

THE MORAL MEANING OF WILDERNESS



JUAN

DAVILA

THE MORAL MEANING OF WILDERNESS

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Griffith University Art Gallery

Monash University Museum of Art

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Cover: *Albert Street*, 2007 (detail)
Frontispiece: *Wilderness*, 2010 (detail)



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Foreword

It is a great honour to present *The moral meaning of wilderness*, an innovative and critically engaging exhibition of recent work by Juan Davila, one of Australia's leading artists. The exhibition represents a radical shift in Davila's practice, which makes a significant contribution to recent discourses concerning art's relationship to nature, politics, identity and subjectivity in our post-industrial age.

Juan Davila was born in Chile in 1946 and moved to Melbourne in 1974. He soon established himself as a significant presence on the Australian and international art scene. His work was the subject of a survey exhibition at the Drill Hall Gallery in 2002, a major retrospective exhibition at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Sydney in 2006 and the National Gallery of Victoria in 2007. Davila's work has featured in a wide range of significant group exhibitions nationally and internationally, including the prestigious *Documenta 12* in Kassel, Germany, in 2007.

In *The moral meaning of wilderness* Davila pursues his exploration of the role of art as a means of social, cultural and political analysis. While many contemporary artists turned away from representation of the landscape, due to its perceived allegiance to outmoded forms of national identity and representation, Davila has recently sought to revisit and reconsider our surroundings *au naturel*. His paintings are, at first view, striking representations of nature, at a time when the environment is as much a political as a cultural consideration. With technical virtuosity Davila has produced a body of work that depicts beauty and pictorial emotion while addressing modern society's ambivalent link to nature and what he regards as increasing consumerism in art today that dulls our capacity to observe nature and reduces our ability to explore our inner selves. The paintings, created since 2003, are undertaken *en plein air*, a pre-modern technique based on speed of execution *in situ*, and the use of large scale canvases characteristic of history painting. He has also employed other techniques such as studio painting and representations of the landscape through the sublime, the historical, memory and modernity. They attest to the international reputation he has gained for his innovation in painting.

Juan Davila's work is extensively represented in the collections of the Australian National University, Griffith University and Monash University, and we are especially pleased to collaborate as university art museums to present this major exhibition focusing on new developments in Juan Davila's *oeuvre*.

The Australian National University Library is also the proud recipient of Juan Davila's library. The Juan Davila Collection comprises 1046 monographs and 66 serials in several languages and covers the fields that have been influential in shaping his intellectual world view: art theory and criticism, art history, architecture, the decorative arts, photography, fashion, popular culture, radical and sexual politics.

In 2008 Davila was a contributing curator to the exhibition *Primary Views: Artists Curate the Monash University Collection*, presented by the Monash University Museum of Art and in 2009 the Griffith University Art Gallery presented DAVILA: GRAPHIC, a major survey of work on paper spanning four decades, and published new writing which examined the artist's subtle inversion of values associated with the 'panorama device' and 'registration', in terms of a print-making project hinged on identity and mimicry.

The opening date at the Drill Hall Gallery was chosen to coincide with the conference *Independence! Two centuries of struggle*, organised by the Association of Iberian and Latin American Studies of Australia, hosted by the ANU Centre for Latin American Studies. The exhibition will be presented in 2011 at Griffith University Art Gallery in Brisbane and at Monash University Museum of Art in Melbourne, with related public programs and academic reflection.

We would like to express our sincere thanks to Juan Davila for agreeing to present this significant new body of work at the Drill Hall Gallery, Griffith University Art Gallery and Monash University Museum of Art. Equally, we acknowledge Dr Kate Briggs for her essays *Painting, an act of faith: moments in the work of Juan Davila* and *After image*, which are scholarly additions to the literature of contemporary art.

We are indebted to Kalli Rolfe for her support of the exhibition, to Chong Weng-Ho for his design of the catalogue, and we acknowledge with gratitude our respective sponsors and staff for their significant contributions which have made the exhibition and tour possible.

Nancy Sever
Director
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The Australian National University

Simon Wright
Director
Griffith University Art Gallery
Griffith University

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Monash University Museum of Art
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Painting, an act of faith

Painting, an act of faith

Moments in the work of Juan Davila

KATE BRIGGS



Painting setup on Philip Island. Photographs courtesy Juan Davila.

IN September 2006 a major retrospective of Juan Davila’s work opened at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Sydney before traveling to Melbourne later that year. A number of the reviews of the retrospective made passing or quizzical reference to the apparition of beauty in Davila’s recent work, notably the portraits of women. These works indicated a new project, a new strategy, one that, while apparently in marked contrast, is to be understood in relation to some of the strategies he has previously employed. This project is materialized here in over twenty new works. At a time of impending ecological crisis, one that will draw in all possible forms and agencies of social life – political, economic and mythical – Davila presents a contemplation on the nature of experience threaded with the political commentary to which we are accustomed. Introduced with four previous works dealing with the representation of women and the gaze, and collected under a title, *The Moral Meaning of Wilderness*, a thesis is articulated in the agile virtuosity of someone who can actually paint. We find amid these landscapes, moments of extreme and luminous beauty. The question of the sublime is raised alongside the act of sublimation. Amid ravenous impressions of Australian landscapes, contemporary and astute, figures emerge to contemplate and complicate this question of our relation to the wild.

These portraits, landscapes, and acts of commentary on the political landscape return to pre-modern techniques of painting as a mode of expression and experience, a critique of “the current multimedia approach which by definition erases any trace of the personal.”¹ Painted *plein air* on large canvases in bays and national parks around Melbourne, the landscapes are tied to titles designating particular sites (such as *Albert St*, 2007) or issues (such as *Australia: Nuclear Waste Dumping Ground*, 2007) also pursued in smaller canvases depicting a nuclear power plant on the horizon (*Melbourne’s Nuclear Plant at Wattle Park*, 2008) or a grotesque modern architectural form in a reference to the proposed development of a pulp mill that would trash a river (*Pulp Mill on the River Tamar*, 2009). Alongside these expositions of the devastation wrought by capital appropriation, the question of the nature of experience is elaborated in variations on portraits of women, painted from life and dressed in



Albert Street, 2007, oil on canvas 185 × 235 cm



Australia: Nuclear Waste Dumping Ground, 2007, oil on canvas 185 × 235 cm



*Melbourne's Nuclear Plant
At Wattle Park, 2008*
oil on canvas 90 × 110 cm

renditions of reverie, images evoked from childhood books and fantasies, women who mythical, imagined, or contemporary, deliver their presences to be held. If, as Davila notes, representations of women and the natural world require “the expression of unconscious feeling rather than moral, nationalistic, communicational or commercial foreclosure”,² the emergence of figures through the landscape, their integration within the landscape, and the incredible virtuosity of Davila’s brush work, where the quality of the air itself comes to life, is most striking.

This is epitomized, for example, in the portrait of a woman reading (*Untitled*, 2008) in that space rendered in coloured strokes above the book and next to her body, a

grey mauve air, as if depicting the force of her concentration. The act of the artist, in a calligraphy of colour, calls attention to the still presence of the possible. Using a renaissance technique whereby the colour of the undercoat shows through in places, in a particular animating light as if the image is lit from within, the colour emanates outward rather than being simply overlaid. Around this reading woman is a warmth and luminosity, air circulating in the form of light and colour around her. Her stillness, the movement of the paint, the enigmatic marks, depict her reverie in the moment of reading. The texture of the moment, impossible to capture in realism, is conveyed in the colour and brush stroke. The marks left by the brush, traces of movement, indicate and



*Pulp Mill on the
River Tamar, 2009*
oil on canvas 90 × 110 cm

capture moments where experience is inappropriable / a word, we might note, that is not recognized by the spell check function of Microsoft Word®™. In this essay I would like to consider what is happening in these moments, what allows for this apparition of beauty, and why the inappropriable is of importance, as more than a gesture, today.

To begin with, let us note a radical shift in the depiction of women within Davila’s work.³ To survey some of the recent pieces we might note the airy lucidity of the figures in the large panorama detailing the history and settlement of Melbourne, 2008, the portrait of Carmen Gallardo, *Guacolda del Carmen Gallardo*, 2004, the painting of the young woman in *The Edge of Melbourne Spm: Keep Ithaka Always in Your Mind*,

2005-6, and from this exhibition, the portraits of Nina Sers, 2008, and another portrait of Carmen Gallardo, this time before a starry night sky, *Guacolda del Carmen Gallardo*, 2007. In contrast, we might remember some of the earlier figures of the phallic woman contextualized in reference to the terrors of the Pinochet regime (for example, *El Enamorado*, 1974; *Leda*, 1975; *Untitled*, 1974; *La Fuerza*, 1975),⁴ the vexations of modernity (for example, the depiction of Marilyn in *Miss Sigmund*, 1981),⁵ and then the hybrid figures of the transsexual. The latter is emblematic of a series of cultural and symbolic connotations, not least the hybrid, the *mestizaje*, figure of the margin, born of two races to find a place in neither (for example, *Flower Vendor*, 1993). The transvestite



