

REVERIE

Curator: Kirrily Hammond

17 May – 22 June 2006

Switchback Gallery
Gippsland Centre for Art & Design
Monash University
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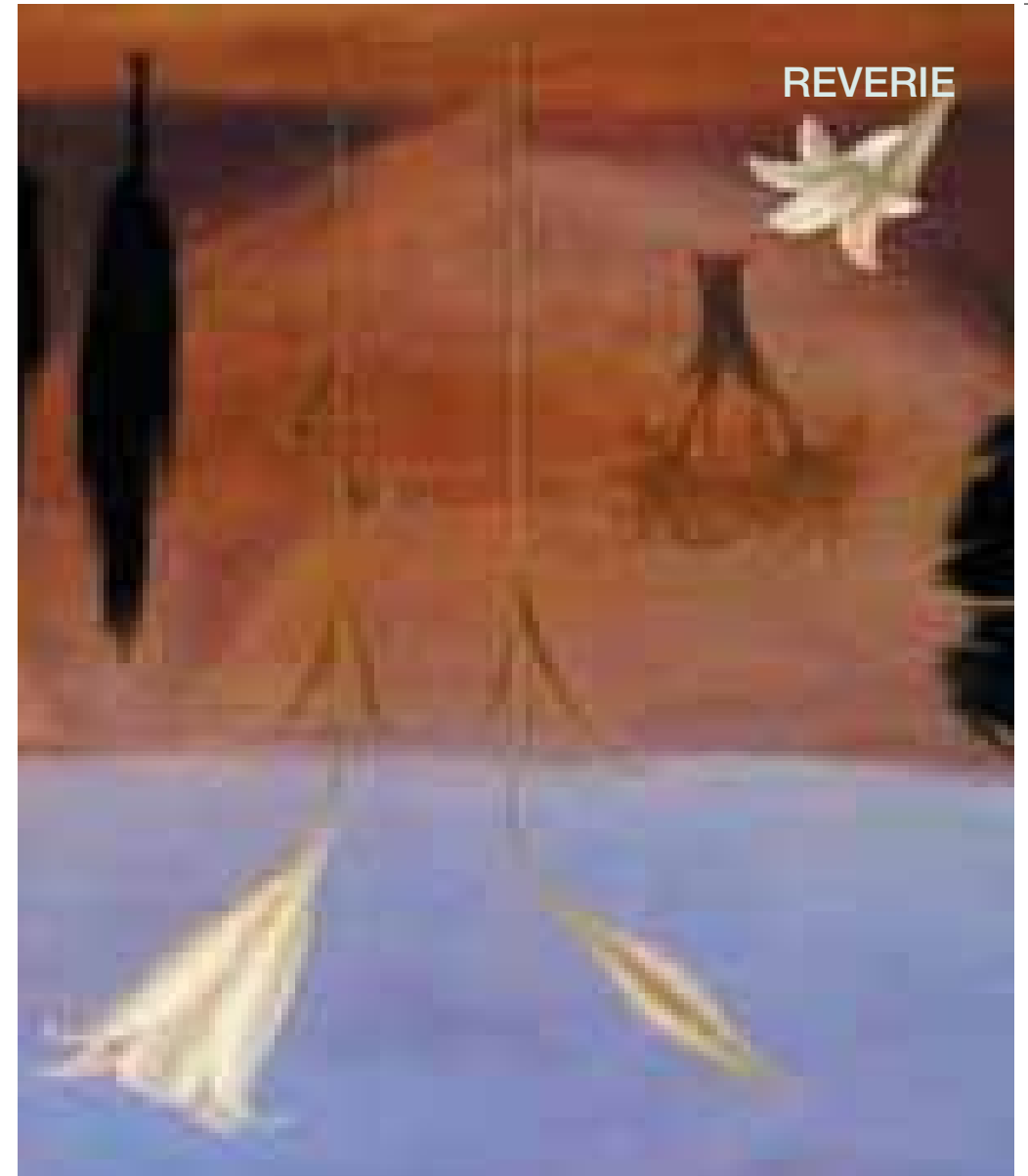
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cover image (detail), reproduced in full above
Roslynd Piggott
Upside-down landscape 1989
oil on linen
136.0 x 183.0 cm
Purchase 1990



REVERIE

Kirriy Hammond

French Symbolist artist Odilon Redon once said 'My drawings suggest and cannot be defined. They determine nothing. Like music, they spirit us into the equivocal world of the indeterminate.'¹

Drawn together from the Monash University Collection, the works in this exhibition share an ambiguity of form and meaning that relies on the viewer's intuition to decipher and interpret. The origins of the indeterminate and evocative qualities in many of these works might be traced back to the romantic aspirations of the Symbolist movement of the late 19th century.

Symbolist artists sought to capture elusive, abstract notions such as moods, emotions and ideas through their highly subjective interpretations of the world around them. Images of nature, figures and cityscapes all became vehicles to express the artists' inner worlds. The vast realms of memory, emotion and imagination were brought together in idiosyncratic works of art that were both fanciful and beautiful, seducing viewers into their own states of reverie. In looking at subsequent generations of artists who pursue similar philosophical interests, it becomes clear that these are timeless and enduring concerns.

