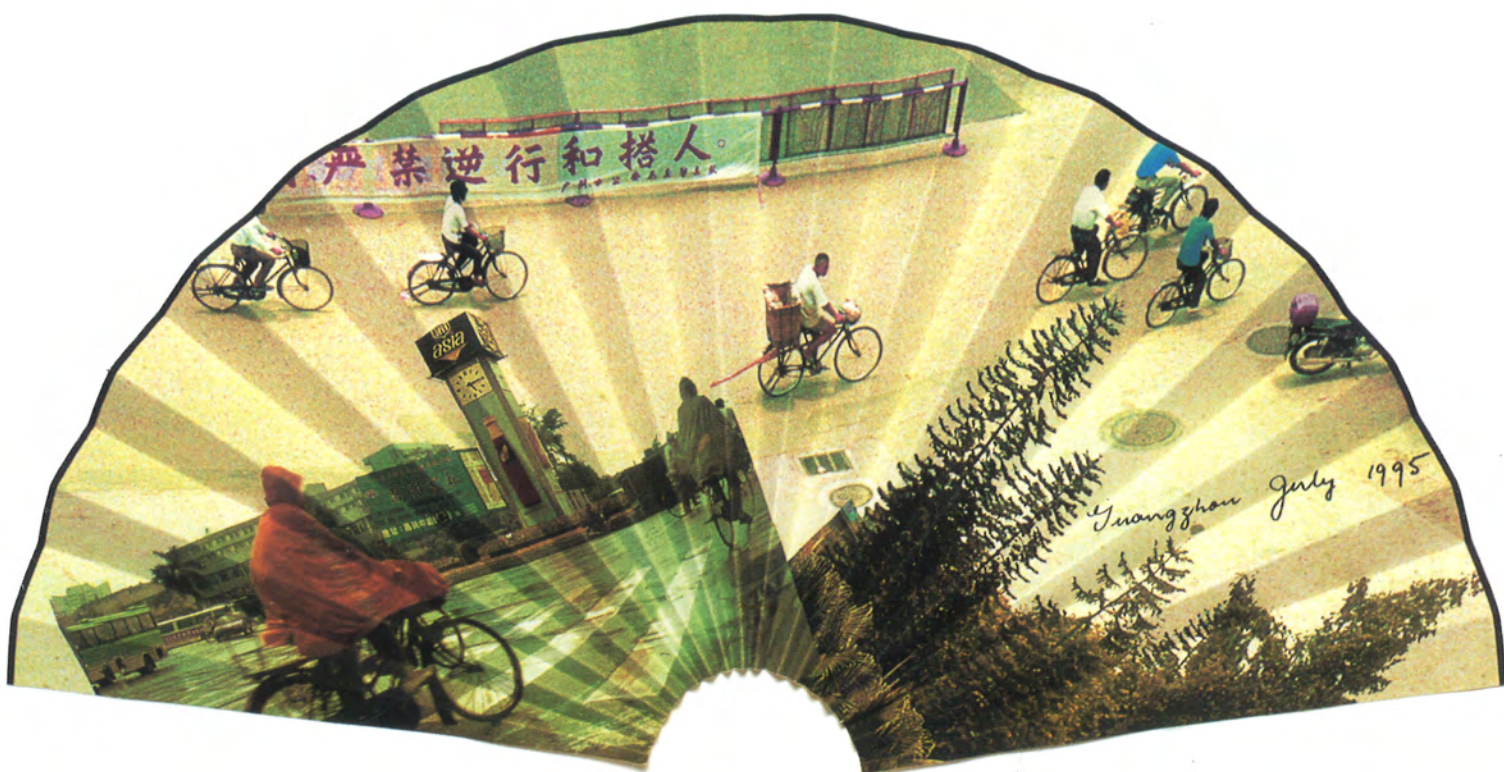


# IMPRINT

SPRING 1997

VOLUME 32

NUMBER 3



PCA 1997 MEMBER PRINTS • WAYNE CROTHERS • MICHAEL SCHLITZ • EUAN HENG  
ACQUISITIONS 1996-97 • AWARD RESULTS • INTERNATIONAL PRINTMAKING EVENTS

THE QUARTERLY JOURNAL OF THE PRINT COUNCIL OF AUSTRALIA INC.



# IMPRINT

THE JOURNAL OF THE PRINT COUNCIL OF AUSTRALIA INC.

Published quarterly by the PCA Inc  
459 Swanston Street Melbourne Vic 3000  
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The Print Council of Australia is a subscription funded visual arts organisation devoted to encouraging the appreciation of contemporary Australian printmaking.

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ISSB No. 0313-3907

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PUBLISHED: MARCH, JUNE, SEPTEMBER AND DECEMBER

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## COVER

### Jan Davis

FAN 3 FROM THE PRINCIPLES OF CHI, 1996

Iris print 8.5 x 17 cm

Photo: Chris Meagher

## DONATIONS

The following members are acknowledged for the generous donation to the PRINT COUNCIL FUND:

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### THE 1997 PRINT COUNCIL COMMISSIONED PRINTS



# EUAN HENG: THE LANDSCAPE OF ART

## an artist's tale

Sheridan Palmer

**E**UAN 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 mark 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 iconoclasm. 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 foil 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  
conté 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 disassociate 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 *Normandy 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 trivia 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



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

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. •

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