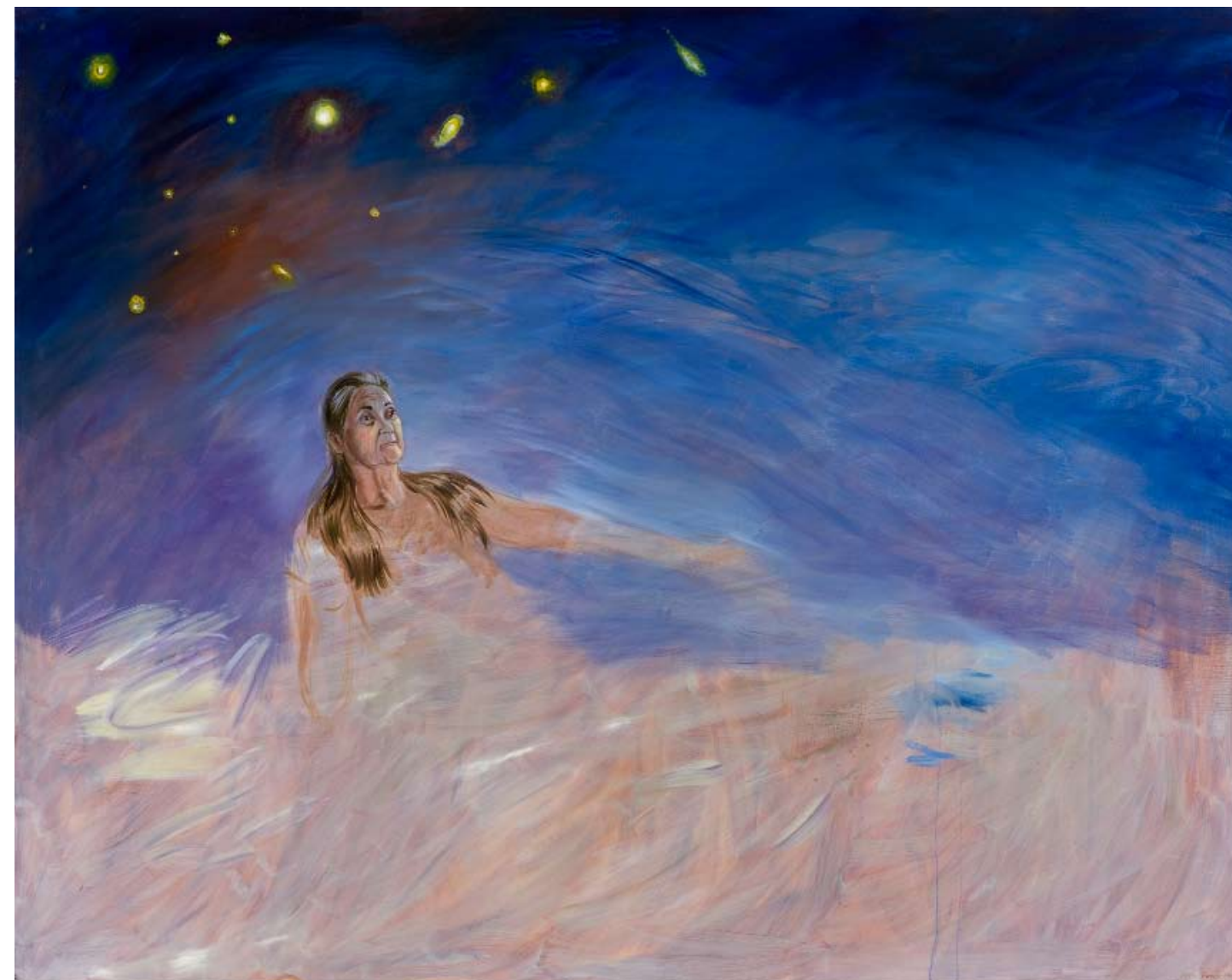
Untitled, 2008, oil on canvas 120 × 90 cm

is one who dresses as the other gender, the transsexual one who has or takes on physical attributes of the other anatomical sex and who in the process of doing so, may have for a time attributes of both: breasts and a penis, for example. The profanation evident in Davila's parody of various public figures in politics and the art world follows a particular logic, aimed at dislodging some of the narcissism of contemporary culture whether exemplified by those figures Davila targets or the people and systems that promote them. Its effectiveness is evident in the diplomatic crisis between Chile, Bolivia, Colombia, Peru and Venezuela produced by the depiction of *The Liberator Simon Bolívar*, 1994 as a transsexual.

We might provisionally characterize a first period in Davila's work from 1974 to 1978, and a second period of savage quotation featuring the comic strip and phallic figures from 1979 to 1982 and the years from 1982 through 1994 of which the transvestite and transsexual are emblematic.⁶ Then come the figures of the refugee / men and women who appear like us yet are subjected to conditions of the concentration camp, in images depicting or titled *Woomera*.⁷ These women have to some degree already entered pictorial realism which allows us to engage with the extremity of their circumstance and the brutality of that circumstance – one that as Australians we have either failed to prevent or have conspired to create. It might be suggested that these women and their counterparts have ushered in a transformation in the depiction of women within Davila's work. Evident from 2002 is a characteristic of these recent portraits: tranquil and airy, grazed by the light of soft and refined definition; elegant grace, images of faith. To describe these recent works in terms of grace and faith – is that not to risk manifest misunderstanding? How can I make this claim, why would I make this statement? To draw out what I see as the *jouissance* evident in these portraits, in these new works: A commemoration of something so often overlooked, erased, outmoded and moved beyond. The rational economy and obsessive endeavour have no room to give to the freedom of such grace which as an intimate extimacy can strangely constitute a threat.

The apparition of beauty, a state of grace

The portrait of *Guacolda del Carmen Gallardo*, 2007, one of the first in the new series of works, was followed by two land or seascapes, *Australia: Nuclear Waste Dumping Ground*, 2007 and *Albert St*, 2007, titles that were added later, then another *Albert St*, 2007 that moves from pictorial landscape



Guacolda del Carmen Gallardo, 2007, oil on canvas 185 × 235 cm

to the plain, pristine white of an empty canvas within the same frame. A passage by Brazilian writer, Clarice Lispector, seems to me relevant here:

State of Grace (*extract*)

Anyone who has experienced a state of grace will know what I am talking about. I am not referring to inspiration, which is a special grace that comes to those who struggle with art.

The state of grace to which I refer cannot be used for anything. It would appear to come just to let us know it really exists. When in this state, the tranquil happiness which radiates from people and things is enhanced by a lucidity which can only be described as light because in a state of grace everything is so very, very bright. It is the lucidity of those who are no longer surmising: they simply know. Just that: they know. Do not ask me what they know, for I can only reply in the same childish manner: they simply know.

And there is the physical bliss which cannot be compared to anything. The body is transformed into a gift. And one feels it is a gift because one is experiencing at source the unmistakable good fortune of material existence.

In a state of grace, one sometimes perceives the deep beauty, hitherto unattainable, of another person. And everything acquires a kind of halo which is not imaginary: it comes from the splendour of the almost mathematical light emanating from people and things. One starts to feel that everything in existence – whether people or things – breathes and exhales the subtle light of energy. The world’s truth is impalpable.

It bears no relation to what I vaguely imagine the state of grace of saints to be. For that is a state of grace I myself have never experienced and cannot even envis-

age. No, this is simply the state of grace of an ordinary person who suddenly becomes totally real since he is ordinary, human, and recognizable.

The discoveries made in this state of grace cannot be described or conveyed. So when I find myself in a state of grace, I sit quietly without uttering a word. As if awaiting an annunciation. But unheralded by those angels who presumably preceded the state of grace of the saints. As if the angel of life were coming to announce the world.⁸

This passage beautifully articulates what French psychoanalyst, Jacques Lacan, referred to as feminine *jouissance*, an experience that may be described within religious discourse, but is by no means confined to that domain though rather perhaps co-opted by it. Lispector describes a state of grace *as if* awaiting an annunciation, *as if* the angel of life were coming. *As if* demarcates a space between the experience and a discourse that might be taken up to describe it, or even to ratify or to prove it, but no, this is not the grace of saints but of an ordinary person, “an ordinary person who suddenly becomes... real”: ‘ordinary, human, recognizable’. Lispector goes on to warn that it “is better if the state of grace is short-lived as it would disappear if we were to start demanding answers”,⁹ it could also become addictive, and such happiness could be dangerous and make one less sensitive to human suffering. Indeed “We must not forget that the state of grace is only a tiny aperture which allows us to glimpse a sort of tranquil Paradise, but it is not an entrance, nor does it give us the right to eat of the fruits of the orchards.”¹⁰ A glimpse but not an entrance.

We might think here also of Giorgio Agamben’s discussion of the halo as a supplement, a transcendence imminent in the perception of the irreparability of the world: “This imperceptible trembling of the finite that makes its limits indeterminate and allows it to blend, to make itself

whatever, is the tiny displacement that every thing must accomplish in the messianic world. Its beatitude is that of a potentiality that comes only after the act, of matter that does not remain beneath the form, but surrounds it with a halo.”¹¹ This beatitude, ‘a potentiality that comes only after the act’ is reminiscent of Lacan’s comment that a “notion as precise and articulate as grace is irreplaceable where the psychology of the act is concerned, and we don’t find anything equivalent in classic academic psychology.”¹² After the imaginary plays of comparison and attribution, the subject momentarily steps outside the orbit of the Other; it is in this temporary dislocation that an act addresses the real and thus changes the subject’s relation to and place in the symbolic. The passage by Lispector continues:

To have known grace is to have experienced something which appears to redeem the human condition while accentuating the strict limitations of that condition. After experiencing grace, the human condition is revealed in all its wretched poverty, thereby teaching us to love more, to forgive more, and show greater faith. One begins to have a certain confidence in suffering and its ways, which can so often become unbearable. Some days are so arid and empty I would give years of my life in exchange for a few minutes’ grace.¹³

This passage was first published on April 6, 1968 in Lispector’s weekly column for a Brazilian newspaper, and ends with a “P.S – I am united, body and soul, with the students of Brazil in their tragic plight.”¹⁴ I would like to consider this convergence of grace, critique and activism, and the threatening extimacy of grace, (from the three angles of Lacan, Lispector and Agamben) in order to articulate what I think Davila points to with these recent works. For it is in this convergence that I see the project of this exhibition: a thesis concerning desire and the unconscious, a meditation on different forms and manifestations of *jouissance*,

driven by a will “to imagine a universe beyond the surface of our perceptions.”¹⁵

A thesis concerning modernity, the depiction of women and sexual difference

Let’s recall that the pathos founding the psychoanalytic experience is the suffering we experience “because words disrupt nature”. Rather than inhabiting an instinctual world of rapport with the environment, we are born so prematurely that experiences with our primary others are utterly formative, for we can’t survive without them and from their responses to us, we take our bearings in the expanding and mythical worlds of infancy. Words said impact with the eroticism of life bringing disharmony and a flawed knowledge about our sexuality and our mortality, our Being-unto-sex and our being mortal. “So we are divided and burdened: so many effects of this rift, for which *jouissance* is the name.”¹⁶ *Jouissance* is the term Lacan used to orient his reading of Freud. And in the course of this work an initial and broadly Freudian account gave way to a second theory of sexuation which relies on the supposition of an Other or “feminine” *jouissance* supplementary to the field of phallic sexuation with which children, men and women are all involved. While Freud introduced the question of feminine desire, at times he provided an answer to that question and instructed women such as Dora or the young female homosexual as to what they did or should desire. Lacan looked at this by questioning Freud’s complicity with the hysteric’s demand for an impotent master and opened the question of what lies outside or beyond the phallic term of the Oedipus complex in the dimensions of both feminine *jouissance* and the end of analysis. To term this Other *jouissance* “feminine” is rather misleading in that it is not presumed to be the domain only

of women; it is an experience both men and women may be open to. Lacan locates mystical experiences within the domain of feminine *jouissance*. He describes it as a phenomenon induced by the lack of signification in the Other, by that which escapes representation.

