



Martin Sharp, 2006 photo Anthony Browell

The Everlasting World of Martin Sharp

Paintings from 1948 to today

Ivan Dougherty Gallery
The University of New South Wales, College of Fine Arts
16 November – 23 December 2006

Preface

"I VIVIDLY remember Martin Sharp's 1965 Clune gallery exhibition. It was one of the most precious memories I took back with me to London in 1966. A fine art sideshow is the best way I can describe the atmosphere the display created, a unique mixture of sardonic wit, irreverence and cleverness... He is one of those very rare creatures, whose alchemy makes visible the invisible and who bridges spans that no global engineer would undertake... Martin Sharp is one of a handful of international guerrillas bringing light to these dark ages." These extracts from a piece I wrote in Nation Review in June 1977 still hold true, and it is both a great pleasure and a privilege to present, with Annabel Pegus, an exhibition of Martin's painting from his youth through to the present.

The size of Ivan Dougherty Gallery precludes a full scale survey but many of the artist's significant concerns and inspirations, Luna Park, Tiny Tim, Van Gogh, de Chirico, Arthur Stace, David Gulpilil, Hokusai, Ginger Meggs are all present. The generosity of Martin's spirit was epitomised by The Yellow House project in Macleay Street in the early 1970s, and it continues in his rambling home in the eastern suburbs, a living museum bringing alive all of the dreams of Martin's life, as he stands at the easel giving a final touch to *Love Me Tender*. *Reprise of Giorgio de Chirico's Song of Love* 1973-2006, receiving visitors from all over the world and intermittently taking calls. This is no ordinary mortal but one who devotes his energy to areas of most need. *A curiosity in her own country* 2003-6, from an original work by Phil May for The Bulletin in the late nineteenth century, depicts an Aboriginal woman with her baby being observed as an oddity by a group of recent settlers. It is a piquant reminder of how little certain things have changed in this country, and also of Martin's deep commitment to his beliefs.

Whilst planning this exhibition we received great enthusiasm from the many friends of Martin as well as from admirers and collectors of his artwork. Such a response is testament to the passion of devotees to Martin's art. Most of all, this exhibition could not have been possible without the enthusiasm, commitment and dedication of Martin Sharp.

Nick Waterlow and Annabel Pegus



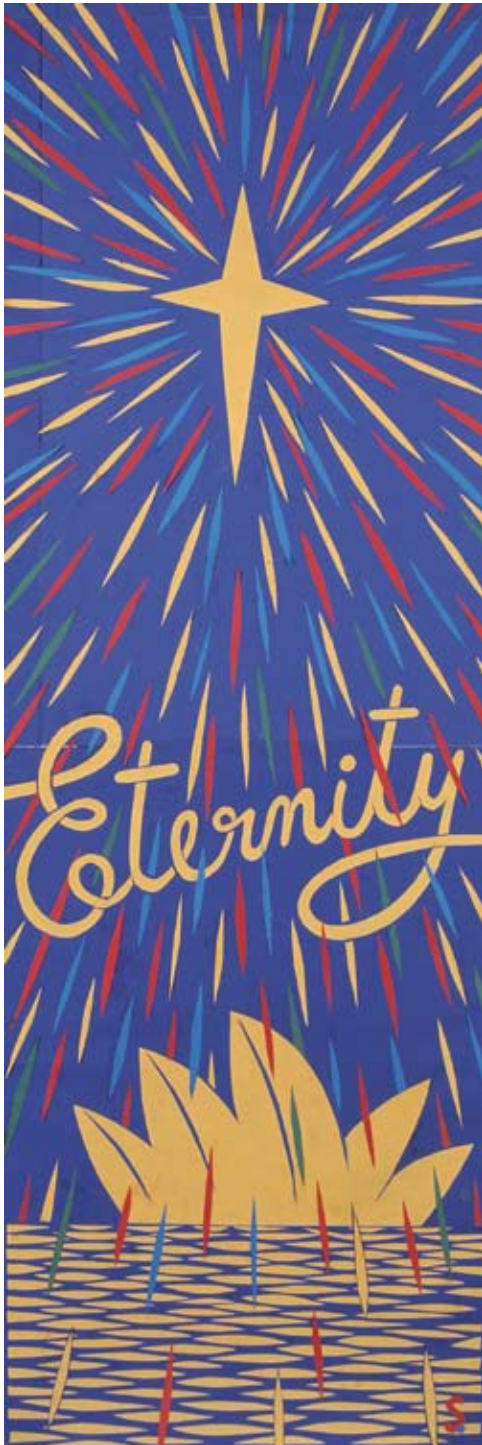
Tiny Tim Christmas Album Record Cover c1995 acrylic on canvas
152 x 152 cm photo Greg Weight

Tiny Tim Christmas Album Record Cover c1995

I painted this in the style of a British 1940s and 50s comic book ... Beano or Tiger Tim's Annual ... for the Christmas album I produced with Tiny.



A curiosity in her own country 2003-6 acrylic on paper mounted on board, 115 x 78 cm
photo Sue Blackburn



Eternity 2001 artwork for banner for Festival of Sydney paper on board, banner 456 x 142 cm photo Greg Weight

A curiosity in his own land

Over forty years ago in OZ magazine I wrote a short foreword to a satirical artwork by Martin Sharp. It landed us both in the dock. Such is the political climate of Australia today, that I approach this foreword with caution.

In 1962, Sharp and a shy fellow student, Garry Shead, bailed me up at a university coffee bar to present their project to blow apart the art establishment. In their hands was the fuse, a few sheets of paper that would reduce the lofty edifice of official culture to rubble. They handed me an improvised explosive device, disguised as a tabloid, the *Arty Wild Oat*, and I flicked through its pages with awe. An insurgency was building.

At various locations, from stately home to grubby office, I began to hang out with Sharp where he would often crouch on all fours dashing off witty socio political cartoons for a variety of publishers, Bob Dylan playing at full blast, spilling Indian ink onto Axminster, ash into fine porcelain and wild oats into wealthy suburbia.

It was only when I attended a throbbing opening at Sydney's Terry Clune gallery in 1965, that I realised my new best friend could apply oil to canvas with breathtaking audacity. The cameras flashed all night, as the cash register sang. Naturally, the painting to which I was most attracted was a large portrait of myself, a prancing popinjay in blue velvet. I squirmed in admiration. Not only for its exquisite Sharpness, but that he had managed to execute it undetected.

Another painting was prophetic, *Seventeen Minutes to Four*, a psychedelic swirl of patterns, flowers and stars, evoking the LSD trips he'd never had. That is, until he reached London a year after the show, where he resumed the cultural insurrection foreshadowed in the *Arty Wild Oat*. Sharp's gold foil poster, *The Gathering of the Heads*, depicted a tribal utopia of musicians and shamans, which served to lure the restless hordes to Hyde Park for a Legalise Pot Rally. On my print of this artwork, Sharp recently scrawled a wistful postscript to his involvement: "Youthful folly... wishful thinking... pipe dreams," but it seemed like a good idea at the time. When a photo from Saigon flashed around the world - the gun-to-the-temple execution of a Vietcong suspect, Martin splattered this image with bright red ink, put it on an Oz cover and penned the line: THE GREAT SOCIETY BLOWS ANOTHER MIND.

