

MOVING RIGHT ALONG

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In a world where life seems to be changing with unprecedented rapidity, where change is a constant, the stories we tell ourselves are more important than ever before. And while this fable about our time being unlike any other is an old story, it is still true and must be told again today.

Tom Moore works in blown glass, an ancient technique, but his images, narratives and settings are completely contemporary. His fantastical world embraces gorgeous birds and animals that have already hybridised with modern automobiles and airplanes, and is inhabited by exquisite creatures that are morphing to inhabit a universe that seems quite as ominous as it is beautiful. (Are those skies weeping?) To my mind, Tom's drawings of the now nearly-obsolete incandescent light-bulb, once the iconic image of the 'bright idea', are emblematic of the perplexing challenges that we confront today: the little face staring at us is an ür-face of human alertness but also a reminder of the power of the imagination.

Tom's evocation of spectacular beauty living amid barely-managed chaos is an allegory of a contemporary world we all recognise. It is in constant motion: his characters are active, getting about their business, flying and rolling and paddling and sailing from one spot to another, always in transit, sometimes in transition. Each spritely light-filled figure appears to move with self-motivated vigour, their spindly legs purposeful. They plunge into action insouciantly, they take to the air with aplomb. Many of Tom's figures are gravity-defying, others have cannily adapted to life on the water — the pickle boy hitches a ride with a spud — and the *Tadpolecamper*, a personage as much as a vehicle, is proclaimed as the 'Actual missing link between amphibians and mobile homes'.

Speaking of missing links, look at the bottles used for ferries or the beaky bottle-bird transporting that carrot-nosed character: humble, ubiquitous, totally necessary even today, one of the oldest forms made by glassblowers, bottles carry messages from the ancient world into the present.

Tom's drawings show the sources of his imagery in Surrealist sketches and contemporary cartoons and comics — they have the same feral immediacy, which translates to the glass figures — and some of his

characters, like SpudBoy and Potato Head, recall the celebrated vegetable-man by the sixteenth century Italian painter Arcimboldo. Tom's creation of an entire universe of hybrids shows the same allegorical impulse that fuelled Hieronymus Bosch's *Garden of Earthly Delights*, with its menagerie of hybrid beings. Tom works within a venerable tradition: it includes medieval bestiaries (the gorgeous raiment of the striped birds recalls parti-coloured hose), the exquisite porcelain monkey orchestras from Meissen, entire tribes of Venetian glass figurines, the nineteenth century nonsense rhymes that Edward Lear illustrated with his spindly personages (Lear was an accomplished ornithological draftsman) and, last but not least, the spiky resourceful energetic animals in Dr Seuss's much loved books for children.

What matters here is that these old lineages are harnessed to the situation in Australia today and set moving. I mean movement in two senses, which overlap and intermingle in the works in a kind of interactive dialogue. All Tom Moore's characters move — they cannot stand still (though they seem frozen in each moment), they are busy making their world through action rather than simply existing in it. And this urgency is embodied in the way Tom makes his characters move through a variety of different media. Doodle to digital, here is an entire artistic spectrum on the move,

from pencil drawings to new media: from the initial drawings, to their manifestation as individual glass figures, to groupings with painted backdrops like mini museum dioramas, some located in Adelaide street scenes, to complex tableaux assembled in photographs and prints, to animations that make actual the constant movement that was previously implied. Here we see every moment in the various stages of the life of these characters and the narratives they inhabit.

Importantly, in this complex world challenge is met by good-heartedness, by evident amity and co-operation, by deploying a finely-honed sense of the absurd. Despite some anxiety, most of Tom's folk manage to hold on to that quality of bright enjoyment of life that Italians call *allegria*. Tom's world is a riot, it's a celebration, it's full to the brim with life. The modernist dictum that 'less is more' is often attributed to the German architect Mies van der Rohe (1886–1969) but any number of twentieth century artists espoused the belief. Tom Moore challenges this belief in the exhibition's title, with the abundant energy of his world. A maximalist rather than a minimalist, he believes that 'Everything matters: if you think about it, less is actually less...' What more can one say?