Jacques-Alain Miller has noted that the question of femininity irrupts, marking the difference between the “modern subjectivity” evoked by Lacan at the beginning of his teaching in 1953 and the contemporary subject. He states that it “is from feminine sexuality and from nowhere else that we can situate *jouissance*, properly speaking, in so far as it exceeds the phallus and the all-signifier”.¹⁷ Germán García similarly comments that Lacan was “able to posit a critique of Freud’s Oedipus by disassembling its manlike dream structure ruled by the master discourse. He then introduces division and the object a to convey, from the feminine side, the key to the onset of the analyst’s social invention”.¹⁸ This object is a semblant, it does not exist as such, it exists as a designation around which the drive turns, an absence which causes desire. To name it is a means of bringing its effects into play as part of a discourse, and if painting is a language, we see it written often enough in Davila’s work. Despite the grounding of psychoanalysis in recognition of the effects of sexual difference, this claim — linking the association of femininity with the recognition of *jouissance* per se — is contentious as many seek to minimize the specificity of this development with regards to feminine sexuation. Some persist, ironically enough, in minimizing the legacy of sexual difference, thus restricting the radical nature of Lacan’s intervention, by erasing the sexual difference he articulated on the field of Freud’s foundering.

In the medieval period, belief or credo was a matter of the heart, of one’s allegiance rather than cognitive agreement with a term of propositional logic. With modernity, the term ‘believe’ began to be used to cast doubt, to indicate something that is not certain or not given, something we are

no longer sure about. Indeed, the very idea that “believing is religiously important turns out to be a modern idea.”¹⁹ It is useful to hold onto a distinction between faith, which in its barest form we may describe as an affirmation in the face of uncertainty, and belief. I would argue that femininity, as an experience of the fall of belief, stands in a contrary position to much religion today. Feminine *jouissance*, as a rapport with the unrepresentable, is aligned with an experience of faith, accessible when the dialectic of belief evident in hysteria falls away even if only momentarily.

While the relation between feminine *jouissance* and hysteria is complex and beyond the scope of this paper, it is worth mentioning that the passage by Lispector first published in her newspaper chronicle later appears in a novel about a woman’s preparation and love for a man.²⁰ It appears as a marker on the way, wrapped or packaged in a hysteric’s dream. It would be a mistake however to assume that such *jouissance* is merely a hysteric’s dream; in fact the way Lispector used these passages illustrates the distinction between the *jouissance* she describes as grace and the fantasy of a sexual rapport evident in the novel. Clinical vignettes by Genevieve Morel point to the same distinction, as do Serge André, Willy Apollon and others who address the question of this relation.²¹ What is so contentious about feminine *jouissance* that some (analysts also) seek to deride it, dismiss it or reduce it to masochism, to a women’s propensity to suffer?²² What is it about such *jouissance* that remains out of bounds? Here Agamben’s commentary is again, I think, useful:

What the State cannot tolerate in any way, however, is that singularities form a community without affirming an identity, that humans co-belong without any representable condition of belonging (even in the form of a simple presupposition). The State, as Alain Badiou has shown, is not founded on a social bond, of which it would be the expression, but rather on the dissolution,

the unbinding it prohibits. For the State, therefore, what is important is never the singularity as such, but only its inclusion in some identity, whatever identity (but the possibility of the whatever itself being taken up without an identity is a threat the State cannot come to terms with).²³

Whatever singularity, which wants to appropriate belonging itself, its own being-in-language, and thus rejects all identity and every condition of belonging, is the principal enemy of the State. Wherever these singularities peacefully demonstrate their being in common there will be a Tiananmen, and sooner or later, the tanks will appear.²⁴

It is in light of this erasure that the presentation of such *jouissance* appears as a strategy, something like the gesture of the Falun Gong I saw the other day demonstrating outside the Chinese Consulate here in Melbourne.

Viewing is no longer placid when modernism sets in

Davila has commented that his recent works use “a style that has been repressed since the modernist break” and contends that “this much maligned realist style of painting still ... has the capacity to both represent and evoke strong emotions, and to address politics.”²⁵ Describing his previous work as “an effect of an ‘inner necessity’”, he notes that *The Edge of Melbourne 5pm: Keep Ithaka Always in Your Mind*, 2005-6 “makes a shift....being the result of a commission, [it] responds to the desire of another, albeit still responding to my own relationship to the Other.”²⁶ The strategies of earlier works have not been discarded but appear distilled in a reflection of this shifting relation to the Other and the Other’s shifting embodiment.

The floating couple in *John Batman*, 2007, articulates again the theme of the sexual encounters of colonial formations. These formations have been expounded and savagely illustrated as an enduring focus of Davila’s work. The fierce parody of early works, appearing blasphemous and almost pornographic,²⁷ call us to consider the distinctions between these three forms. If parody calls on profanation and maintains a particular relation to fiction, commemorating “in reality the absence of a proper place for human speech,”²⁸ parody and blasphemy may be distinguished in their strategies with regard to desire. While blasphemy aims at the Other in order to de-complete it, to create a space in which desire may operate, parody aims to convert privation into joy. And pornography “which maintains the intangibility of its own fantasy in the same gesture with which it brings it closer — in a mode that is unbearable to look at — is the eschatological form of parody”.²⁹ It is then hardly surprising that following up on the works of *Love’s Progress*, works of 2003 such as *Two Women on the Banks of the Yarra*, feature an impossible gaze while the Courbet/analysis series featuring *The Origin of the World*, 2002, seek to reinstate the subjectivity of the woman in repose. Along with the Woomera pieces, they usher in this third period in Davila’s work, and hence here have been included with these most recent works. The unbearable has shifted form from its brutally graphic realization in earlier images to a more logical articulation of the impossibility associated with the gaze and the viewer’s position.

The women in *Two Women on the Banks of the Yarra*, 2003, gaze elsewhere, beyond us. In one of the paintings the women are naked yet their genitals facing away from us are not offered to view, and the women are looking up but not at us. The men, in portraits stuck to the canvas, are also looking elsewhere. The modern motif of painting a woman near nature is here disrupted by hindrances to her possession by way of the gaze. Even if they appear to be positioned on display in the landscape for our gaze, they are not. Rather,



Two Women on the Banks of the Yarra, 2003, oil and collage on canvas 175 × 260 cm



John Batman, 2007, oil on canvas 185 × 235 cm

we are drawn to consider their contemplation whatever that might be. In these works, Davila was reworking modernist masters such as Manet and Courbet, producing a visual disturbance with the slippage of gaze and poses, no longer in perspective. His response to Courbet's *Woman with a Parrot*, 1866, is to adjust the nude: by "repositioning the body I have disrupted the gaze that can have sole possession of the woman. She is now with someone else, possibly an analyst, within the pictorial frame."³⁰ Where the metaphor of the parrot had been seen as a phallic creature, in *Woman with a Parrot*, 2003, Davila expands it to "a pictogram representing the Lacanian psychotic structure of holes without signifiers, as explored in the nude woman's analysis."³¹ In contrast to the subject ravaged by (the Other's) *jouissance* depicted in works from the 1980's and 90's, the paintings of the women in analysis appear in the process of articulating the failures of signification such *jouissance* produced, and hence, we might imagine, lead to these recent portraits of sanguine beauty.

In *The Studio of the Painter*, 2006, the model holding a mirror is represented in another mirror, while the painter, seated beside her contemplates a photograph depicting the image from which Courbet's painting *L'Origine du monde* was, perhaps, painted. In the lower left hand corner is a signature, G. Courbet, 1866, while next to the painting of the model is another signature: Velázquez, 1644. On the wall behind them, is a magazine cover pinned to the wall that is painted with a series of caricatures. Malévitch once noted that "the futurists, while forbidding the painting of feminine thighs, the copying of portraits, have also removed perspective."³² *The Studio of the Painter* takes those three elements into one frame in a visual parody of the field of modernity figured in the painter's use of the nude woman (filtered through a photo) and the industrialization of the city (sketched on the wall). Between these elements, the model is left to her contemplation, to contemplate her self. In the play of the gaze, a rather glamorous Latin American man on the cover

of *Radiolandia* looks out over the right of the frame where men of the city, reminiscent of John Brack's *Collins St, 5 pm*, appear as caricatures, their hats blowing off.

The strange posture of the woman on the left in *The Painter's Studio*, 2006, shows her in a moment of responding to another woman kneeling to give her a cup of coffee. The painter is depicted painting her reflection in the mirror rather than looking at her directly. In the mirror we see another mirror. Davila is replicating here the layout of the scene Velázquez painted in *Las Meninas*, from the back so that we can see what he is painting. Foucault, writing about this painting, assumes there is only one mirror and that we as spectators take the place of the mother and father, the King and Queen, whose portrait, he thought, was being recorded for eternity. Davila uses his canvas to contest this version by illustrating that the painter, like the one in *Las Meninas*, was painting an image reflected in a mirror. Velázquez wasn't looking directly at the Princess, but referring to *her reflection*. The *double entendre* of this statement is something Davila goes on to explore. In Davila's version we see two figures in the distant door frame, and a sparkling enigmatic object demarcating an imaginary point at the axis of all these figures, as if to reference the crossing visual axes Foucault refers to in establishing his thesis. Painted over yellow, the undercoat comes through in places, marking something about the gaze and presence.