Pop art, politics, music and consciousness intermingle in Martin's work. Everything is fluid and connections between disparate images from the art canon are meticulously referenced. Boofhead is both wise and ignorant, the idiot savant. On a 1965 cover of Sydney Oz, which threw itself behind Joern Utzon's much mocked vision for the Sydney Opera House, Boofhead's speech balloon evoked ockerdom: "But I don't give a stuff about Opera". In two major works in this show, Boofhead is depicted in an art gallery with Rodin's *Thinker*. In the smaller painting he is presenting a catalogue of the exhibition to the Thinker, and in the larger work the Thinker is handing him one of Van Gogh's stars. Boofhead is evolving, like the country that created him.

Sharp blows hot and cold about Australia, and the issue of national identity underlies much of his work. In response to a Sydney Morning Herald commission of a poster to commemorate Federation, Sharp submitted a collage of Bernard O'Dowd's future oriented sonnet, Australia:

Are you for light, and trimmed, with oil in place,
Or but a Will o' Wisp on marshy quest?
A new domain for Mammon to infest?
Or lurks millennial Eden 'neath your face?

The answer today is all too obvious. The Herald rejected the collage, but published Sharp's less taxing alternative, a wordless depiction of a nation striving for the stars.

The most recent painting Martin completed for this show, not that it is really completed, is his luminous transformation of a Phil May cartoon published in *The Bulletin* in 1896, when magazines still had teeth. An Aboriginal woman sits in the city nursing her baby, circled by gawkers. In Martin's vision, her blood red dress spreads completely across the stolen ground on which the elaborately attired Europeans stand to stare. How tragic that May's original caption is as applicable today as it was over a hundred years ago: "A curiosity in her own country".

Apart from his youthful years in swinging London, there was the period when he founded the Yellow House in a grand collapsing Potts Point town house. Here a new generation of Australian artists, filmmakers, writers and photographers were inspired. The spirit of The Yellow House followed Martin when he inherited the family home. Ever since he has lived and painted in his unrenovated mansion, Wirian. Once, when our babysitter flushed one of the downstairs toilets, she was almost electrocuted.

Its living room is dominated by a vast dining table strewn with letters, drawings, cartoons, invitations and the previous night's leftovers. This table and the room where it sits - its walls multi layered with paintings, letters, photos, juvenilia - seem to be the physical manifestation of the mysterious mind that gradually brings forth the images we see in this show.

Some of these paintings have been sitting on an easel in that room for years and years. Every time you visit Wirian, Martin is usually pottering away at an image, the dogs asleep at his feet, or occasionally brewing toxic coffee for a stream of visitors. This collection takes us into that realm, where you will notice that however long you have looked at a painting, you can still discover surprises, including allusions to his other works, and those of his revered Van Gogh, Hokusai and Matisse; plus bite sized chunks of philosophy.

While to many Martin remains a curiosity in his own land, the wild oats of his imagination continue to replenish our cultural landscape.

Richard Neville
2006



Martin Sharp, Oz, March 1965 courtesy Richard Neville



Sailing Ship c1948 watercolour on cotton sheet 35 x 39 cm photo Jason Hamilton

Sailing Ship c1948

This sailing ship I painted when I was a boy ... maybe it was 1948, maybe later ... it was painted on a sheet when I was sick in bed. I remember that there were also eagles wearing three-cornered hats on it. My mother cut them off so the boat would fit in the frame. I wasn't pleased. Now I'm glad she framed it ... it has survived to be shared with you. But I still miss Captain Eagle.

Family Collage c1948-52

This fragile collage is drawn from old family drawings, watercolours and scraps. At present it starts with boyhood drawings of my grandfather, Stuart Ritchie. He loved cartoons. He had to join the family engineering firm. This joins into my mother, Jo's childhood drawings and student drawings into my own early work ... my first poster design, "Don't harm emus".

It is a study of the artistic spirit though three generations, the love of drawing and of collage ... from a hobby to the beginnings of a profession. My grandfather, my mother and I were all single children.



After 'Still Life' by Van Gogh
1957

This still life is my first painting based on Vincent's work from my schooldays. My teacher, Justin O'Brien had given me a prize for art. It was a small book about Vincent Van Gogh and he suggested I do a work based on one of the pictures from the book.

I love Vincent. I love his painting, his writing, his courage and his sanity. He is a dear friend. Paul Cox, the filmmaker, made a most beautiful opening speech about Vincent in the exhibition dedicated to him at the Mornington Peninsula Gallery, Victoria. I would quote it in full if I could. It is so true how Vincent helps us artists.



*After 'Still Life' by Van Gogh 1957 synthetic polymer paint, watercolour on paper mounted on board
36 x 50 cm photo Greg Weight*

Family Collage c1948-1952 2 panels, collage of letters and drawings mounded on cardboard 38 x 115 cm photo Jason Hamilton



The Toff c1958

The Toff is part of a series of character portraits I did at Cranbrook when I was fifteen or sixteen years old. I would probably paint one a week. Justin always provided us with good paints and brushes. He had a great filing system. He would keep everyone's work and give them back at the end of the year. So here they are fifty years later.

Justin would exhibit the boys' work in their classroom or half way up the stairs in the main building. To be exhibited here was an honour ... to have your painting in the middle was the honour of that fortnight. My first painting to achieve that position was a portrait of "Cheery" Bell, the tough English teacher who taught me the Bernard O'Dowd poem. It was the first time anyone had painted a teacher and it caused a sensation ... "Cheery" even asked Justin for the painting. Perhaps he was one of my first collectors, or he wanted to destroy it ... I never heard from him. Did he lack manners or was he trying to teach me another lesson?

The Toff 2006

I used The Toff painter circa 1958 as a study for this latest version. Luke Sciberras has done a print of it on canvas for me ... it looked a bit dull and before long I had started painting it ... in oils this time. I'm pleased with the result. To me, my boyhood vision holds good and I am pleased to return to a smaller sized picture to re-enter the world of portraits and to begin to get to grips with oil paint. If I have the opportunity, I will do some more based on my school pictures ... and then begin painting portraits from life.



The Toff c1958 poster paint on paper on board 80 x 60 cm photo Greg Weight



The Toff 2006 oil on canvas 104 x 83 cm photo Jason Hamilton

Martin Sharp interviewed by Nick Waterlow, 2006

Nick: In the 1979 interview with James Gleeson you said, "Soon there will be a museum of eternal childhood and popular imagery that will enchant us all." What are your thoughts now?

Martin: It was something I was working on with Richard Liney, and with Kingo (Peter Kingston) but I don't think we have created it really. It was an idea that we were hoping to do at Luna Park.

Nick: Part of it was revealed in the recent *Notes from the River Caves* Focus exhibition at the Art Gallery of NSW with Peter, and your house itself reveals more of it, but was your dream always to find a public place?

Martin: Yes, that was the idea when we were working at Luna Park, which was pre the fire on 9 June 1979 and all those complicating aspects.

Nick: Whenever I come to see you here and look again at your work and the world that has inspired you somehow you're like Peter Pan. There's something that is quite unchanging about the subjects you seem to be obsessed by and be part of. Do you feel that?

Martin: I looked up obsession in the Chambers 20th Century Dictionary (laughs). I will try and remember what it said and it is sort of a psychiatric term. I'm very interested in these things, I'm not obsessed. I think you're controlled by them if you're obsessed.

