Front Matter

Antipodes Editors

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About the cover

“Woden Waiting”
John Cattapan
1992-93
oil on linen
195 x 330 cms

“Woden Waiting” is part of a cycle of works that has developed from my obsession with urban identity and its attendant darker side. The painting was done in 1992 while I was living in Canberra, a constructed capital city that has been superimposed on the Australian bush. Canberra as a protected vision of planned, dense, urban containment was overtaken earlier this century by the automobile. Cars and flawless highways became important signs of expansion. And so the Woden Valley is one of a number of interconnected satellite suburbs. The office buildings, shopping malls, and perfect rows of tiered car parks present themselves as competition to the rich spectacle of the surrounding Brindabella Mountains.

“Woden Waiting” is, in essence, a commentary on the effects of a pristine, ordered, but alienating environment on its inhabitants. One thing that everyone who lives in Canberra feels is the horror vacui of so much open unattended, manicured space—Canberra has the largest green acreage per person of any Australian capital city. The notion of a “chance encounter therefore is improbable.

The image of an accident in Woden Waiting” stands first as a metaphor for a desire for the unexpected—literally a chance encounter. Second, the accident scene represents the idea of disruption or indeed derangement—the surreal urban disaster of the foreground takes place as a disembodied, nocturnal vision.

Drifting across the surface are cryptic hieroglyphic-like markings. They stand for an unseen, spontaneous “atmosphere” of information—a kind of automatic transmission. Blown up from doodles, the markings are, like the narrative of the painting, a stage intervention that reinforces the desire for “something (anything) to happen.”

John Cattapan
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This issue brings Antipodes into its tenth year of publication. Trying to think of a way to tie this fact into the "Editor's Notes," I decided to take a sentimental journey back to March 1987, the date of Volume 1-Number 1 of Antipodes. It had been a long time since I had looked at the Inaugural Issue, and I feared that I might shudder with embarrassment. Much to my surprise it didn't look all that different from the December 1995 edition.

Certainly the fiction and poetry selections were impressive, including stories by Thea Astley, Barbara Harshman, Gerard Windsor, and B. Wongar, along with an excerpt from a novel by Thomas Keneally. Poets represented included Kevin Hart, Les Murray (Les A. Murray in those days), A.D. Hope, Fay Zwickly, Alan Bond, and Philip Mead. Of course, many of these writers have published in subsequent issues of the journal and some have been the subjects of essays.

There were three articles focusing on the theme of "Australian/American Literary Connections." Brian Kiernan talked about "Connections and Disconnections", Carolyn Bliss discussed how Australian writing could be "naturalized" for Americans; and Jack Bennett compared Willa Cather and Henry Handel Richardson. All three of these essayists are still active members in the AAALS, with Carolyn Bliss assuming the Association's presidency this year. The interview with Shirley Hazzard was conducted by Dennis Danvers, who has had two novels published since.

With great optimism I submitted the first issue to the Council of Editors of Learned Journals' Annual Contest to be entered into the "New Journals" division. Of course, it didn't receive a prize. One of the judges found the whole project distasteful, objected to the overuse of rules (lines), and predicted an early death for Antipodes, noting that "it was obviously very expensive to produce," then adding that "it would be difficult to sustain interest in such an obscure subject." The other two judges, I recall, rather liked the journal. Antipodes probably still uses too many rules, and it is expensive to produce—back then we didn't even have a four-color cover and perfect binding, just staples. But the journal has survived, all the while making its subject less obscure.

Robert Ross