Foucault's account of *Las Meninas* opened *The Order of Things* which concludes with some comments on psychoanalysis, noting that

by following the same path as the human sciences, but with its gaze turned the other way, psychoanalysis moves towards the moment – by definition inaccessible to any theoretical knowledge of man, to any continuous apprehension in terms of signification, conflict, or function – at which the contents of consciousness articulate themselves, or rather stand gaping, upon

man's finitude. This means that, unlike the human sciences, ...[psychoanalysis reveals a] region where representation remains in suspense, on the edge of itself, open, in a sense, to the closed boundary of finitude ... an existence at once real and impossible, thought that we cannot think, an object for our knowledge that always eludes it.³³

Foucault's error was to overlook the materiality of the structure of the gaze in the staging of Velázquez' painting, projecting instead his fantasy onto the frame. Caught between "the master who is representing and the sovereign who is being represented",³⁴ he overlooked the girl whose portrait was being staged. In a rather uncanny way, we find this situation, as a condition of modernity, parodied in the portrait of a robed woman with a caricature of a man looking over her shoulder in *Untitled*, 2008. Between them is the ghosted image of a woman's reflection in a scene evocative of Manet's *A Bar at the Folies-Bergère*, 1881-82, revisited.

Davila's thesis regarding modernism, femininity and the gaze, astutely elaborated in the field of painting, is also a broader political and social commentary. Where contemporary artists choose abstraction as something that is not supposed to be subjective, an avoidance of the figure is mistaken for critique. Davila has taken issue with this for some time; noting, for example, in 2001 that in "retrospect we can see that modernism, which cut painting's narrative and created a new language of forms, has operated as a utopian field but also as a censorship of anything that is uncertain. Today, modernism is a neo-capitalist language."³⁵ In "Courbet's Curtain", he also notes that with modernism, artists resorted to

splitting and cropping the image and its pictorial space in order to say something about emotional life. The anxiety produced by the attempt was too great to allow the traditional formulae of representation to remain. Today we see the outcome of that process: total foreclo-

sure and the emergent language of power and tyranny. There is no place for depiction of emotional life once this has happened. ...Restoring erased names and representing marginalized places and cultures are among the devices that I have used to remind the Australian viewer that art is more than money. This is my answer to the manipulation of modernism as a means to impose social control.³⁶

From mirror to gaze: redressing erasure

An early portrait, of Tove Lindholm Tomic, 1979, is prescient of Davila's more recent portraits while illustrating the distinctions between them. A title is given to the work to anchor it to a precise reality, here the woman portrayed. Her image in the photograph taped to a mirror covers the image that would be her reflection in the mirror. While the photograph seems to capture a private moment, the mirror depicted is in a public rather than a private space. The lipstick left open on the shelf also points to the difference between the softer image in the photograph and the accoutrements of masquerade evident in the reflection, whose subject is obscured from view, except in the form, overlaid, of the photograph from a different time. Temporal disjunction is part of a violence which is somehow marked in three lipstick lines in the top right hand corner of the mirror frame. The woman, as Davila notes, "seems to be at an edge, in a spatial gap. And we certainly cannot have her gaze or 'truth'"; "her actual body, in the flesh is not there. We have a reflection in the mirror and her semblance in a photo. Did I paint her from life? If so I would have painted her through her reflection in a mirror, something I do as many painters did in the past. Did I paint her from a photo? Then the background would be a fantasy of the artist."³⁷ If the woman's gaze here appears lost in itself, the woman doesn't find herself in the



The Painter's Studio, 2006, oil on canvas 175 × 260 cm



The Studio of the Painter, 2006, oil and collage on canvas 175 × 260 cm

mirror, there being no simple reflection, no single signification or representation with which she might identify in order that she might know what it is to be a woman. The response to that spatial and logical gap, different in different psychic structures, can be related to the subject's relation to the Other and the question of whether the Other continues to hold omnipotence and thus the potential to disrupt the subject's stability in a menacing way.

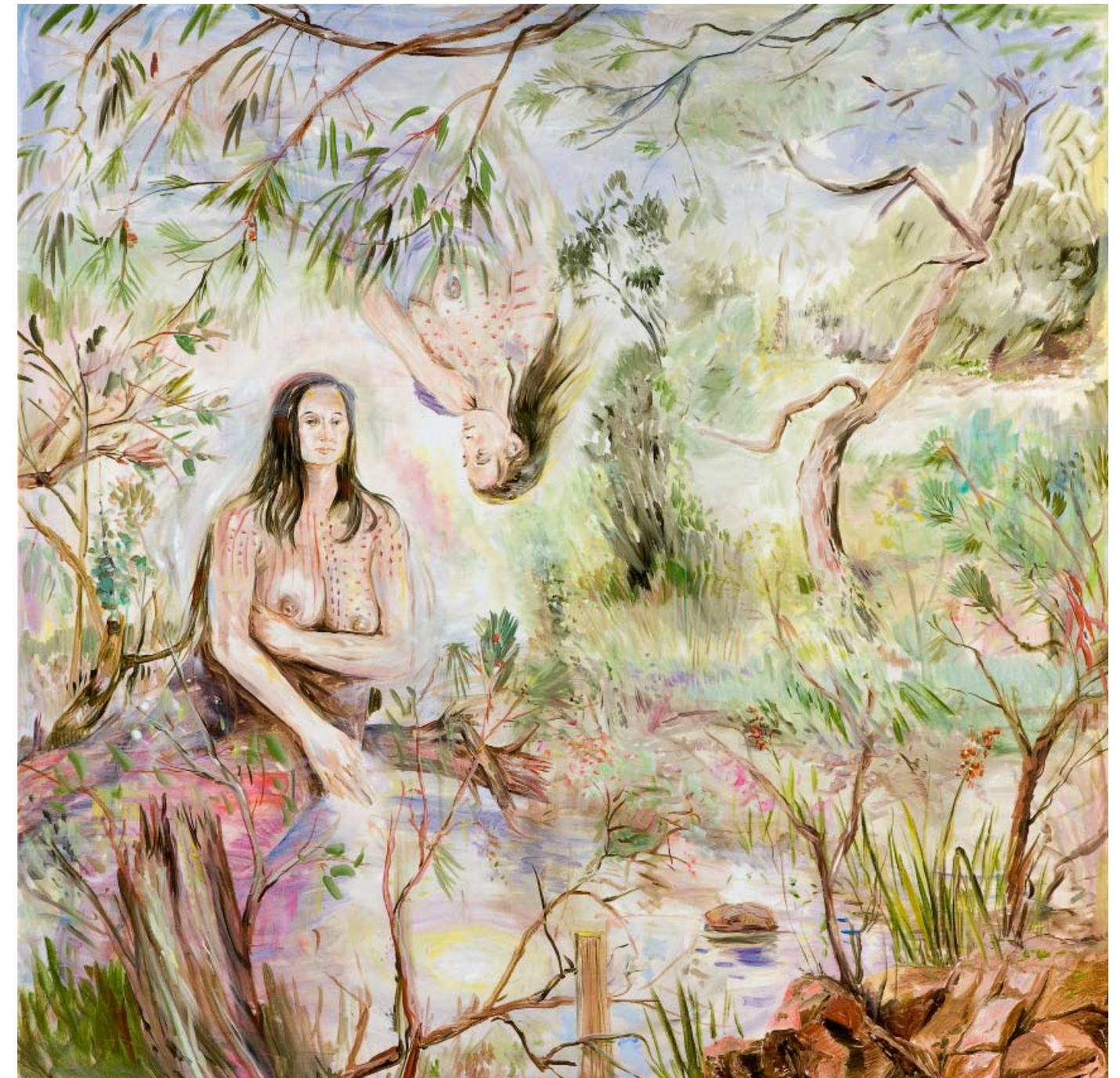
A key distinction between the portrait of Tove and the more recent portraits is the difference between working in the presence of the body as distinct from the semblance of a photo. The presence conferred to the women in these recent portraits is striking. The contemporary paintings articulate something about the individuality, the singularity that is seen and witnessed there. Davila notes

pondering about what happens with the woman posing for the painter. It is a silent session where she is observed and depicted in a canvas. I wonder if she must invent herself for the pose / I do not direct this / and if it is here that the unconscious is political. Does the subject's structure stage the pose? Would the pose be the effect of truth and *jouissance*? This session is not [that of] the collective demand to the subject to invent itself but appears to be, within the Arts, one of the last spaces of radical ambiguity left.³⁸

This consideration of the effects of truth and *jouissance* allows the artist's studio to be a site "for the construction of a politicised vision"³⁹, a point to which we shall return. Here let us note that the difference in singularity is ambiguous and mysterious, and it is that which calls us. For the unintelligible can be felt and acknowledged but not easily known and the idea of expertise may not be appropriate here.⁴⁰ Though philosophy may well articulate the difficulty of thinking the experience of exteriority, psychoanalysis works with "the woman's subjective property of bearing the Other within herself",⁴¹ which accounts for the key role of feminine

jouissance in the recognition and theory of *jouissance* more generally. For there are different forms of *jouissance* and it is the threads and ties woven between them that create the universe we imagine we inhabit.

