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Introduction

He remains both fascinating and enigmatic. From a well-to-do New Zealand family he led a solitary life in Melbourne, London and, for the last 25 years, in Sydney. An urban hermit (they find safety in the anonymity of crowded places) he had no known partner and few close friends; his main, though intermittent, social contact was with his students at ESTC where the teacher-pupil relationship maintained a suitable psychological distance.

With a mere forty to fifty finished works over a lifetime, he could have fallen into the “odd ball” category – of interest to a narrow minority. Whilst such a group do form the core, he is of serious interest to a much wider circle. There are the artists, who almost universally respect his draftsmanship, and there are those critics and collectors who actively enjoy the more minimal and more suggestive results to be found in the large body of unfinished works. Numbering in the hundreds (and valued well below the six figure sums for major finished works) these are available to a broader public and have hence allowed a wider appreciation of his work to spread.

Miller’s paintings are layered. First, the underlying grid is pencilled on, then, by a slow and painstaking accretion of strokes, the image emerges. The broad and loose dating for most of his works suggest this process could take years. At a particular moment a crystalline scintillation sets the whole canvas shimmering. Taken too far this crystalline sparkle can overload both eye and mind and the aesthetic reaction can come to a halt. Just when this point is reached is a matter of personal taste. For some, the result is seen as overworked - Patrick White for one: he was keen to acquire a work but Miller delayed until he felt it was finished; at which point White had lost interest. For others that very intensity is precisely the quality they seek and admire.

Whilst none of the works in this show are finished (by the artist’s own rigorous standards) they cover the overall spectrum, ranging from the spare and suggestive *Building, quarry and trees* to the more saturated energy of *Trees* (cover) through the intensely rhythmical verticals in *Forest*. Their dating is not easy. Ann Wookey has suggested earlier dates, based mainly on his iconography; Robert Henshaw and myself feel later dates are suggested by the relatively clear canvasses, though this may also be explained by the fact they appear to have been unstretched early in their life and been in a folder since then. Titles are occasionally problematic also. The more embryonic the form, the wider the possibilities for

interpretation. Thus *Forest* carries a suggestive connection with the human figures present in *Triptych with Figures*, c 1938-54, (Tate Gallery) or *Figure Group*, c 1951-7 (AGNSW).

Like other noted Modernists – Mondrian, Klee, Kandinsky – we find an underlying philosophical position at variance with the secular humanism that dominated the 20th century – at least in the West. In Miller's case it was anthroposophy. Next, his palette was informed by Rudolf Steiner's theories concerning the particular psychological weight he attributed to different colours. Finally, his geometry is vital: here the Golden Section, and other geometric ratios, play a significant part in both the outer proportions and the inner subdivisions of each work. The Golden Section holds an ancient fascination. Expressed arithmetically, the ratios found in Fibonacci numbers (1,1,2,3,5,8,13,21... with each number the sum of the previous two) are unique: each number is (about) 1.61 of its predecessor and 0.61 of the following number (the approximation getting closer as the numbers rise). With instantiation of these ratios in the growth patterns of the living world, it's tempting to assume they play a deep, though unexplained role in our make-up.

If this arithmetic is not too difficult, even for non-mathematicians, the more esoteric metaphysical positions can be harder to fathom – and hence to share. The tougher sceptics may scoff, but as long as anyone perceives a certain numinous quality emanating from Godfrey Miller's works we can only keep an open mind on the matter.

CN, 2010

Bibliography

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Henshaw, John, "Godfrey Miller", Darlinghurst Galleries, 1965

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