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GODFREY MILLER

Godfrey Miller passed away just over forty years ago in May 1964, yet there is no diminution of interest in his work. If anything, his reputation is higher than ever. His aphorisms and insights are equally valid and memorable....

time shakes off adornment of facts

reality is made of cadences, rhythms, materials - all that sciences ignore.

The world is a beautiful mathematical unity which is unfolding in accord with its exact nature. If humans like or do not like to join, so much the good or bad in their future. But being a family of Nations, a family of men is a hindrance. The great tragedy of our age is that education did not [allow], and even prevented, the mind working in rhythm between whole and part. First whole, then sovereign part. We had to wait.

The chief oversight: that intuition to make a whole was not active and working in us, in matter of world health before we learned by instances old disease spread".

When the struggle of forging thought was beginning in Western Civilization, slowly evolving from a mythological past, similarities might be drawn with Pre-Socratics like Heraclitus"from the strain of binding opposites comes harmony". "The harmony past knowing sounds more deeply than the known". (Fragments 46 & 47)

Having passed through the nightmare of Gallipoli, Miller was not going to be distracted by self serving politicians again. Not much attention has been paid to his internally revolutionising exposure to the essence of traditional Chinese philosophy and artifacts and Japanese artistic principles; Miller studied and respected the way their creative imagination supported the cultural poise of their societies - against which the materialism of Western values cut a poor figure. Indian ideas generally also played an essential role: he maintained a loyal adherence to their intellectual integrity - Tagore, Adi Shankarcarya, Buddhism and Lao Tsu.

The most consistent and moving idea of his life was of course notion of 'Unity', a concept which was his main impulse as well as a metaphysical all-embracing principle. It explains the consistent metamorphosis of individual works over many years from the initial structure through a steady accretion of marks, repeatedly testing half-formed internal revelations, to realize (in the literal sense of 'making real') the Unity which he felt underlay each work.

A certain contained, harmonic principle informs the realistic and rural subjects of the 1920s back in Melbourne. This, in part was due to the continued influence of his teacher Alfred Henry O'Keefe in Dunedin before the war. Remembering that his first profession was as a draughtsman/architect, it was in modeling and drawing that he enrolled at the National Gallery School. But the significant learning phase of his career was in London at the Slade in the 1930's - both externally and internally: there was exposure to modern art, modernist ideas, philosophy (he became a fellow of the Royal Institute of Philosophy 1935-9), and a full round of international lectures and exhibitions. His Slade experience brought him in touch with first-rate draughtsmen (Tonks, and Prix de Rome scholar Charles Jackson). He visits Paris, Florence and Venice, then Andalusia and Toledo; he takes photographs of Islamic Art in Spain and Turkey, and of classic architecture in Greece. At the same time, and for the rest of his life, Miller's work embraced abstraction: various experiments in drawing, some notebooks recall Leonardo's methods (Science Museum) and cubist still life.

In October 1938, he leaves England for Melbourne, visiting family in New Zealand in March and May 1938. Finding Melbourne too cold, by May 1939, he has taken a studio at the rear of 54 Young Street in Sydney. There he launches into an intensive series of work. He begins with sweeping landscapes of the Harbour, and the Botanical Gardens, cityscapes, suburban landscapes, the Hawkesbury River – in short, most of the various series which were pursued over the next 25 years. As Miller moves into teaching at the National Art School in 1945 (by invitation of Douglas Dundas) he is able to resume his figure drawing which evolves into his characteristically abbreviated and transformational work on paper. As his fame spreads, three phases may be observed: of gradually integrating density (in, say, *Trees in Quarry*, previously in the Merz collection); of a sharpened sense of rhythm (in the 1962 Tate *Triptych* and many of the landscapes); and finally the brilliantly clear versions of *Summer*. Somewhere within the last group are the ultimate religious paintings, represented in this exhibition with the *Crucifixion*. Of these he wrote words that might form a fitting summation of his whole life's work: "I have given peace forms to life".

John Henshaw, 2004