We can with Agamben remember that *ek-stasis* is "the gift that singularity gathers from the empty hands of humanity."⁴² Yet rather than speak of transcendence let us think of impermanence, rather than speak of ecstasy, let us exist in joy. Small distinctions perhaps, yet shifts in direction, subtle enough to leave for a moment the tenuous hold of the mind with its devouring demand for accumulation and prestige. As Benjamin concluded: "The idea that happiness could have a share in beauty would be too much of a good thing, something that their *ressentiment* would never get over."⁴³ He distinguishes two forms of happiness, the hymnic and the elegiac, noting there "is a dual will to happiness, a dialectics of happiness... The one is the unheard-of, the unprecedented, the height of bliss; the other, the eternal repetition, the eternal restoration of the original, the first happiness. It is this elegiac idea of happiness — it could also be called Eleatic — which for Proust transforms existence into a preserve of memory ... the bridge to the dream."⁴⁴ Freud related these two moments, commenting that "No one who has seen a baby sinking back satiated from the breast and falling asleep with flushed cheeks and a blissful smile can escape the reflection that this picture persists as a prototype of sexual satisfaction in later life".⁴⁵ Yet the oceanic feeling remained a mystery to him, perhaps foreclosed by his pain and his fear of death. While Proust wrote to "the incurable imperfection in the very essence of the present moment", Freud had his collection of artifacts packed to go with him when he went away on vacation.⁴⁶ Two portraits of a woman in a red dress sitting in a courtyard garden, serene and still, apparently content, evoke a kind of radical immanence that rests on the acceptance of loss, while that of the nymph and her echo in *Woman by the River Yarra*, 2008, a primeval



Woman by the River Yarra, 2008, oil on canvas 206 × 210 cm



Nina Sers, 2008 oil on canvas 180 × 150 cm

landscape of childhood reverie, returns us to the mythical and the question of memory, the bridge to the dream.

These later portraits of women in the solitude of their existing proffer images of an identity in separation, a singularity that allows one to exist. Many of the women are also named. The woman under the night sky is *Guacolda del Carmen Gallardo*; the young woman standing is *Nina Sers*, 2008; the portrait of a young girl, articulating the presence of desire, is *Maria*, 2009, while the painting of the beast-man, also evocative of the childhood reveries of picture books, is anchored with the title of a place, *761 Wattletree Road*, 2008. The incredibly beautiful graphic and colours in these works, the movement of the lines and paint profile a new engagement with the sensual joy of painting and the integrity of the body in its emotional candor. It is tempting to attribute



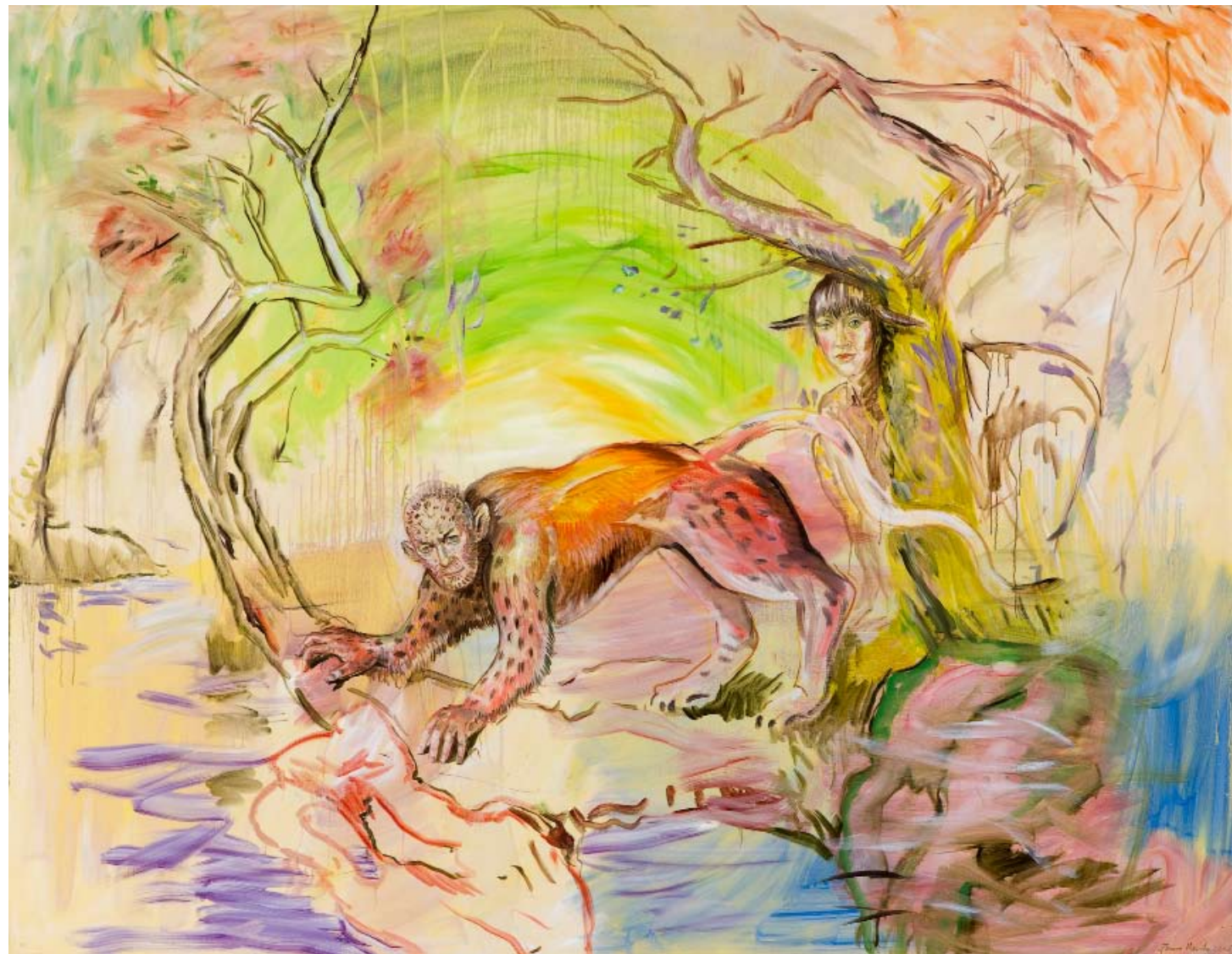
Maria, 2009 oil on canvas 84 × 71 cm

a move from privation to joy in the rendering of these paintings which cannot be dismissed as an idealism or ephemeral daydream, as the visual wit in the painting of the house called *331 Wattletree Road*, 2008, so clearly displays. The image of the suburban house, iconic in the Australian landscape and psyche, here appears threatened by a force from the right hand side of the frame. Temporality has entered the frame in the snapshot of a moment. With inordinate prescience this image was painted in 2008, before the global financial crisis, before the Black Saturday fires, catastrophes both incarnated in this image in a compact way. The house, signifying dreams of prosperity, development, and independence, an economic ideal of safety and status, is burnt from within and thrown by the storm of an economic hurricane. These two elements of the economy and the environment interlaced in a moment of catastrophe, where everything you believe is stable can be swept away. It is, as always, the dialectic between these elements with which we must engage.

As with his previous works, our personal associations are called forth and projected onto the images, yet these recent works (with the exception of the portrait of Kevin Andrews) no longer engage profanation in the same way, either as critique or as a mode of protection. To the extent that profanation “neutralizes what it profanes” Agamben distinguishes it from secularization which, as “a form of repression”, leaves “intact the forces it deals with by simply moving them from one place to another”.⁴⁷ Eric Laurent has commented that “Lacan stresses that the desire of the neurotic is what takes place when there is no God on the horizon. The neurotic tries to be an atheist, to evade the problem of God. But he has the father, it is true.”⁴⁸ One legacy of the modernist aversion to religion and ‘the problem of God’, the secularization apparent in the major theorists of modernity (Marx, Freud, Nietzsche, Weber, and possibly Durkheim), is the resurgence of religious discourse we are witnessing today, particularly religious fundamentalism as a response to



331 Wattletree Road, 2008, oil on canvas 185 × 235 cm



761 Wattletree Road, 2008, oil on canvas 185 × 235 cm

the dislocations of modernity. In many ways Kierkegaard characterized and articulated the modernist irruption of the issue of belief, and from this crisis produced a commentary on anxiety and faith for which Lacan hailed him as the most acute questioner of the soul before Freud. The iconoclastic invective in Kierkegaard’s parody and assault on Hegel’s system is stunning in its irreverence, striking in its aggression. Writing under the pseudonym Johannes de silentio, Kierkegaard refers to Hegel as an ideologue of modernity who reduced passion to science. He laments the days when “faith was a task for a whole lifetime, not a skill thought to be acquired in either days or weeks”⁴⁹ (like brief cognitive behavioral solutions), and in a later work, under the name Johannes Climacus, describes faith as something that

occurs when the understanding and the paradox happily encounter each other in the moment, when the understanding steps aside and the paradox gives itself, and the third something, the thing in which this occurs...is that happy passion to which we shall now give a name.... We shall call it *faith*. This passion, then, must be that above-mentioned condition that the paradox provides.⁵⁰

The Greek and Latin roots of the word *passion* denote an action happening to a subject; the religious question is who or what to attribute this agency to. Is faith a grace-given condition or a volitional act made possible by such a condition?⁵¹ Vacillation over the role and position of the Other with regard to the subject’s agency and intent, contrasts with the state of knowing, which in itself is an acceptance of not knowing, of faith. While sometimes described as a certitude of knowing, this is quite different from the certainty of fundamentalist conviction where no dialectic can be entertained. Indeed faith is to be distinguished from the creeds and theories of the religious question surrounding it for the “word of faith manifests itself as the

effective experience of a pure power of saying There is no such thing as a content of faith, and to profess the word of faith does not mean formulating true propositions on God and the world”.⁵² The potentiality which exceeds the performative power of language, Agamben notes,

cannot be accumulated in any form of knowledge or dogma, and if it cannot impose itself as a law, it does not follow that it is passive or inert. To the contrary, it acts in its own weakness.... That this potentiality finds its *telos* in weakness means that it does not simply remain suspended in infinite deferral; rather, turning back towards itself, it fulfils and deactivates the very excess of signification over every signified, it extinguishes languages In this way, it bears witness to what, unexpressed and insignificant, remains in use forever near the word.⁵³