Nick: Well you're certainly not controlled by them.

Martin: No, but this was a very interesting area because I'm always interested in where images come from, and often a lot of very strong images were coming from those novelties, and comic strips. It was that sort of interface which I was very interested in, how a personality becomes a novelty, how some people from the real world become celebrated in a novelty form like Elvis or The Beatles or sports stars. There are little figures made of them. (Some very famous people end up in the wax works of Madame Tussaud's, very creepy I think, but it is considered a great accolade by some).

Nick: Was it going to England that your collection began of Queen Elizabeth II and all the family?

Martin: No, I found a China figure of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth the Second as a girl in an antique market here. I thought of her in her nursery of Empire surrounded by lead soldiers and animals which I had collected. It becomes a poetic combination. It's an evocative way of showing these things that is amusing, like telling a story with them.

Nick: What were your own feelings when you first got to London in the sixties?

Martin: Oh well I felt there were a lot more people who were like me or I was like them (laughs). It was sort of a good feeling, and it was very broad socially, extremely broad.

Nick: You certainly haven't been forgotten over there, nor has Oz Magazine. Ideas were the currency of the day and if you had something interesting to say, you could meet virtually anybody, as you did. Where were you living in London?

Martin: When I arrived, I visited Bob Whitaker who was living in Greenwich, whom I'd met in Melbourne with the Moras. He was working with The Beatles. I wanted to be closer to the action. He found a great studio in Chelsea which we shared, but it was too small for us both. Then one day David Litvinoff told me that there was a top floor studio in the The Pheasantry next door on Kings Road. It was a fantastic studio, which became my main one in London, where I did most of my interesting work. I shared with Eric Clapton and Charlotte Martin, Philippe Mora and Freya Matthews, and my girlfriend Eija Vehka Aho, so there were the six of us living there. I provided the words for some of Eric's music, like *Tales of Brave Ulysses*, and he pointed me in the direction of Tiny Tim's Royal Albert Hall performance, that led on to major work. It was a great period you know, and it was wonderful to meet so many people from all different countries. It was the centre of the world at the time.

Nick: You were at Joubert Studios in Chelsea just before The Pheasantry, was that ever Augustus John's?



Seventeen Minutes to Four 1965 oil & lacquer on paper mounted on board 135 x 185 cm photo Sam McAdam

Martin: I don't know. Judy Garland was living next door. I only saw her once you know.

Nick: Was Germaine Greer living in The Pheasantry at all?

Martin: Yes, she was there, downstairs in quite a small apartment with Tony Cahill the drummer from The Easybeats. He was a fabulous guy who helped with doing a tape collage, and she was writing *The Female Eunuch*.

Nick: Well that propelled her into the stratosphere. An amazing time. So what year did you come back to Australia?

Martin: I came back a couple of times, firstly about 1970 and then in 1972 or 1973.

Nick: In 1970 when you came back you created The Yellow House?

Martin: Yes, it was a quintessence of the London experience of living at The Pheasantry and the combination of music and art. I was going to have an exhibition at the Holdsworth Galleries, where a friend of mine Charlie Brown was the director. But this exhibition at a conventional gallery fell through, so we had to ad-lib and got offered the Clune Gallery in Macleay Street, which was closed down at the time, to do what one wanted really. I just started painting it and creating an environment, friends arrived and helped and The Yellow House came out of that experience, doing that exhibition there. I went back to London and gathered all the stuff that would help make a good show and did it in a more conceptual way, with Magritte and all the other influences. The second exhibition became The Yellow House.

Nick: Who were the first people that you then involved?

Martin: I talked with Albie Thoms about it in London actually and he thought it was a great idea; he was very good on the film side. Richard Weight helped me when I came back, so it grew.

Nick: And it became legendary in every way, and then of course there was the exhibition at the Art Gallery of NSW.

Martin: Yes, it was difficult, but anyway we did it. It's hard to put something like The Yellow House into the Art Gallery of NSW.

Nick: It's true, because it was a lived experience and a sharing of so many moments and different artistic possibilities, and the creating of an environment. How long did the actual Yellow House last?

Martin: Not very long.

Nick: Out of interest, did you go to where the original Yellow House had been in Arles in France?

Martin: No never.

Nick: So how did that inspiration really happen?

Martin: I was just reading Vincent's letters at The Pheasantry. They're such wonderful letters and I still read them; there are so many of them. I'd like to pull out different sections. For example, his interest in Japanese art is intense and he writes about it so well. Make a little book.

Nick: Who else in Australia has given you that kind of inspiration in terms of their art, their writing, their vision?

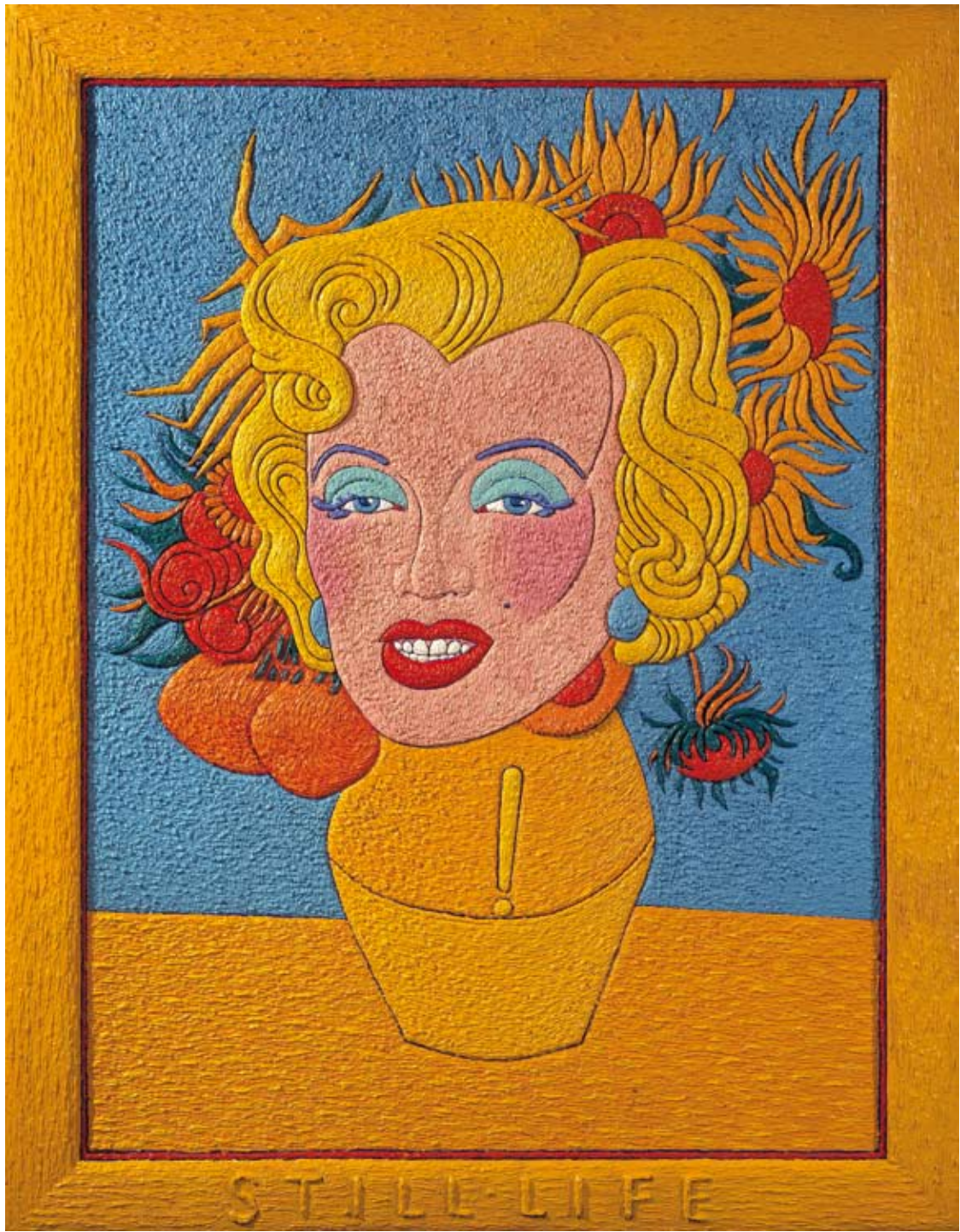
Martin: I don't think anyone really had the influence that Vincent did. That came from Justin O'Brien at Cranbrook, and a book given to me as an art prize by him.

