

## **NOTES IN RESPONSE TO THE WORK OF JULIAN TWIGG**

Julian was a student of mine at RMIT University. But ask any art tutor, there is something about making art that no education system can teach.

This *property* if you like, can easily be pointed out to students of the subject, yet very many may never grasp that the materials they use or the subject they choose cannot in themselves generate a single worthwhile work. So it could be said that the property in question is the work's ability to *overcome* both subject and medium; a line becomes something else, not merely a line, a colour not a colour, a form not a form. Perhaps we can say that a successful work opens a kind of portal in subject and medium which takes us onto a new field of possibility.

Once upon a time all pictures told stories, and pictorial conventions were devised to relay these pre-organised narratives. Today, other media fulfil this task perfectly well – TV documentaries for instance - and art has moved on. Perhaps

art has always been nomadic; it moves to ever-newer ground, both disregarding and capitalising on the social environment that sustains it. But if most new art doesn't tell stories what then is it useful for? The fact is, not much art is intended to be useful. Some may see art as a way to advance a cause of some kind but most realise there are many better mediums for the purpose, just like there are better mediums to tell stories.

Art has no meaning in itself, meaning resides entirely with the viewer - an idea championed by Joseph Beuys. This German artist's ideology has since gone out of fashion along with ideology itself, but his popular concept has permeated our psyche: today no-one sensibly expects art to tell them anything. So it's up to the spectator, but let us recognise that the work also plays an active part in this. If a work of art - even for a second - manages to transport us somewhere we haven't been before, if it manages to evade the conventionally segmented world we usually inhabit, then it is a remarkable work.

If we look out onto Port Phillip Bay, there is something we will never see - it is an image. Neither is what we see a composite of images. For an image to exist, life must be absent. Time and space must be eradicated by some device – a camera for instance. What we really see out on the bay are perceptions mediated by the brain and the imperfect organ of sight. As one's eye moves across the view, an infinite number of complex elements inseparably flow through our

consciousness and some aspects of the whole are committed to the storehouse of experience. How can an artist convey this ever-fluid, imperfect experience without resorting to 'images'?

In the early 90's when it was still the proper thing to do, I learned a lot about French deconstruction theory. (Interestingly, my Word program still tells me 'deconstruction' isn't a word). I studied Gilles Deleuze among others, and of all the things I gleaned from him, one continues to be of lasting value. While all the cultural theorists around him seemed consumed by negativity, it was Deleuze's belief in art's potential through the condition of *becoming* that interested me. I interpreted this complex idea in my own way and it has come to mean something crucial. It is the notion that if art has a future it must avoid our way of *arresting* things - it can only be an active force if it locates a station where language cannot colonise it.

Perspective, that masterstroke of Renaissance thought to create the illusion of depth, is excellent for eliminating any semblance of reality. Proficient draftsmanship, that beacon in the tower of Western art, is the perfect means to cut out objects and isolate them from the world where they are truly active. Julian Twigg doesn't use either device. And he doesn't paint ships and ocean either. He paints *shipness* and *oceanity*. He paints these things in the process of 'becoming', and this, I believe, is a very real situation indeed. Julian knows what painting itself proffers. And on that subject, here is a quote from NY: *Some say painting is dead. Too much mouth not enough eyes.*

Robert Hollingworth, 10.08.01

An Essay to accompany the exhibition, *Passing Trade* by Julian Twigg.

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