

# EUAN HENG



## CYCLE

Selected Paintings and Works on Paper

Latrobe Valley Arts Centre  
October 24 - November 24, 1991

# CYCLE

*'To and fro goes the way.  
On the seventh day comes return.  
It furthers one to have somewhere to go.'*  
— I Ching

**T**HOSE who have watched the evolution of Euan Heng's art since he came to live in Gippsland in 1982 will be familiar with the Latrobe Valley settings against which his cartoon-like characters enact private rituals. In the new work exhibited here, however, factories and industrial detritus have been swept away, leaving solitary male figures in contemplation of a dreamlike coastline, or (as in the charcoal drawings), occupying even more ambiguous spaces.

Though Heng sometimes puts himself in his pictures, none of these characters appears to be a self-portrait (except in the sense of Everyman). All are workers of one kind or another: descendants of his earlier *Char Man* (1983 Coll LVAC) and *Worker* (1986-87). Their attitudes and the objects they hold indicate their roles in life, while their stylish clothes and shoes proclaim their modernity. This, in turn, underlines Heng's continuing commitment to Modernism.

Heng has given his new series of drawings and paintings the generic title *Cycle*: a word alluding to his perennial theme of love, death and salvation. On a more mundane level, it is connected with movement, vehicular transport, journeys and completion. And, amusingly, if an exclamation mark is added, it becomes a command. Multi-layered meanings such as these can be found in the transitional painting, *Hitch-Hiker*. This character looks like the *Char Man* but holds the *Workers's* ladder - a recurring symbol of Heng's - which has changed from yellow to blue.

FRONT COVER: *Hitch-Hiker*, 1991  
Oil on Linen  
111cm x 106cm

PHOTOGRAPH: Terence Bogue

He turns his back on a box-like house or shelter containing a flight of stairs. The yellow suitcase standing next to him probably holds his tools of trade, or may refer to intellectual baggage. Clearly, the *Hitch Hiker* is setting out on a journey; the blue ladder propped against empty air suggests that this journey will be a spiritual one.

There is nothing superfluous in Heng's pictures. This is most noticeable in the drawings, in which formal inventiveness is pushed to extremes. In the study for *Encounter*, a timber-cutter thoughtfully slices into a log with a chainsaw; judging by the monolithic treestumps ranged behind him, he might have levelled a whole forest. A hazy sun echoes the shape of the man's bald head and emphasizes the circularity of the tight-knit composition. But nothing is quite as it seems to be. There is more visual punning in the related watercolour, *Limb*, where the same man, dressed in red, carries a log resembling blood-stained flesh. In the study for *Magician*, he is seen nailing crates together for some obscure purpose; moreover, there is something supernatural about the way the sun hovers between hammer and box opening. Heng's interest in Vorticism (particularly the art of William Roberts) is evident in the expressive distortion of the figures: observe the air of satisfaction with which the *Engineer* in another study bends forward to scoop up the toy train at his feet. And in *Roman Holiday*, the body of a kneeling carpenter is deformed into a squat S-shape as he prepares to hit the end of a plank with his sledgehammer. Behind him a hill and the base of an upright post hint that he could be an agent of the Crucifixion.

If the drawings are full of arrested movement, the oil paintings emanate stillness. Their increasingly religious

tone reflects Heng's preoccupation with the art and life of Sir Stanley Spencer, the metaphysical paintings of Giorgio de Chirico, and certain works by Florentine masters of the *Quattrocento*. This is no facile mannerism, nor are the paintings merely allegorical in content, for Heng's figures and symbols are allowed to emerge, not forced, into consciousness.

Like the knights-errant in the medieval *Quest of the Holy Grail*, Heng's surrogate selves make halting progress towards their goal through a series of trials and encounters. Emma Jung (who relieved her husband C.G. Jung of the task of analysing the Grail Legend) has explained that "The *Quest* presents us with different types of humanity at varying degrees of spiritual development." Heng's fascination with this marvellous cycle of tales, and the bluntness of its telling, adds depth to his imagery. This is evident above all in his use of symbolic colours: a rich, cardinal red, rose pinks and warm yellows, complemented by green and a gamut of blues. It is by the skilful deployment of these hues that the artist's vision is enabled to take flight.