Nick: In which year was that?

Martin: It was 1956, and then he said why don't you do a painting based on one of the pictures in the book, and I did a still life, an atypical Van Gogh, and I'm still working on art drawn from his pictures.

Nick: You are, that's something that interests me about you, that once you choose a muse you are eternally faithful. I was just looking at this painting here inspired by de Chirico. How did your love affair with de Chirico begin?

Martin: Well once I saw it, *The Song of Love*, I thought it was such an amazing picture. It inspired Magritte. I started my version of *The Song of Love* in 1973 when I did an exhibition with Tim Lewis called



Still Life 1999 synthetic polymer on canvas 149 x 117 cm The Hazell Collection photo Greg Weight

Art Exhibition, based on images drawn from fine art and *Art Book*, a little book of collages I published in London in 1972. The collages were all drawn from art books or prints, for example the Warhol portrait of Marilyn Monroe placed on Vincent's *Sun Flowers*. This collage was only possible to me at the time because Marilyn's green eyeshadow was the same green as the background of the sunflowers. There was also an echo of Marilyn's life and Vincent's. They were both great artists, they died at a similar age and one could describe Marilyn as a sunflower. I called the painting *Still Life*, because though they had left this world they were still alive in their art and influence, and of course *Still Life*, is a typical title for a floral arrangement.

I was and am interested in the migration of images...first there is a painting and that painting for some reason becomes popular and is reproduced and eventually becomes so often reproduced that someone like me can cut the images out of their backgrounds and reset them in other landscapes, making a new image which then becomes the sketch for a painting, returning them back to the original medium from painting to printed reproduction and back to painting.

Nick: What an extraordinary process.

Martin: Well it seemed a good idea. With *The Song of Love* it was a matter of scale. The version for *Art Exhibition* is a lot larger than the original. I showed it again in 1976 at the Tolarno Gallery (with Georges Mora.) I took the green ball out of the painting and placed a real green ball on the floor of the gallery. Now it's back in the painting. I call it *Love Me Tender. Reprise of Giorgio de Chirico's Song of Love*. That head of Apollo always looked a bit like Elvis to me, different hair but the face is close.

Nick: Have you ever seen *The Song of Love* in the flesh?

Martin: I saw the original in New York when I was visiting Tiny Tim some years after I had done my version. I think it's the mother of Pop Art.

Nick: How do you see it as the mother of Pop Art?

Martin: Well the classical head, a plaster cast modelled from antiquity and probably from anywhere in an art school, and that very simple realism

including the rubber glove. And the green ball, they seemed to create a continual sort of energy, revolving in a way, like a perpetual motion machine. Strange picture, with a lovely title *The Song of Love*. It leads directly to Magritte to Surrealism, to Pop art to Postmodernism. *Demoiselles d'Avignon* is the beginning of Cubism and Abstract Expressionism.

Nick: Going back to your process of recycling, which is very different to the postmodern one of appropriation.

Martin: Well I don't know, I think I did a lot of appropriation.

Nick: Way before postmodernism was even dreamt of.

Martin: It was just the spirit of the time. I could do those Collages because the original images had radiated so far out into the mass culture, that the original colours weren't there anymore, the scale wasn't there anymore, they'd lost their preciousness because they got so far away from the source and they could intermingle again. If you flick quickly through Sir Herbert Read's book on the history of art, that goes from the Lascaux Caves to Jackson Pollock, the image vanishes into a flux. But then you can't keep the images out of art, so Pop Art had to come.

Nick: There has always been throughout your work a social concern, whether it has been manifest through Luna Park or through support for the Indigenous people in Australia. Where did that come from, your social conscience?

Martin: I believe in the idea of a fair go. My mother said "Darling, you should never be afraid of the truth".

Nick: Which used to underpin this country's psyche.

Martin: Maybe the go is not as fair as we thought it was. I mean my Aboriginal interest has been quite a slow process. Now I think it really is the most important issue in Australia. I'm still not working on it as much as I should perhaps, but it really started off with a book that my grandmother gave me when I was a young boy called *Child Artists of the Australian Bush*. It was about the young Aboriginal artists'



Love Me Tender. Reprise of Giorgio de Chirico's Song of Love 1973-2006 acrylic, oil, wax pencil on board 178 x 142 cm photo Greg Weight

from Carrolup in Western Australia and a fantastic blossoming of their work. Mr and Mrs White, who weren't really art teachers, encouraged the kids to work and they produced sensational images that always struck a chord with me, and I saw one of them Micky Jackson being interviewed quite recently on television, I was immensely moved. Also as a boy, seeing an Aboriginal artist doing poker work on a boomerang.

Also years later I met David Gulpilil through Bill Hunter when he was about twenty and later David did some work with me on the Tiny Tim film. I think he is the greatest actor in Australia. I saw him again at the Tudawali Awards in 2001 and I thought how brave he was coping with all the pressure. I thought I would like to do something for him so I hurriedly painted a portrait of him and submitted it for the Archibald prize. It was rejected so I kept working on it until early this year.

Nick: Another aspect of your work is to do with that beautiful O'Dowd poem from Federation.

Martin: Yes, it was written in 1901 and I think it's an amazing poem. I had to learn it at school from 'Cheery' Bell who was a tough English teacher, and a great character and I did a portrait of him, which was my first milestone school painting.

Nick: There's something beautifully noble about those words.

Martin: AUSTRALIA

*Last sea-thing dredged by sailor Time from Space,
Are you a drift Sargasso, where the West
In halcyon calm rebuilds her fatal nest?
Or Delos of a coming Sun- God's race?
Are you for Light, and trimmed, with oil in place,
Or but a Will o' Wisp on marshy quest?
A new demesne for Mammon to infest?
Or lurks millennial Eden 'neath your face?*

*The cenotaphs of species dead else where
That in your limits leap and swim and fly,
Or trail uncanny harp-strings from your trees,
Mix omens with the auguries that dare
To plant the Cross upon your forehead sky,
A virgin helpmate Ocean at your knees.*

Bernard O'Dowd 1901

It's a very short powerful poem. And you know it asked the questions about the future of Australia that I think are still being asked.