This movement of turning back to fulfill and deactivate ‘the very excess of signification over every signified’ is a movement of sublimation, described by Lacan where he speaks of (and designates feminine *jouissance* in terms of) sublimation love, as a means of returning *jouissance* to desire.⁵⁴ We know that a precipitation in the symbolic opens a place where the body may be experienced as such and that as people who speak, we speak with our bodies: “The speaking/being is the subject become duration ... inscribing itself as One of the body.”⁵⁵ The One of the body, described by Lispector as “the unmistakable good fortune of material existence”, the very movement of which turning back towards itself, for a moment, extinguishes language.⁵⁶ In a rather autobiographical paper titled “Writing begins where psychoanalysis ends”, Serge André argues that “against semblance, writing aims at ‘the Eternal.’” Certain writers, he notes,

equate the eternal with a manifestation of the divine. They are free to do so. But, for my part, I believe that

“the Eternal” or “God” are still only signifiers (names for the “being of the signifying process”), vain signifiers that attempt to *designate* the void, the original hole where the real disappeared for us, but which they are incapable of *making present*. Nonetheless, it is the presentification, the making present of the real outside of language that the writer tries to attain.⁵⁷

André likens this to paintings by Morandi which succeed in allowing the simplest objects, those most often overlooked, to come into focus, to “impose themselves with a presence that we never knew.” He notes that the writer’s challenge is to “try to give body to the real presence of language, at the risk of only being able to manifest the obstinate force of a silence.”⁵⁸ To give body to a real presence: this is an apt description of Davila’s work, animated as it is by a faith in transmission, by the faith necessary to any social act, be it speech, writing or painting.

This fleeting light

Touched by the sublime, we leave lighter for having witnessed and perhaps entered into an engagement with these debates. Ethics is a matter of our relation to the real, it is matter of how we engage with the moral meanings we live in attribution to the feelings, thoughts and experiences that pervade us and our others. *The moral meaning of wilderness* is a title contesting the equation of Woman and Nature by presenting variations on the singularity of each, while addressing that which animates our sense of being. To counter such an equation as an essentialist reduction is not to deny the imperative of politics or the issue of sustainability. It is an investigation seeking to separate the threads, redress the erasures on which appropriation and exploitation are

founded. It does this by questioning the projections and mechanisms we inhabit. I have argued that in recent times Davila has worked to transmit something of the *jouissance* Lacan referred to as feminine and that his depictions stand as a valuable commentary on the importance of recognizing such experience. Let us now return to the political and ethical threads articulated in social scenes where the move from *jouissance* to desire is noted as the nature of work. I would like to refer again to the succession of works, following some of the moments where points are drawn and returned to from earlier works. Considering the chronology of the works in this exhibition, the unfolding of this thesis in the sequence of its construction, we see the manner in which the arguments have been have been tied together, the way in which the thesis, developed in transmission, aims to address us.

Four previous works, two bearing the title *Two Women on the Banks of the Yarra*, 2003, *The Painter’s Studio*, 2006 and *The Studio of the Painter*, 2006 frame the recent work as an introduction picked up again with *Two Women in Melbourne*, 2008, a study of a psychoanalytic scene, with the analyst in the quietude of listening, pregnant and naked, and the analysand lying on what seems like a beautician’s table, her body disappearing into abstract marks and coloured forms. It is the hysteric perhaps, contemplating some impossible object, a foetus like object, denoting not simply a desire for completion through a baby but envy of the other woman and what the unborn child presents on the side of having. On the other side of the frame, the stillness of the scene is evident in the flowers on the table. Themes of catastrophe, the trauma of *jouissance*, the force of the gaze are reworked in an image of alchemical intensity such as *Reverie*, 2009. Like a seventeenth century alchemical engraving come to life in Technicolor, the woman’s gaze and smile is directed over her shoulder into the golden yellow spot of



Reverie, 2009, oil on canvas 200 × 280 cm



Two Women in Melbourne, 2008, oil on canvas 175 × 260 cm

an exploding masturbatory pleasure. This image, a man's rendition of a woman's reverie, paints her clothed in fantasy. Let us distinguish, however, between fantasy and reverie, for while not mutually exclusive, there is a different relation to the object in each. Whereas in reverie one becomes for a moment absent to oneself, fantasy as a realm of approbation and appropriation at once elevates the object and the divided self. The iridescent colour, a dioramic view of landscapes as trophies, as symbols of abundance, very maritime, coral cushions are caught in the movement created by the hair swirling sweep of the drive as marked in her gaze directed past that enigmatic disk floating in space. Fantasies of possession as a phallic claim seem alluded to here, in this 'homage to reverie', the solipsistic refuge. From here we can disappear or come back into the world, the object falling back into circulation as a cause of desire, that which allows for a link with another.

Together these works, *Reverie* and *Two Women in Melbourne*, articulate the space of analytic discourse, an examination of the constellation of one's interior, something particular and unknown, and while spoken to an other, this sharing is also an exploration of one's solitude. In the analyst's presence, the woman lying on the couch may enter and consider the illusive object of her fantasy and all that this recognition and journey entails. For to understand that one's fantasy drives behavior in a way that goes generally unseen, or at least unrecognized by one's self, is a work that may be or may lead to an ethical position. Where in contemporary life do we find the place of such contemplation in the presence of an interlocutor? While this might be considered the luxury of a few, it is a cultural choice to restrict this liberty of articulation, one imbued with the knowledge of the transformative effects of speech. Davila's thesis, this thread regarding depictions of women and the relation to the gaze, over these last eight years addresses this ethical articulation of desire. Now we find this concern directed also to the question of

the environment. Taking the phenomenon of the depiction of women, within modernism and within psychoanalysis, Davila addresses the complexity of the "field of projections" on that other site of *jouissance*: the landscape. This is not new, his work having long considered its Australian context. He commented, for example, in 1980 on an 'undue concern' of Australian art with the landscape or 'love of nature' which as an "expression of a sexual symbolism at the same time ...ignores the 'body'".⁵⁹ Now, some years later, this is articulated as a critique of the "worship of representations of nature instead of the *jouissance* it symbolizes".⁶⁰

In *What about my desire?*, 2009, turquoise threads through the landscape, under the paint strokes giving form to the young man's body. This turquoise light, extreme beauty. The landscape depicts a colonial farm on Churchill Island viewed from the wetland on the other side, across a bay, which is lush and vibrant, given in mauve and green. The painting becomes more impressionistic, less colonial, as we follow the curve of the bay towards the immediacy of the wetlands. The boyish young man, towel draped around his thighs, looks out over the bay imbibing perhaps the horrific unspoken history of this place; it is not his country. This man appears lost before the statement of his own desire, he may have the outlines of what it might be to speak as such, yet the content is somehow not defined. "What about my desire" is the plaintiff call we might hear through his speech, were he to speak to us directly. But given that he doesn't, we hear this call muffled, from behind him, where we nonetheless notice the alacrity of his listening ear.

If "desire is vain, not because it is frustrated, but because it is fulfilled for a second turning into ashes what we touch upon,"⁶¹ this contemplation touches upon the destructive aspect of human experience, that which Freud termed the death drive. *Churchill National Park*, 2009, is accurate to the scene soon after the fires that ravaged the Victorian countryside in February 2009, immolating whole towns and

leaving over one hundred and seventy people people dead. The translucent orange of new growth highlight the debris, including crumpled beer cans left since the fires in the sentiment of 'since God has burnt, we can trash it'. Over the debris is the shadow of a man cast in an ominous outline, like an arsonist surveying his work. In *Princes Highway, Melbourne*, 2009, on the other hand, a woman is standing between fire and air; an irreducible sense of the movement of the water, rippling in concentric circles around her as she stands seeming still, hands crossed over her abdomen, naked below the waist, shrouded in a feathery shroud like a primeval person. Standing calming lit, in her beauty and somber expression, by the explosion behind her. What else can we say? That she is reminiscent of Rembrandt's *Saskia* or that she appears akin to the recent portrait of Carmen Gallardo, depicted as elderly, her face aged and weathered as someone who has endured. The brightness of a constellation in the starry sky above sheds light on Gallardo's face and shoulders as her arms and torso vanish into the air. Both these images are conveyed in the calligraphic flow of the brushstroke, breaking the classical framing of each scene. To evoke, perhaps, notions of the finished and the unfinished, Ruskin's hatred of impressionism, a famous case with Whistler.

Commenting on the pictorial structure for this exhibition, Davila notes that:

The argument proposes to gaze at nature and woman as the two great mysteries in terms of *jouissance*.

Charles Taylor in a general discussion about the moral meaning of the sublime says: "The idea is that being in touch with (the wilderness), being open to it awakens or strengthens something in us which enables us to live proper lives, which perforce will be lead almost entirely in 'civilization'". He also thinks that wilderness is not the locus of an alternative life to the city. Rather it communicates or imparts something to us which awakens a power in us of living better where

we are. This is the meaning of Thoreau's dictum: "In wilderness is the preservation of the world." These statements, in my view, are an expression of denial and control. What is "important is the way that our natural world figures in our moral imagination," says Taylor, stating that it has become one of the crucial underpinning of much contemporary ecological consciousness and concern.

We find an earlier discussion of this in Ruskin with his notion of the sublime in nature as a moral force, later denied by Proust who sought to capture early memories through evocations of nature. But *jouissance* in principle is not moral, it is traumatic because it lacks meaning. It is enigmatic, beyond pleasure or pain, it does not only reside in the body (also in thinking and language) and as an utterance we cannot understand *jouissance*. These are not moral matters as [they are for] Ruskin, who proposes the destruction of the symbolic world by repressing pleasure through conformism. In a peculiar way they seem to equate "woman" to "nature".