Hence in *Pilot*, a man in a red suit clasps a toy plane of the same colour; behind him a pale blue sky may be seen through an open window. There is a joking reference here to a 'sky pilot' or minister, but this magisterial person resembles nothing so much as the painted figure of a saint, holding his appropriate attribute and compressed into the narrow side-panel of an altarpiece. The *Aviator* also holds a red toy plane. He is seated rather awkwardly on a grassy slope overlooking a seashore. His suit is opalescent white, like the indeterminate zone where sea meets sky. A single cypress tree occupies the left side of the picture and penetrates the heavens, where the sun is half-hidden by rosy clouds. This is the closest Heng has come to painting a landscape, in this case a dreamy Arcadian scene which is in tune with the man's inward gaze. Red plane and evergreen tree are paired opposites, like male and female, or life and death (the cypress symbolizes both funerals and eternity).

A mood of profound contemplation suffuses the painting called *Metaphysician*. Its horizontal shape is dictated by the reclining figure of yet another red-suited man, posed like the central figure in Piero di Cosimo's *Death of Procris* (c.1490, National gallery, London), and cradling a toy train-engine. He, too, lies close to a beach where a

turquoise sea is lost in a turquoise sky, streaked with blood-red clouds. Title and engine link this picture with De Chirico, but the mood is serene rather than melancholy. It is reminiscent, too, of paintings of Saints Anthony and Jerome meditating in the wilderness, red being the colour of the robes they traditionally wear. In which case the Toys could symbolize temptation or *vanitas*, the ephemeral nature of worldly achievement. Through its association with blood, the colour red symbolizes life, love, sublimation and death. Heng's modern knights-errant seem to be contemplating these mysteries.

Rosemary Adam, September 1991

Rosemary Adam is a Lecturer in Art Theory in the School of Visual and Performing Arts at Charles Sturt University, NSW.

## EUAN HENG

1945	Born Oban, Scotland
1960-69	Merchant Seaman and various other occupations
1970-75	Diploma and Post Diploma study at Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art, Dundee, Scotland
1991-current	Masters Degree Candidate by Research, RMIT, Melbourne
1977	Arrived Australia

### Solo Exhibitions

1974	Prints, Stirling Gallery, Stirling, UK
1976	Paintings, Prints, Stirling Gallery, UK
1979	Paintings, Prints and Drawings, Arts Council Gallery, Canberra, ACT
1984	Paintings, Prints, Australian Galleries, Melbourne, Victoria
1985	Paintings, Drawings, Australian Galleries, Melbourne, Victoria
1987	Euan Heng (Survey of Selected Works), 1977-1987, Paintings, Prints, and Drawings, Latrobe Valley Arts Centre, Morwell, Victoria
1988	Paintings and Drawings, 70 Arden Street Gallery, Melbourne, Victoria
1989	Paintings and Works on Paper, 70 Arden Street Gallery, Melbourne, Victoria
1990	Watercolours, Australian Galleries, Melbourne, Victoria
1991	Cycle, Paintings and Works on Paper, Latrobe Valley Arts Centre, Morwell, Victoria

### Group Exhibitions

1973	International Print Exchange, Compass Gallery, Scotland, Montpellier Ecole Des Beaux Arts, Illinois State University, and Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art
1974	Scottish Young Contemporaries, McLellan Galleries, Glasgow
1975	Trees, Stirling Gallery, Stirling, UK
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; 1983, Republic of China, Taipei City Museum, Taiwan, China

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- 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, Ogisu Memorial Museum of Inazawa City, Japan
- 1984 The Painter Printmaker Show, Gallery Huntly, Canberra, ACT
- 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, Latrobe Valley Arts Centre, Victoria
- 1988 Blake Prize, Blaxland Gallery, Sydney
- 1988 Sulman Award, Art Gallery of NSW, Sydney
- 1988 100 x 100, Print Council of Australia Bicentennial Touring Exhibition
- 1989 70 Arden Street Gallery, at Perth Galleries, Perth, WA
- 1990 Contemporary Gippsland Artists, LVAC and touring Australia
- 1990 Modern and Contemporary Australian Watercolours and Gouaches, John Buckley Fine Art, Melbourne
- 1991 Indo-Eco - Latrobe Valley Arts Centre, Sale Regional Gallery - Linden Gallery, Melbourne
- 1991 At—Tension to the line (contemporary drawing), Greenhill Galleries, Perth, WA
- 1991 Transitional Times, 25th Anniversary Print Commissions, The Print Council of Australia, The Australian Print Workshop, Melbourne and Touring

### Awards, Prizes, Scholarships, Commissions

- 1971 Pat Homes Memorial Prize (Drawing)
- 1973 BMK Travelling Award (Paris)
- 1974 Post-Graduate Scholarship
- 1974 GTV Prize (Printmaking)
- 1976 A Pernod Prize (Painting)
- 1976 Scottish Arts Council short term bursary for study at Kirktower House Print Workshop, Montrase
- 1984 Commissioned Member Print, Print Council of Australia
- 1991 25th Anniversary Print Edition, Print Council of Australia