Nick: It's always seemed to me that until there's true reconciliation with the original inhabitants that this country is not whole.

Martin: That's right, and if we don't apply ourselves we'll get kicked out anyway, somehow. I think the whole show will fall to bits, because that foundation hasn't been established properly.

Nick: The forces of light will remove us. Just going back to social comment and your work particularly in the Australian and London versions of Oz Magazine, that then went into record covers for Cream and the Dylan poster, and Jimi Hendrix, and other contributions, you had everything at your fingertips to bring your viewpoints to the world, and you found a very clear way of doing that through your graphic art and social comments. What drove you?

Martin: I don't know if I was driven, I suppose I had a desire to express myself and really painting or drawing was the only thing I had any aptitude for. You know I look back now at the sort of pictures I was doing when I was at school and I say some of them are very good actually.

Nick: I don't think anyone would disagree.

Martin: But that's only because I had a caring art teacher, Justin O'Brien who kept them and gave them back to me and to every boy in fact. It wasn't a matter if they were good pictures or not, he knew what they were worth to those who had done them. My mother took me to see the first Blake Prize which he won. I have never seen such colour, it was the first art exhibition I saw.

Nick: Did you ever see Justin O'Brien when he lived in Rome?

Martin: I did. He took me on one of his wonderful walks around the city, and I took a tape recorder with me and I have some good comments and wonderful memories. I called him my art father.



David Gulpili – *The Thousand Dollar Bill* 2002-5 180 x 120 cm acrylic on canvas photo Greg Weight

Nick: Just going now to Tiny Tim, whose 10th anniversary of his death is on 30 November. What was it in a nutshell that really attracted you to his singing?

Martin: I knew the material he was working with, because I played the old 78s, my mother's and father's, and so I was familiar with a lot of those old songs, also they were starting to be re-released into vinyl at that time, so I understood him I think because I was doing the collages and he was using the whole language of popular song. I'd been using the language of art to make new pictures, and so I had sympathy with what he was doing on a conceptual level and I thought he was very modern. A lot of people thought he was just nostalgic, but I saw something very different.

Nick: But what was that thing that was modern?

Martin: Well, that he had a mastery of the whole language of popular song and was using it to express civilisation and the world, and himself in relation to that, and I just thought he was amazing. I knew how good he was, how authentically he used those songs.

Nick: Your opposition to the hierarchy of images has given you great freedom, yet your inspiration often comes from artists in the fine arts tradition. I think that's why you've reached the imagination and the consciousness of so many people. You found a unique way of infiltrating amongst things and images that are known, and putting them together in a way that creates a new awareness and new knowledge.

Martin: Oh, I'm glad to hear that. Well I always thought that there is a language of images which belong to everyone..... I saw 'eternity' written on the street where I lived when I was a boy. Many of us who lived in Sydney saw that. I wondered about it...it was a mysterious word...Athur Stace wrote anonymously, eventually he was discovered and his story came out. I loved his dedication. I would use 'eternity' in various works of mine to keep his word and style of writing in circulation. So his message would be remembered.

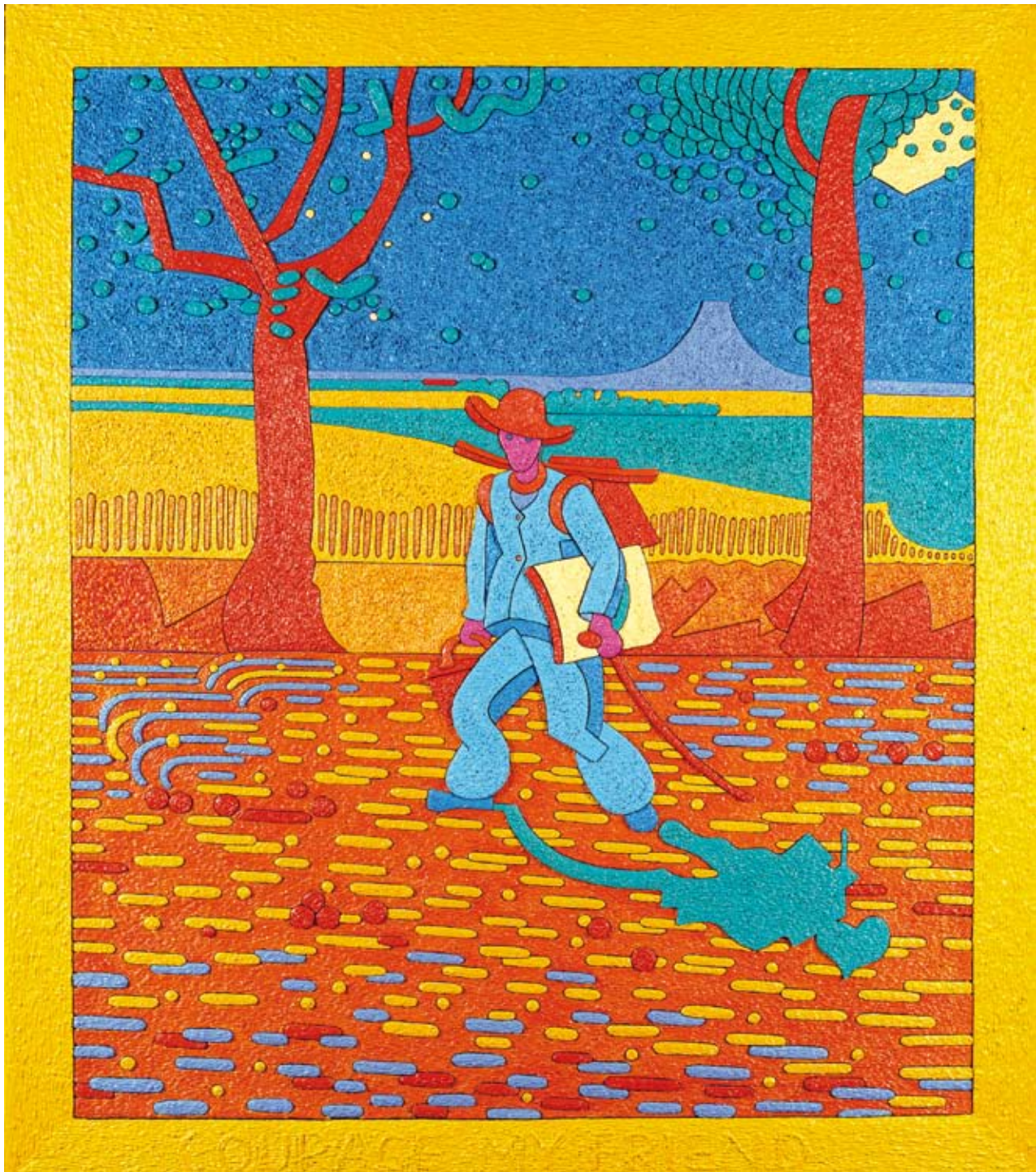
Nick: In the interview with Gleeson you quote these words of Van Gogh. 'I have a terrible lucidity at moments when nature is so glorious in those

days... I'm hardly conscious of myself and the picture comes to me like in a dream.' Does this ever happen with you?