Transgression is forgotten, corporate conformity becomes the current "worship of nature". A simple life is the message of the religion of nature. The picturesque sublime, the sensuous reverie looking at clouds, the sin of idolatory – worship of representations of nature instead of the *jouissance* it symbolizes – are all part of this conservation of the status quo "for the next generation" which is really just an excuse for doing nothing, an evasion of conservation. Proust, through the narrator in his novel says: "he knows that his own rare glimpses of a reality behind the phenomenal world have been more valuable than anything visible to the 'naturalists' and their school, who can only copy the surface."⁶²

The question of what it is to be human or fully human, rendered in eighteenth century meditations on language and



What about my Desire?, 2009, oil on canvas 204 × 270 cm



Churchill National Park, 2009, oil on canvas 200 × 300 cm

the sublime touch on the themes of death, eternity, earth and God. Taylor notes that Thoreau is a ‘paradigm protagonist’ of ecological consciousness, the idea of the interconnectedness of all life on earth. He also notes there is a complexity and tension here, “almosta contradiction in the moral imagination of nature I’ve been describing”, between kinship with nature as the source of life and nature as hostile, indifferent and inhuman.⁶³ One claim at stake in Taylor’s book regards which path, that of belief or unbelief, is the “more powerful and effective healing action in history”.⁶⁴ Taylor is aware that “morality rationalizes”, that this engages and perpetuates the binding of religion and violence, inaugurating the profound ambivalence on which modernity is centered. He is concerned “to discover what the moving force is here, to give an account which does justice to it”, to help strengthen and liberate it from the forces “which so easily colonize philanthropy and turn it into its opposite.”⁶⁵ He thus situates a religious path in contrast to “the awe-inspiring Stoic courage of a Camus or a Derrida”, a division between those with and those without a “faith commitment” that rests on a judgment, one that might be deconstructed if, like Oskar Pfister (Protestant minister, analyst and interlocutor of Freud), we consider the act of rather than the purported content of faith.

Elaborating on the identification involved in these moments of judgment, Davila describes how in the paintings about the gaze where the arguments about Courbet, Velázquez and Foucault, the painter and the model are represented, I have tried to depict the political gaze as well. The image of Dr Haneef unjustly jailed, the Minister that ordered his arrest and the painter witnessing the scene is depicted in one space. This does not occur in reality, but it can in a pictorial space. Two opposing mirrors replicate this horror to infinity. The mirrors reflect also someone other than the actors and the painter’s personal gaze is placed alongside the technological recording of such events. Impossible

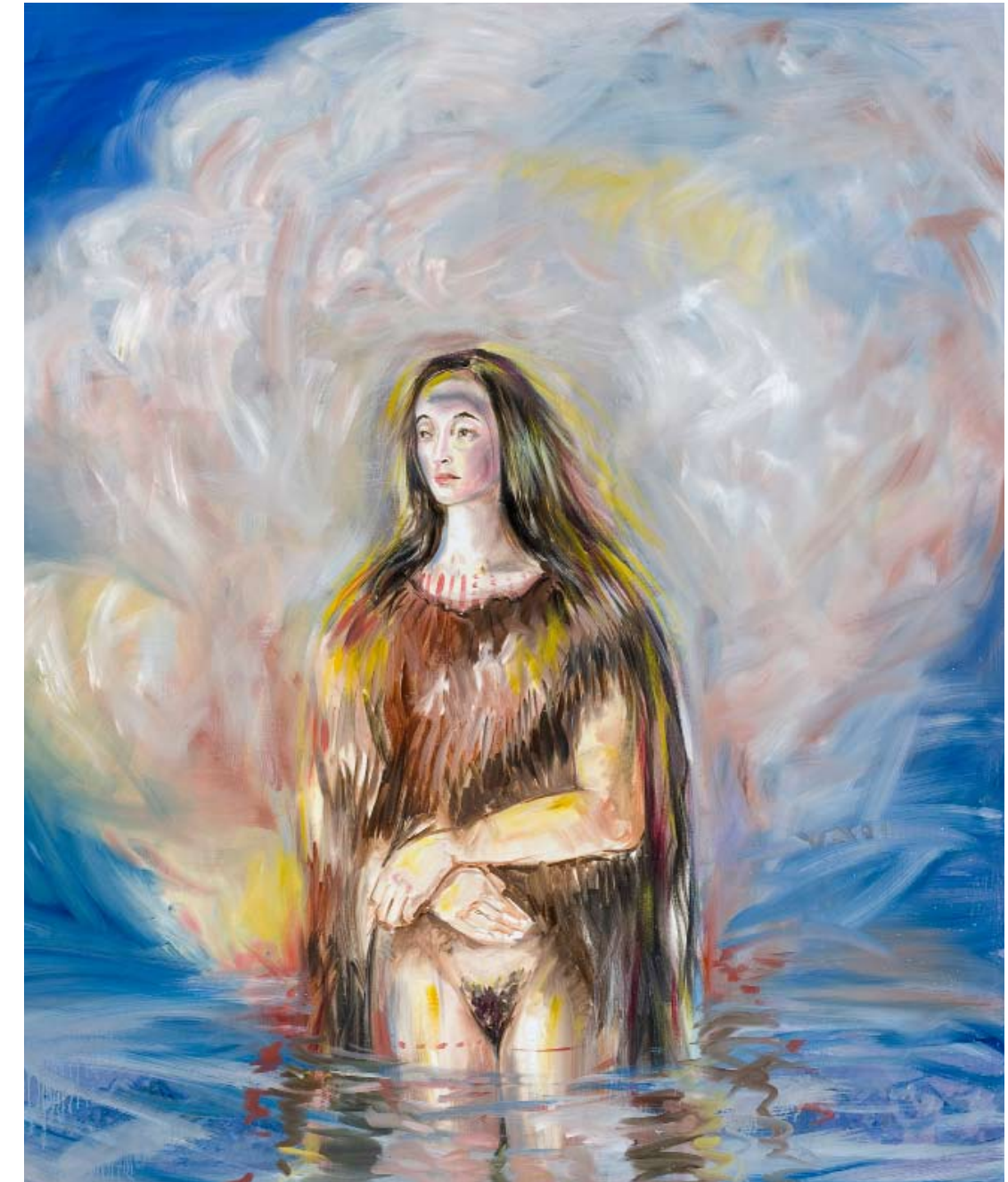
space, infinity, shifting of scenarios has a similar effect to the one that occurs with identification. In identifying with nature where one magnifies and intensifies its forms in an attempt to liberate something in us. Could it be a release of imagination in a utopian attempt?

Painted from a newspaper image, Dr. Haneef is bent forward in a moment of the retracted subjectivity of one under siege, his body here positioned as the phallic extension of the politician, Kevin Andrews, who is pontificating, caught in a moment of moral dictation, where he is purporting to instruct us on what is right. The painter is at his easel, his body sketched in like a blank surface, while his interpretation aims to punctuate such projections, to illustrate their *jouissance*. This painting, along with two “landscapes” titled *Wilderness* and one last portrait of a woman, complete this exhibition. Davila continues:

Gaze is Wilderness. The gaze is always elsewhere, its treasure unknowable. Why then do we take pleasure in illusions? Why do we record the visible so diligently knowing that it is a fake? Why so many projections of an erotic nature on the natural world? We live in an era of debauchery of the imagination...visible by way of communicational technology, full of human cruelty and animal states. Nature has no moral meaning, how can something always in flux, all metamorphosis and movement be fixed? It would be better to learn a hallucinatory poetry of revolt and beauty in Nature.”⁶⁶

Unintelligible life

Beauty, as Benjamin noted, “can be defined in two ways: in its relationship to history and to nature. In both relationships the semblance, the problematic element in the beautiful, manifests itself.”⁶⁷ We see this depicted quite clearly in the landscapes titled, *Wilderness*. Life signified in the painted



Princes Highway, Melbourne, 2009, oil on canvas 180 × 150 cm

touch of light in *Wilderness*, 2010, embarks (or disembarks) in the articulation of the bastard marriage between a science fiction modernity and the organic in nature. The green shape from *Pulp Mill on the River Tamar*, 2009, here comes to life of its own discord, leering animation like a cartoon visage, dripping. One legacy of modernity is nature as organic transmutation, terrifying in that it cannot be controlled. The green shape, an object of contemporary architecture, is reminiscent of the shape Zaha Hadid has applied to a range of things: a shoe, a bar, a building. In *Pulp Mill on the River Tamar*, 2009, this object was transposed in an unlikely place, an apparition of the contemporary modern in the landscape, here that apparition has become the landscape, an emanation, dripping, the underside of the sublime. *Wilderness*, 2010 addresses more directly this fear; depicted on the left hand side is a morphing drip. It could be a drop of oil, or water or mercury, but unknown and unknowable, it threatens with menace. To the side of it, a dark patch overlaid with strokes of pink paint evokes a kind of suture, while to the right we find the spinning constellation of strange objects evident in other works. Astral and maritime, strange worlds of reverie. In the history of painting there have been many views of nature that are not descriptive. Here the brush stroke as one kind of mark is overlaid with another: the flow of an automatic technique, *fumage*, the carbon trace left by holding a lighter near the canvas. Used by the surrealists, Davila suggests one could argue these are the truest renderings of the nature discussed by them and so contrary to Ruskin, whom he describes as an uptight academic determined to find moral meaning in everything, to outlaw chance. Both paintings draw out the fear and sense of disagreeable disgust, the horror which underlies an experience of Ruskin's controlled sublime.

One key to the shift from the eighteenth century to contemporary context of the sublime is that today the natural

environment, or what is left of it is, is so evidently disappearing, just as we are if we pause to reflect on it. Our being for death, the existential moment of life as awareness has been projected onto the natural world such that the projection itself has become real; with so many people multiplying on a limited land mass, polluting air, water and degrading the environment this way of life is passing. We have created the environment as an effect of our fantasies and foreclosures, destroying the future we could not envisage. Too caught in economies of anxiety, exploitation and control to notice that these economies were themselves becoming our natural environments, they have become real. We can see this from the perspective of those moments outside the system, those moments in the reverie of 'feminine' *jouissance* without content or those moments of reprieve granted from the slow work of studying one's own unconscious, elaborating the domain of one's own response. This endeavor doesn't put an end to fantasies or foreclosures but it allows one to notice how one responds to the other in light of one's own gaze, one's own expectations of the other and uses of the other as an object, one's own relation to phallic *jouissance*.