Peter Graham explores the metaphysical realm of the imagination in his works on paper. The scratched, overwrought surfaces reveal traces of the artist's meandering thought processes in the layers of abstract marks and texts that make up his images. Like an idea emerging from the subconscious, a fragile and delicate plant-like structure rises out of the murky depths in *From Frozen Grounds* 1996. The light, lyrical swirls of new growth defy the sombre environment from which they emerge, sharing an affinity with the hanging trees and lilies that populate Rosslind Piggott's *Upside-down landscape* 1989.

A gentle element of the absurd permeates Piggott's upturned Tuscan landscape and invokes the surreal, inner world of the imagination.² The meticulously detailed white lillies belong to a personal symbology, mysteriously floating in the sun-drenched hills and merging with the fine glazes that enrich the painting's surface. This still and tranquil landscape of the mind contrasts with the urban landscapes by Siri Hayes. Her large-format photographs depict the environs of Merri Creek and suggest an element of the sublime

in this pocket of Melbourne bushland, despite the inner-city detritus that is plainly evident. The series title, *Lyrical theatre*, calls attention to the miniature protagonists of a fictional play enacted on the banks of the creek. The vast scale of the surrounding landscape engulfs these diminutive figures, creating a setting that recalls notions of the sublime prevalent in Romantic paintings of the 19th century. In their individual depictions of landscape, both Piggott and Hayes have suspended time and movement for a moment of introspective contemplation, encouraging personal journeys of the mind.

Enigmatic and beautiful, open-ended and impenetrable, Graeme Hare's images create an opportunity for subjectivity to enter the arena of photographic representation. His deliberate blurring of the photographic image removes it from the original subject matter and conveys the presence of the artist. This aesthetic manipulation was also a key element of the late 19th century Pictorialist tradition, in which emotional effect was privileged over mechanical representation. As Hare once stated, 'I make pictures, not photographs, to convey moods.'³ His sepia-toned moving train is an image that transcends any literal depiction of travelling. Instead it evokes the imagined act of staring from a train window, allowing the eyes to blur and the mind to wonder, evoking the *memory* of a past journey.

Whether it be a fanciful interpretation of the world around us or a poetic meandering into the subconscious, each work in this exhibition inhabits a place somewhere between reality and fiction, consciousness and memory. Just as the Symbolists valued above all the importance of individual experience and expression, the indeterminate and liminal nature of these works encourages viewers to bring their own experiences and feelings to the fore, and respond in a very intimate way. This interaction enables the works to inspire and capture both artist and viewer, allowing for reveries that cross the threshold from the real to the imagined.

¹ Odilon Redon, as quoted in Ingrid Erhardt & Simon Reynolds (eds.) *Kingdom of the Soul: Symbolist Art in Germany 1870 - 1920*, Prestel, 2000, p.17.
² Rosslind Piggott describes her landscape paintings as psychological spaces, painted directly from the imagination, in an interview with Gary Catalano, *Building a Picture, Interviews with Australia Artists*, McGraw-Hill, Sydney 1997, p.20.
³ Graeme Hare interview with Louise Bellamy, 'Judge not, just enjoy the ride', *The Age*, 6 October 1989, p.14.



List of works

Charles Blackman
Born Sydney 1928

1. *Drifting* 1966-67
lithograph on paper
Plate 54.7 x 78.6 cm;
Sheet 56.2 x 78.6 cm
Purchased 1968

Lynne Boyd
Born Melbourne 1953

3. *And at every drifting cloud that went with sails of silver* by 1989
oil on linen
122.0 x 152.5 cm
Purchased 1989

Peter Graham
Born Melbourne 1970

4. *From Frozen Grounds* 1996
charcoal, gouache & pencil on paper
205.0 x 140.5 cm
Purchased 1997

5. *Unearthly transmission (Underground Observatory)* 1994
graphite & gouache on paper
75.0 x 56.5 cm
Purchased 1994

6. *Now my song is sung* 1994
graphite and gouache on paper
151.0 x 115.0 cm
Purchased 1994

Graeme Hare
Born Melbourne 1952

7. *Train* 1982
Type C photograph
Framed: 41.0 x 160.0 x 5.0 cm
Purchased 1999

Siri Hayes
Born Mornington, Victoria 1977

8. *Crossing the Merri* 2003
Type C photograph, edition 6/10
142.0 x 112.0 cm
Purchased 2005

9. *Scene 3* 2003
Type C photograph, edition 2/10
112.0 x 142.0 cm
Purchased 2005

Louise Hearman
Born Melbourne 1963

10. *Untitled # 596* 1996
pastel on paper
50.0 x 38.9 cm
Purchased 1997

Nicola Loder
Born Melbourne 1964

11. *Child 1-16* 1996 (detail)
(from the series *Child 1-175*)
silver gelatin photographic prints
60.0 x 49.8 cm
Purchased 1988

Rosslind Piggott
Born Frankston, Victoria 1958

12. *Upside-down landscape* 1989
oil on linen
136.0 x 183.0 cm
Purchased 1990

Ronnie Van Hout
Born Christchurch, New Zealand
1962; arrived Australia 2000

13. *Untitled* 1995
(from the series *Mephitis*)
selenium toned photograph
45.0 x 30.0 cm
Purchased 2000

14. *Untitled* 1995
(from the series *Mephitis*)
selenium toned photograph
45.0 x 30.0 cm
Purchased 2000