Martin: I wish it did, you know, it's hard work usually, but I'm interested in creative moments, or creative expression and I thought that was a great definition of one of those moments. I don't have that sort of lucidity, but I thought it was for Vincent a state of grace where the picture came through him, the creative process was in action. It was like that with Arthur Stace, when he heard the sermon in the church and the preacher was saying "I would love to shout eternity through the streets of Sydney" and his head just started ringing with the word, 'eternity'. He literally staggered out of the church and reached in his pocket and found a piece of chalk and just knelt down there and wrote it on the pavement. It was one of those moments. I think it's probably why Vincent's pictures are so powerful and have such an effect on people. He's a fascinating figure and he's still unfolding. Just read his letters, his is one of the finest minds. He said in a letter to Emile Bernard that 'Christ alone... was a greater artist than all other artists, despising marble and clay as well as colour, working in living flesh. ... he loudly proclaimed that he made... living men, immortals.' Vincent and his brother Theo succeeded in their work. They are considered by many as tragic figures and in the eyes of The World they are but to artists they are triumphant, thanks to Theo's wife Jo and her son and Vincent's namesake and godson, their work together lives today. To me they are the Royal Family of painting. You have the essential ingredients of the creation of art. You have the artist Vincent, the patron, Theo and the curator Jo. Her son Vincent builds the Van Gogh museum. His son Theo is murdered for his art. This is a noble family. Vincent the artist set the benchmark you put your life on the line for your art.

Nick: His works have certainly affected so many lives in so many parts of the world. Getting back to images *On the Road to Tarascon*, is it as important as the de Chirico in terms of being at the epicentre of your work?

Martin: Yes, more so. The first time I saw it, although I don't really remember it, was at my father's surgery. My mother had bought him two prints from the Notanda Galleries, in Rowe Street. That and the



Courage My Friend c1988-99 synthetic polymer on board 172 x 150 cm private collection photo Greg Weight

Bridge at Arles, so those two pictures decorated the surgery, and later some of my own work came to be hung there as well. I always saw it as such a great image of the artist travelling on the road of life. I did a series of drawings too, *Footprints on the road to The Yellow House*, where they were shown in Sydney. That painting, *On the Road to Tarascon* was lost in the Second World War; who knows it may turn up again sometime, it would be wonderful if it did.

Nick: Where was it lost from?

Martin: It was in a museum in Germany, I've forgotten exactly which museum, but it was destroyed by bombing. I would have dug through the rubble if I'd had the chance.

Nick: I can see you doing it.

Martin: But, you know, also it was a great moment I think in his life, just before the troubles with Gauguin and other things. It was a great moment of optimism and possibility. And a great self portrait. And one analyses the picture every time, you try to find out what makes it work, to me it's like doing a thesis. He also loved the Japanese prints and the world that they evoked and the colours of that world, and when he went to Arles he said he had 'found Japan', and it looks like the Japan he imagined through the prints. He wrote a lot about Hokusai, who of course is another artist I've had a lot to do with in one way or another. And the painting *Abalone* is a tribute to Hokusai titled *The old man mad about drawing*. The print it was based on was described as a forgery but it's too good for that...I believe it is a tribute.

Nick: Hokusai and the whole Ukiyo-e School seem in a sense quite close to the way you create your own work.

Martin: Yes, the bright colour and a simple outline. The *Pentecost* came from a combination of Matisse's *Red Interior*, with one of Magritte's cloud birds. It's a wonderful painting, the Matisse. It's got the two pictures on the wall, one black and white and the one coloured. I just cut those out and set that print over the Magritte cloud bird and it just seemed to look very good, so I stuck it down and it's in my Art Book. I did a variation of that for the exhibition

in 1973 and then I just kept working on it over a long period. I brought the cloud bird inside the room, and then replaced the black chair which was sitting at the table with Vincent's chair and I put the landscape of Antoine de Saint Exupery in the back of this, so there were four different artists welded together and the name was *Pentecost* and the dove was like the Holy Spirit.

Nick: Moving on to that, the Holy Spirit, you seem to have a spiritual belief that you manifest through your work, through your life, through interest in the cruciform, all those things.

Martin: I'm quite surprised really when I look at them, I mean there is quite a lot expressed there. You know the work *Golgotha*, of those that died in the ghost train, that was John Godson and his two little boys, Damien and Craig, and the other four Waverley College boys who'd come from mass at Mary Magdalene at Rose Bay and were there on the Devil's Station Hell's Railway. This was a powerful conjunction of imagery and I did feel it was like a Carnival Golgotha. It wasn't one person who had died, it was seven of them, so I tried to express that in a cross. In a sense I think it worked; in one way it was resolving the symbolism that I saw within that event. I still keep in contact with Jenny Poidevin, whose husband and two boys died in the fire, and the other families.

Nick: More recently you've used the cruciform again, haven't you?

Martin: Yes, I have a carpenter friend called Stephen and I asked him to make some crosses for me I painted them in the Aboriginal colours, the yellow, the black and red. It seems to work, being well received by some of the Aboriginal Christians I have given them to.

Nick: Some are in a church aren't they?

Martin: Yes, some are, the late Father Ted Kennedy's church in Redfern and other churches in Redfern. Angelica Frances Greening, took me along to this church in Auburn, where there were some Aboriginal preachers lifting the curses off the land, that had been put there from the early days by the Aboriginal leaders or priests. It was a very, very powerful night, it was the night the riots broke out

