

***Peter Boggs: Transfigured Realities* by Sasha Grishin**

Book launch by Andrew Flatau

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I'd like to thank Dominic not only for the opportunity to launch this beautiful book, *Peter Boggs: Transfigured Realities*, but also his support back in 2014 for the first, albeit modest, public gallery survey of Peter's work at Orange Regional Gallery, which I curated and for which Sasha Grishin wrote the catalogue essay and kindly opened the exhibition.

So it's great to be able to repay those favours this afternoon, but for me it's an ongoing pleasure to be counted as a friend of Peter and Ruth, to be able to visit them at home and appreciate the tranquillity and calmness of their house and Peter's studio. Congratulations, Peter, on yet another exquisite show and of course this wonderful book, which works on so many levels. It can of course take its place on the coffee table, alongside any book on Rick Amor or Vilhelm Hammershoi, but the most important thing is that the book represents an insightful record of a life devoted to reflective art practice and the sustained exploration of some of the great dichotomies or dualities of our experience as human beings.

Through literature and philosophy, we have become aware of the 'disconnect' between appearance and reality; the initial and accessible perception of things versus the discovery of uncertainty and the inaccessibility of deeper meaning or explanation. But what Peter has been able to achieve in his art, and this is no mean achievement, is to present the dichotomies in each picture as an existential experience.

Sasha has often described Peter's work as belonging to the 'realm of the uncanny, where something can be familiar, yet foreign at the same time', or as Peter himself puts it: 'that something can belong both to somewhere and anywhere simultaneously'.

Before I say anything more, I should perhaps mention how I became connected with Peter's work, which was initially through recommendation. Peter is recognised as what we might call an 'artist's artist'. In his foreword to the book, Philip Bacon, explains from his perspective, as a commercial gallery director, how he often takes on board the recommendations of other artists in deciding to represent an artist. In Peter's case, Philip tells the story of how Margaret Olley basically insisted that he represent Peter. Indeed, Peter has been most fortunate in being strongly represented and supported not only by Philip Bacon in Brisbane, but by Maunsell Wickes here in Sydney and by Beaver Galleries in Canberra.

But Peter is also what we might call a 'curator's artist'. One day I received a call from Lou Klepac, who was concerned that Peter deserved a wider audience and perhaps a regional gallery survey. I had been working as a freelance writer/curator for Orange Regional Gallery under the directorship of the late Alan Sisley. Lou recommended that I look at Peter's work and take it from there, which I did, and Alan Sisley supported the project wholeheartedly.

As a busy clinical academic I was immediately attracted to Peter's work, and studying it became a tonic to the hectic pace of the day, but I was interested in where this work came from, its evolution if you like. It has been suggested that Peter might share an artistic lineage with the *Macchiaioli* painters, a group of young Florentine artists of the 1850s and

1860s, who were emerging from the constraints of their traditional academic instruction, brought up as they were on the historical /mythological subject matter of traditional Italian painting. These artists sought to identify intimate, often agrarian contemporary subjects for their paintings. In his essay for the ORG catalogue, which was called *Mysterious Realities*, Sasha indeed referred to the similarity between the Macchiaioli and Peter's work, especially in terms 'of their 'subtle tonality' and narrow 'field of enquiry'. But Peter's work is depopulated. There are no human figures to generate defined temporal narratives or provide distractions of scale and proportion. The viewer is invited into the pictorial space for an intimate adventure.

I think we can sometimes overthink and over-attribute artistic influences, and while there are similarities between Peter's work and some of the *Macchiaioli* painters, most of their work was focused on representing the gentle narratives of everyday life, the authentic rather than the mythological or historical mega-dramas of traditional Italian painting, produced, as it invariably was, within a model of city-state patronage. If we are going to discuss the depiction of the everyday, perhaps illuminated by natural light through a door or window, we might as well discuss Vermeer.

Influences can often be overplayed and conjured out of simple appreciation. I'll give just one example of this. When Peter visited the ORG during his survey, he took the opportunity of looking at part of the Mary Turner Collection hanging in our upstairs gallery. Even though the room was dominated by well-known modern Australian masterpieces, I found Peter stopped dead in his tracks and mesmerised by the smallest painting in the room, a 12.5 x 18.4 cm oil on cardboard landscape, painted in 1918 by another New Zealand born Australian artist, Roland Wakelin. Peter had not been aware of this work because it had been acquired by Mary Turner straight from the artist during her time at Macquarie Galleries, which of course represented Wakelin. 'You can't paint better than that', Peter said. However, we've not discussed that painting since, or Max Meldrum or any of the so-called Australian tonal realists.

Peter has followed his own path and his complete mastery of a suggestive rather than illustrative or proscriptive visual language opens up unique imaginative experiences for the viewer. 'Like a waking dream', writes Peter! In the exhibition, *Into the Light*, the very title plays with the notion that the viewer is transported into the pictorial space and can gaze into the light and move in their mind's eye through portals, round corners or enter other gardens or rooms. An exhibition lasts a short while, but Peter's work is timeless. However, the magic of Peter's paintings is captured in *Transfigured Realities*, and Sasha's insightful and comprehensive commentary of Peter's practice will repay close reading, so I commend this beautiful book to you all.

Andrew Flatau, 2018