invaders, toy weaponry, and the childish materials used such as stamps, and textas. The peaceful Buddha figures born of the lotus flower and Bodhi tree, unbounded by European or Middle-Eastern dogma, also inhabit Fox's increasingly more realistic hills. They are also symbols of hope, even though they are presently shrouded.

Fox is a consummate traveller. A review of her first², and all previous solo exhibitions mentions her travels in Asia as inspiration. This year she is on the road for two months on an Australian Art's Council grant to the Tyler Institute in Singapore as an artist in residence. She is excited at the possibility on this journey to view Mt. Kailas in Tibet; a pivotal inspiration in her work. Previously her travels in India, Nepal, Cambodia, Laos, Vietnam, Thailand, Burma, and the US have added new layers of complexity, harmony and meaning to her work.

Belinda Fox graduated from the Victorian College of the Arts in 1996, as a printmaker and six editioned etchings were produced for this exhibition. Last year she gave up her position as a printmaker at Port Jackson Press in Melbourne and became a full time artist. This is her forth solo exhibition.

The artist's process has expanded through the years and the "technical journey" within the process of her work of six years ago, albeit complex and difficult has become increasingly diverse in search of the unique in printmaking. Jeff Makin writes in 2000 that the work is, "initiated by three dimensional copper sculptures, that are subsequently drawn, collaged, enlarged and transferred to copper plates via screen printing, to be finally etched and printed in the traditional manner"³ and Kirsten Rann in 2003 writes of work similar to the current exhibition that it, "employs techniques such as intaglio etching, the dripping of ink, staining, embossing and ancient imbutsu (using lino instead of traditional woodblock to 'acknowledge her present position in time')." ⁴ The major change in the last two years has been in the display of the work. The works placement within alter like installations as overwhelming shrines within exhibitions is a testament to her development as an artist. Also the composition integrity of the pieces has increased and each work sings. Not of the techniques employed, but of works as a whole.

¹ Middlemost, Thomas, *IMPRINT*, Spring 2005, Volume 40, Number 3, p.14.

² Makin, Jeff, *IMPRINT*, Winter 2000 Volume 35 Number 2, p.15.

³ *ibid.*

⁴ Rann, Kirsten, *IMPRINT*, Spring 2003, Volume 38, Number 3, p.20

The artist is represented by Art House Gallery in Sydney, Australian Art Resources, and Axia Modern Art, Melbourne, Beaver Gallery and Impressions Gallery, Canberra, and published by Port Jackson Press. In 2004 she won the prestigious Grand Prize in the Silk Cut Linocut Print award, and was a finalist in the Swan Hill print award, she produced a print council commission in 2002. Fox has curated exhibitions, and worked collaboratively with a great range of artists, and her work now resides in national, state, and regional art galleries in corporate, university, and private collections in Australia and elsewhere including the Charles Sturt University which holds the Nekorwa – SF 2003 intaglio, chine collé, produced while in residence in San Francisco at Crown Point Press.

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