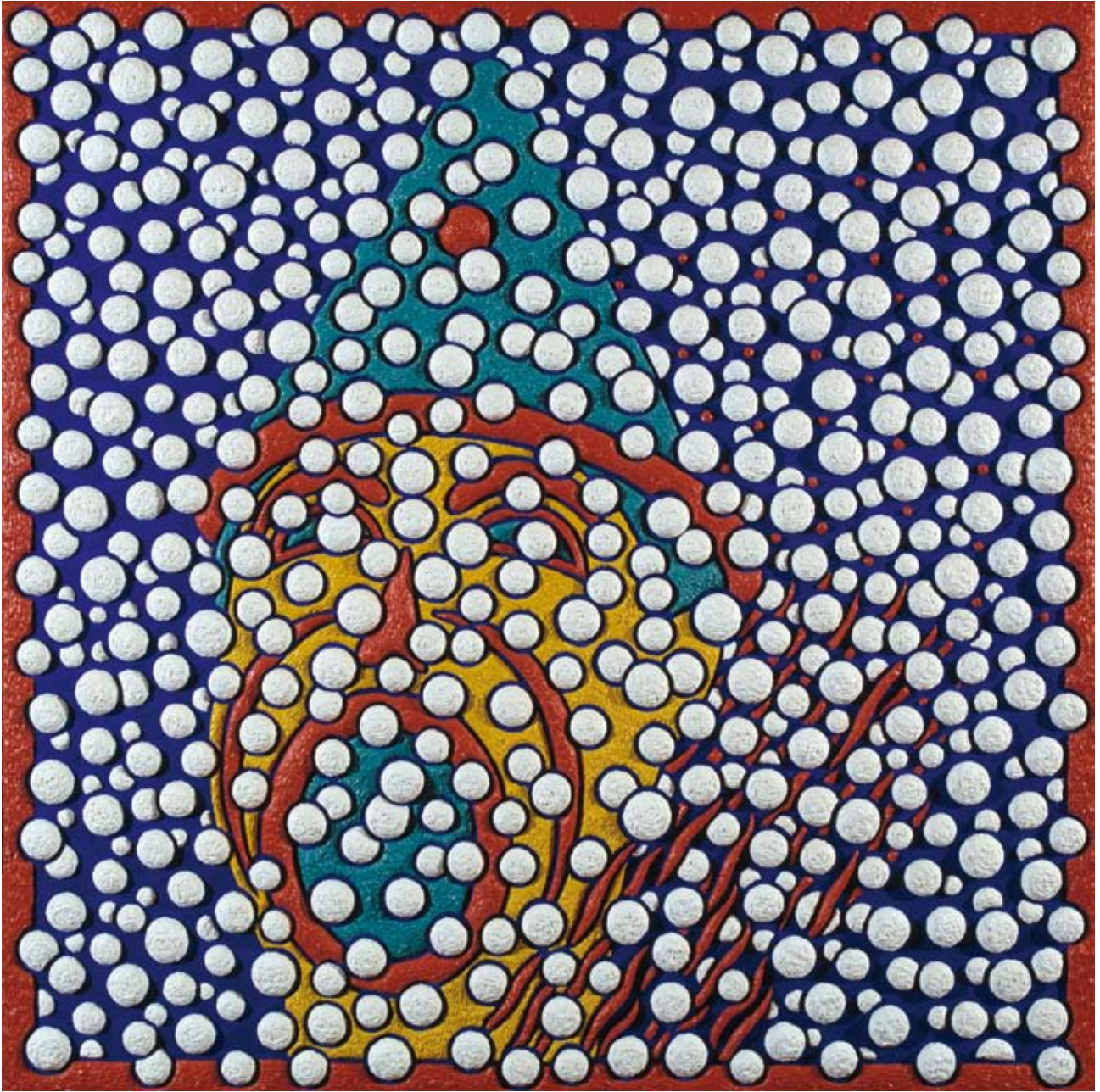
My friendships

A lot of my major paintings have been done with Tim Lewis, another school student of Justin O'Brien's. We started working together at The Yellow House and we have done a lot of work together over the years. He introduced me to Liquitex paints and Tamarisque canvas's in 1973 and I have used them ever since.

Peter Kingston is another student of Justin's who I have worked with a lot. Friendship is a very big part of my creative life. Greg Weight framed my first official exhibition and has photographed most of my work over the years. Another Yellow House compatriot, Jon Lewis, photographed David Gulpilil in my studio ... just one Polaroid ... it became the basis for my portrait of David which was used for a banner on the streets of Sydney. David had given Jon a special look, full of wise humour. I tried to find that expression and pass it on.



Abalone 1990-2006 colour pencil, ink, synthetic polymer paint on canvas
293 x 180cm under painting by Tim Lewis
photo Greg Weight



Snow Job 1980-1995 synthetic polymer on canvas 122 x 122 cm private collection photo Greg Weight



Golgotha c1987 (from top to bottom/left to right) John Godson, Richard Carroll, Craig Godson, Damien Godson, Jonathan Billings, Michael Johnson, Seamus Rahilly crayon, photocopied newspaper, mounted on cardboard 75 x 55 cm each
photo Jason Hamilton

on the Block in Redfern. The Aboriginal people make very impressive Christians because they are really sincere and eloquent.

Nick: I feel privileged to have seen such an extraordinary manifestation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art in the last 35 years.

Martin: Yes, it's amazing, I mean it's so unexpected and so good.

Nick: Just coming back to you personally, you were talking at the *For Matthew and Others: Journeys with Schizophrenia* Mad Scenes Concert with that very beautiful introduction, talking about visions that you had when you underwent your heart surgery. How did they affect you afterwards?

Martin: It's a very important avenue of investigation. I asked Madeleine, a dear rehabilitation nurse, if it was common to see these things. She told me that many patients had experienced these visions but because they were intangible no medical papers had been written on the subject. For me it was the spirit world becoming visible.

Nick: And finally what do you have planned for the future?

Martin: I want to continue painting. I would like to do some oil paintings the same size as *The Toff* (2006). I have used a school painting as a sketch for a current painting and this seemed to work. I want to go back to a more intimate scale to re-enter that world of portraits. I also hope to do some harbour scenes, some beach scenes, some nudes, landscapes and traditional subjects.

There's a particular work I want to do of Weary Dunlop. It's a large scale work based on the word 'Weary'. I heard a great interview about Weary Dunlop who was described by an artist who had painted his portrait, as Australia's greatest war hero. A musician had written a musical tribute to Weary inspired by this portrait, called *The five letters of gold*. The brief for my painting came from this song.

Also, there's still a lot of work to do with Tiny.

You work for the public, you never probably meet. It's tough for the people you actually know. You give more loyalty to the audience you don't know. That is the position of being an artist.

Film Script 1976-2004 acrylic on paper mounted on board 136 x 319 cm
photo Greg Weight





Aboriginal Cross 2005 wood, acrylic paint 64 x 43 cm
 carpentry Steve Darmondy, design Martin Sharp
 photo Sue Blackburn



Centenary of Federation, Sydney Morning Herald Front Cover 2001 collage,
 paper 74 x 58 cm private collection photo Greg Weight



Ginger Meggs in Japan 1996 oil stick on canvas 183 x 118 cm underpainting by Tim Lewis collection Albie Thoms
photo Sam McAdam



Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen (Revelations 18 v.2) 2000-6, wax crayon acrylic on canvas 184 x 280 cm underpainting by Tim Lewis, source collage by Richard Liney 1977 photo Greg Weight