### Collections

Australian National Gallery, Canberra  
 National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne  
 Bendigo Art Gallery, Victoria  
 Latrobe Valley Arts Centre, Victoria  
 Mornington Peninsula Arts Centre, Victoria  
 Box Hill Municipal Collection, Victoria  
 Bathurst Art Gallery, NSW  
 Wagga Wagga Regional Gallery, NSW  
 Naracoorte Art Gallery, SA  
 Print Council of Australia, Melbourne  
 Art Bank  
 New Parliament House, ACT  
 Hamilton Collection, Victorian Education Department  
 Griffith University, Queensland  
 Charles Sturt University, NSW  
 Box Hill College of TAFE, Victoria  
 Lefebvre Collection, Sydney, NSW  
 Scottish Arts Council Collection

### Bibliography

#### ESSAYS AND ARTICLES

- Thorp, David, Euan Heng, Australian Galleries, Melbourne 1984 (catalogue essay)
- Coventry, Christopher, The Style is the Man, Latrobe Valley Arts Centre, 1987 (catalogue essay)
- Coventry, Christopher, The Style is the Man, Art Space Journal, Vol.1 No. 2, Spring 1988
- Adam, Rosemary, Euan Heng, Art and Australia, Spring 1989, Vol.27/1
- Adam, Rosemary, Euan Heng: Recent Work, Unpublished Manuscript, 1989
- Lowe, Victoria and Adam, Rosemary, Students Choice (Australian Works on Paper from the Permanent Collection), Wagga Wagga City Gallery, NSW, 1989
- Bensley, Karen and Hansen, David, Contemporary Gippsland Artists, Latrobe Valley Arts Centre, August 1990
- Adam, Rosemary, Cycle, Latrobe Valley Arts Centre, October 1991 (catalogue essay)

#### CATALOGUES/JOURNALS

- Clarke, Betty, Seven Painters: Different View Point, University of Melbourne, June 1983
- Patron and Member Prints, Imprint 3, Print Council of Australia, September 1984
- International Print Exhibit: ROC Taipei Fine Arts Museum, ROC 1984
- Gallery Commentary, Art and Australia, Winter 1986, Vol.23, No.11
- Gallery Commentary, Art and Australia, Spring 1987, Vol.25, No.1
- The October Show, Latrobe Valley Arts Centre, 1988
- Duxbury, Lesley, 100x100 Print Council of Australia, 1989
- Scherer, Rodney and Hanson, David, Indo-Eco, Latrobe Valley Arts Centre, April 1991
- Palmer, Sheridan, Transitional Times, Imprint Vol.26, No.3, Print Council of Australia, Spring/Summer, 1991.

#### REVIEWS

- Gage, Edward, Art Galleries, Edinburgh, The Scotsman, September 1974
- Coia, Emilia, Pictures and Private Enterprise, Glasgow, The Glasgow Herald, September 1974
- Ferguson, William, Art, Edinburgh, Times Educational Supplement Scotland, October 1974
- Clough, Juliet, Art, Edinburgh, Times Educational Supplement Scotland, December 1975
- Ferguson, William, Pernod Winners on Show, Edinburgh, Times Educational Supplement Scotland, 1976
- Bates, Elizabeth, Queensland College of Art Gallery, Art Network II, Spring, 1983
- Baron, Sonia, Print and Paint Artists Compared, Canberra, Canberra Times, 1984
- Rooney, Robert, Realism All But Forgotten, Weekend Australian, June 1983
- Carmichael Rod, The Look of Real Things, Melbourne: The Sun, June 1983
- Heynatz, Jeannie, Individual Look at Industry, Latrobe Valley Express, July 1987
- Rooney, Robert, Once an Englishman Weekend Australian, April 1988
- Catalano, Gary, When Construction is the Key, Melbourne: The Age, April 1988
- Catalano, Gary, Heng's Deep Emotional Resonances, Melbourne: The Age, September 1989
- Catalano, Gary, Blake Questions Today's Artists, Melbourne, The Age, December 1989
- Hill, Peter, Rich Narrative Behind Heng Imagery, Melbourne, The Age, September 1990

Other activities of the Artist include teaching in the United Kingdom and Australia. Currently Senior Lecturer, School of Visual Arts, Monash University College Gippsland

Latrobe Valley Arts Centre • 138 Commercial Road Morwell, Victoria, Australia (051) 34 1364  
 Open Tuesday-Friday 10am -5pm • Sunday 1.30pm-4.30pm