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Triptych with Figures

c.1944–50



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NOT ON DISPLAY

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|-------------|--|
| ARTIST | Godfrey Miller 1893–1964 |
| MEDIUM | Oil paint on canvas |
| DIMENSIONS | Support: 654 × 1041 mm |
| COLLECTION | Tate |
| ACQUISITION | Purchased 1961 |
| REFERENCE | T00434 |

CATALOGUE ENTRY

Godfrey Miller 1893–1964

[T00434](#) **Triptych with Figures** c.1944–50

Inscribed 'Godfrey Miller' b.r. and again on the stretcher

Oil on canvas, 25 3/4 x 41 (65 x 104)

Purchased from the artist through the Whitechapel Art Gallery (Grant-in-Aid) 1961

Exh: Sydney Group, David Jones' Art Gallery, Sydney, September-October 1954 (68) as 'Triglyph with Figures'; *Recent Australian Painting*, Whitechapel Art Gallery, London, June-July 1961 (66) as 'Triptych' 1957-60

Lit: John Henshaw (ed.) with foreword by Peter Bellew, *Godfrey Miller* (Sydney 1965), n.p., repr. pl.2 (dated c.1938-55)

This [painting](#), like a number of the artist's other works, is a study of diversity in unity, a theme that preoccupied him from the 1930s. The [triptych](#) form was adopted to express (a) a law or principle, (b) its opposite, (c) its 'inversion' (cf. the term in music), i.e. differences in timing, etc. As he stated in a letter of 23 January 1962, this led to 'the Figure with the Three Entities. To me it is a Figure of great charm. It is endless in its variations and elasticity and it is firm in its mathematical ordering. I believe the Truth about it can neither be spoken or written. It is not three similar things added together: it is not one big thing divided into 3 ... My Triptych, I hope I modestly suggest shows many Things. How a Whole is greater or great because of its giving up its monster wholeness: the Parts have an enhanced life - by their going into whole. I painted the group of figures as enunciating the Whole: the rhythms of leaves, lights as defining the Parts ...

'What I am feeling in creating Figure of Triptych is that though language can assist us, the Light real Truth can once come in the visual arts: where all is given at once. In fact we on this level should have no addition, no division. A Thing just exists alongside, as the panels in Triptych, its neighbours, movements etc.'

In a further letter of 6-9 February 1962 he added: 'I have left on my painting as a frame a narrow strip of wood into which and from which my mathematical points have gone and influences emerged, and which really should, if a Gallery refrained be included in the framing.'

He was unable to remember exactly when this work was painted except that it was done mainly in the 1940s and may have been completed about 1950; he thought that it probably took about four or five years in all. It is almost certainly the picture exhibited with the Sydney Group in 1954 as 'Triglyph with Figures', but this title was a mistake. The possibility that he did some further work on it after the exhibition cannot be ruled out.

Published in:

Ronald Alley, *Catalogue of the Tate Gallery's Collection of Modern Art other than Works by British Artists*, Tate Gallery and Sotheby Parke-Bernet, London 1981, pp.516-7, reproduced p.516

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c.1935