***Ginger in Japan* 1996**

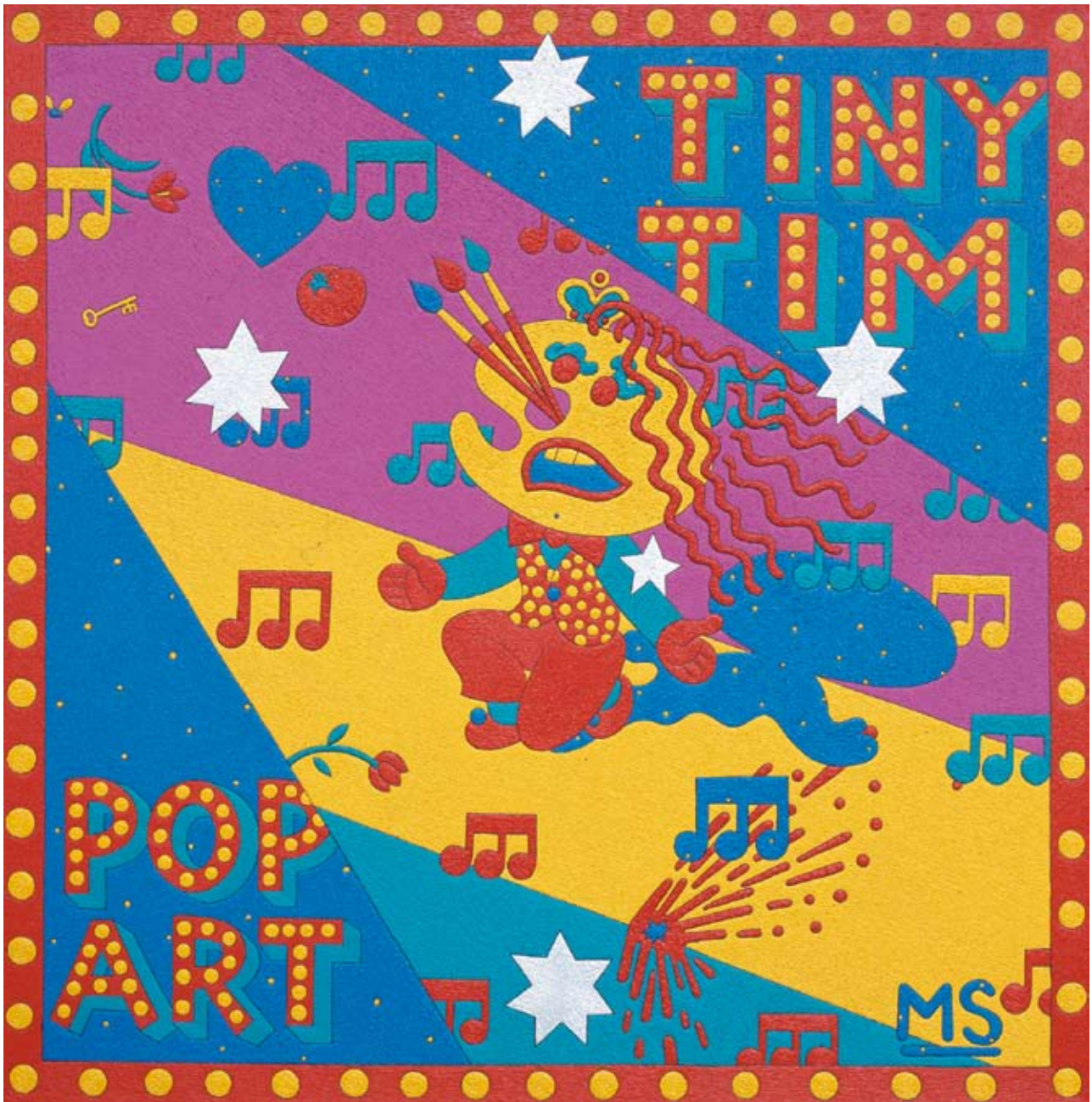
I had a torn, old Ginger Meggs comic from circa 1930s and an equally tattered Hiroshige print. Jimmy Bancks, the creator of Ginger Meggs, had a style drawn from Japanese prints. They fitted together well ... so I made a collage ... then Kristin Coburn made a silk screen of the collage and then Tim Lewis prepared a large painted version (Tamarisque canvas on board, Liquitex acrylic paints) which I worked over with crayons, coloured pencils and ink.

***Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen (Revelations 18 v.2)* 2000-2006**

The original collage that inspired this work is by Richard Liney. We were working together at Luna Park and became concerned about the problems it was having. Peter Kingston, Richard and I had an exhibition at the Art Gallery of New South Wales in 1977. Richard's collage was prophetic of the approach of the end of Luna Park, the ghost train fire of 9 June 1979. The current title of this work was given before 11 September 2001.



Pentecost 2001 acrylic on Perspex (prototype for print 2006) 80 x 60 cm photo Sam McAdam



Tiny Tim Pop Art c1997 acrylic on canvas 152 x 152 cm photo Greg Weight



Loop 1971 ink, acrylic on plastic 43 x 36 cm private collection
photo Sam McAdam

List of Works

Family Collage c1948-1952
2 panels, cardboard, collage of letters
and drawings
38 x 115 cm

Sailing Ship c1948
watercolour on cotton sheet
35 x 39 cm

After 'Still Life' by Van Gogh 1957
synthetic polymer paint, watercolour
on paper mounted on board
36 x 50 cm

The Toff c1958
poster paint on paper on board
80 x 60 cm

Seventeen Minutes to Four 1965
oil & lacquer on paper mounted on
board
135 x 185 cm

Heart 1970
acrylic on Perspex
180 x 150 cm
collection Ian Reid

Loop 1971
ink, acrylic on plastic
43 x 36 cm
private collection

Self Portrait 1973
70 x 60cm
mirror in gilt frame

Pentecost 1973-1993
acrylic on board
190 x 130 cm
private collection

*Love Me Tender. Reprise of Giorgio de
Chirico's Song of Love* 1973-2006
acrylic, oil, wax pencil on board
178 x 142 cm

Film Script 1976-2004
acrylic on paper mounted on board
136 x 319 cm

Ginger Meggs Sings Mammy at the School Concert 1977
acrylic on canvas
underpainting by Tim Lewis
152 x 152 cm
private collection

Snow Job 1980-1995
synthetic polymer on canvas
122 x 122 cm
private collection

Golgotha c1987
crayon, photocopied newspaper,
mounted on cardboard
six works at 75 x 55 cm each

Courage My Friend c1988-99
synthetic polymer on board
172 x 150 cm
private collection

Abalone 1990-2006
colour pencil, ink, synthetic polymer
on canvas
underpainting by Tim Lewis
293 x 180cm

Art Galaxy 1993
acrylic on paper
82 x 82 cm
private collection

Tiny Tim Christmas Album Record Cover c1995
acrylic on canvas
152 x 152 cm

Ginger in Japan 1996
oil stick on canvas on board
underpainting by Tim Lewis
190 x 125 cm
Collection Albie Thoms

Tiny Tim Pop Art c1997
acrylic on canvas
152 x 152 cm

Still Life 1999
synthetic polymer on canvas
149 x 117 cm
The Hazell Collection

Psalm 53 "The fool in his heart says there is no God" 2000
acrylic on Perspex
130 x 130 cm
The Hazell Collection

Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen. Revelations 18v2, 2000-06
wax crayon, acrylic on canvas
underpainting by Tim Lewis
184 x 280 cm
source collage by Richard Liney 1977

Australia are you for light... 2001
collage, paper
56 x 44 cm
private collection

Centenary of Federation, Sydney Morning Herald Front Cover 2001
collage, paper
74 x 58 cm
private collection

Eternity 2001
silk/nylon banner for Sydney Festival 2001
456 x 142 cm

Japan 2001
synthetic polymer paint on paper on board
60 x 54 cm
The Hazell Collection

Pentecost 2001
acrylic on Perspex (prototype for print 2006)
80 x 60 cm
private collection

Sharp 2003-2004
acrylic on Perspex
162 x 162 cm
private collection

David Gulpilil – The Thousand Dollar Bill 2002-6
acrylic on canvas and scarf
180 x 120 cm

A curiosity in her own country 2003-6
acrylic on paper mounted on board
115 x 78 cm

Aboriginal Cross 2005-6
wood, acrylic paint
carpentry Steve Darmondy
design Martin Sharp
64 x 43 cm

The Toff 2006
oil on canvas
104 x 83 cm
private collection

All works collection of the artist unless otherwise stated.
Measurements are height by width.
Additional works will be added during the course of the exhibition.

Acknowledgements

The Everlasting World of Martin Sharp
Paintings from 1948 to today

16 November – 23 December 2006

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Martin Sharp, Southampton Row, London, c1966-7, photo Robert Whitaker