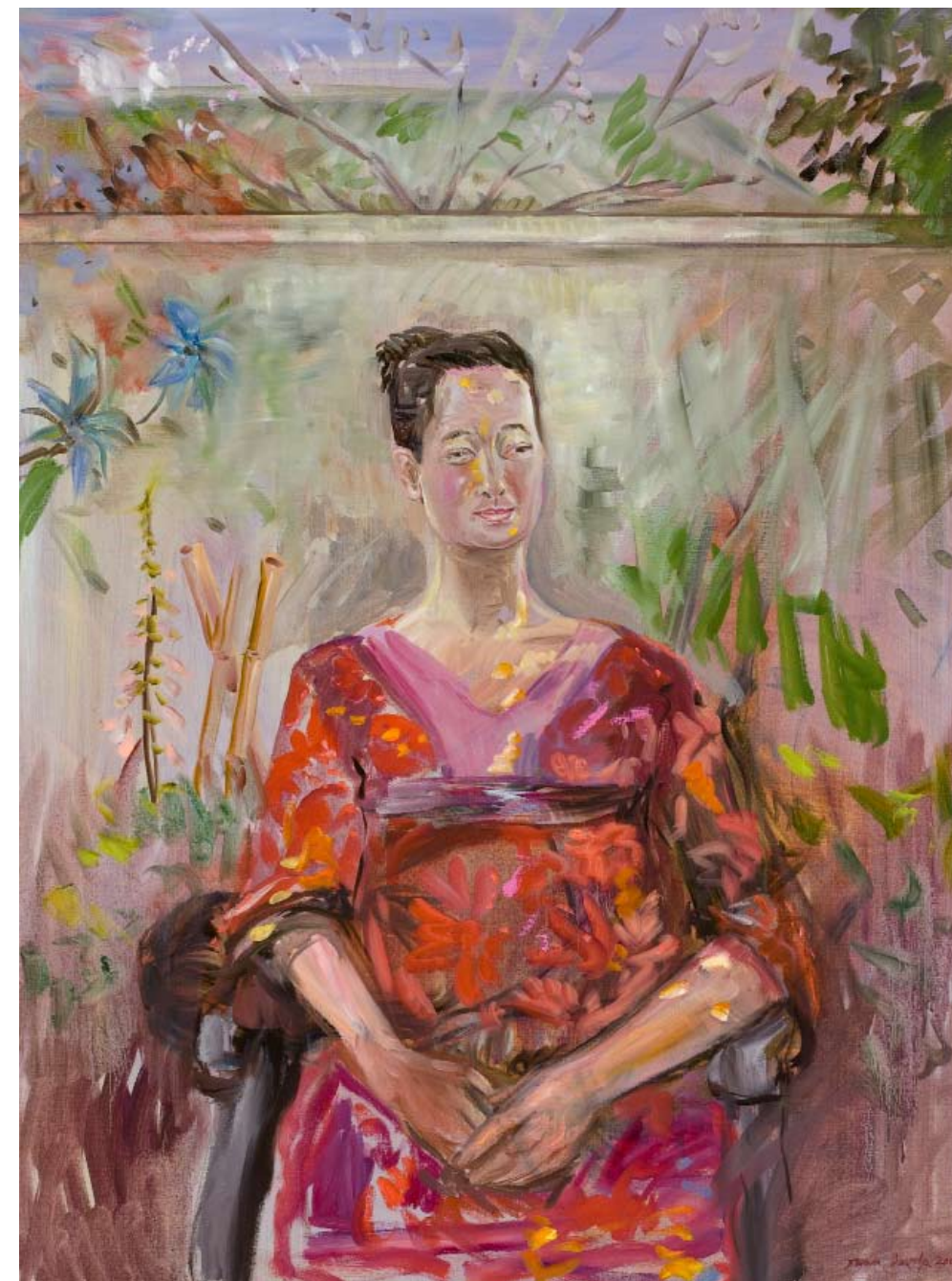
The equation between human and environment is not sustainable in that it does not exist. Just as there is no equation for sexual difference, for the relation between man and woman in the unconscious, despite what Jung would have us believe, so there is no equation between man and the environment. For one, on the whole, exists only where the other has not been. The landscape as natural environment is not necessarily hospitable to people or to our convenience and so – at least with modernism – it comes under threat, it ceases to be. The modern condition of our relation to the landscape is that it reflects our being-to-death in its very disappearance, and the consequence of our unconscious (run by fantasies and foreclosures) is made real. That consequence is a devastation and death and our task is to consider both our finitude and our capacity for destruction. Self control,



Wilderness, 2010, oil on canvas 190 × 240 cm



Untitled, 2008, oil on canvas 120 × 90 cm



Untitled, 2008, oil on canvas 120 × 90 cm



Untitled, 2008, oil on canvas 120 × 90 cm



Untitled, 2009-2010, oil on canvas 120 × 90 cm

as Freud noticed, is a condition of a civilized society and it comes at a price. We might, with Judith Butler, “ask what remains unspeakable here, not in order to produce speech that will fill the gap but to ask about the convergence of social prohibitions and melancholia, how the condemnations under which one lives turn into repudiations that one performs, and how the grievances that emerge against the public law also constitute conflicted efforts to overcome the muted rage of one’s own repudiations.”⁶⁸ Acknowledging finitude and one’s own potential for violence is a process of mourning the destructive aspect of human experience: Practices of desecration fueled by fantasies of allure and fornication, or the forms of violent domination rendered and made possible in foreclosure. As finite beings, “each of us must find our own ‘path’ to death”,⁶⁹ and “the subject wishing to indefinitely maintain himself in similitude (in the *as if*), while contemplating his ruin, simply loses the wager. He who upholds himself in the messianic vocation no longer knows the *as if*, he no longer has similitudes at his

disposal. He knows that in messianic time the saved world coincides with the world that is irretrievably lost, and that, to use Bonhoeffer’s words, he must now really live in a world without God.”⁷⁰

There is one more portrait. The woman here is centered, still and somber. There is a depth to her look, a gravity to her gaze and she, unlike most of the women represented here, is looking directly at us. The most emotional of the portraits, her bearing is delivered through the gaze. Something is happening in the landscape, perhaps a brooding tenor in the background, some event on the horizon yet it doesn’t distract from the portrait of the young woman who holds her own. There is a melancholic trace, a sadness in her eyes, which direct the portrait, for the colour of what appears as landscape is rather the colour floating as needed to frame her gaze. Floating there to frame, it moves into the background, a landscape of mauve and green, an autumn fire burning perhaps, her gaze distilled in our focus.





Two Women on the Banks Of the Yarra, 2003, oil on canvas 175 × 260 cm



Albert Street, 2007, oil on canvas 185 × 235cm



Untitled, 2010, oil on canvas 190 × 240 cm

NOTES

- 1 Juan Davila, Project Concept and Rationale, 26 April, 2009.
- 2 *Ibid.*
- 3 An earlier version of this paper, addressing the paintings from 2007 and 2008, was presented at *Out of Bounds: Art, Faith and Religiosity*, convened by Domenico Di Clario and Sarah Curtis (Monash University, Caulfield Campus, August 20-23, 2008) with an invitation to consider the work of Giorgio Agamben.
- 4 A further set would include *Lunch on the Grass*, 1975; *Nemesis*, 1976; *The Wurlitzer*, 1978; hence this period would be from 1974-78.
- 5 Other paintings in this period from 1979-1982 would include works such as *Hysterical Tears*, 1979; *Bedroom Ensemble*, 1980; *Tod*, 1980; *Rat Man*, 1980; *Stupid as a Painter*, 1981-82.
- 6 Evident in works such as *Fable of Australian Painting*, 1982-3; *Portrait of Joshua Smith*, 1990; *Nothing if not Abnormal*, 1991; *Portrait of Bungaree*, 1991; *Flower Vendor*, 1993; *The Liberator Simon Bolívar*, 1993; *Juanito Laguna as the Andean Inhabitant, the Latin American Colonial Angel, the Devil, Bungaree, Jekyll and Hyde*, 1994.
- 7 This third period includes works on the gaze and the Courbet/analysis series, for example: *Two Women on the Banks of the Yarra*, 2003; *Origins of the World*, 2002; *Portrait of Joanna Heffernan*, 2003; *The Studio of the Painter*, 2006 and *The Painter's Studio*, 2006.
- 8 Clarice Lispector, *Discovering the World*. Translated by Giovanni Pontiero. Manchester: Carcanet Press, 1992. P. 122.
- 9 *Ibid.*, p. 123.
- 10 *Ibid.*
- 11 Giorgio Agamben, *The Coming Community*. Translated by Michael Hardt. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993. P. 56.
- 12 Jacques Lacan, *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis. The Seminar of Jacques Lacan. Book VII. 1959-1960*. Translated by Dennis Porter. London: Routledge, 1982. P. 171. It is, he says, “one reason why we accept as such the idea of other forms of knowledge than the kind that is founded scientifically” (*Ibid.*).
- 13 Clarice Lispector, *Discovering the World*. P. 124.
- 14 *Ibid.*
- 15 Juan Davila, correspondence with the author.
- 16 Philippe de Georges, ‘On *Jouissance*’, *Psychoanalytic Notebooks. The London Society of the New Lacanian School*. Issue 20, The Object a and The Semblant. London, January 2010. P. 59.
- 17 J-A Miller, “Of Semblants in the Relation between Sexes”, *Psychoanalytical Notebooks of the London Circle*. Issue 3, Autumn 1999. P. 20. Miller described the inexistence of the Other as

opening “the Lacanian epoch in psychoanalysis”, and argues that if Lacan formalized the Freudian Oedipus complex in terms of the concept of the Name of the Father, he did so in order “to expose it as a semblant and to open it up to pluralization” (J-A Miller and Eric Laurent, “The Other who does not exist and his ethical committees”, *Almanac of Psychoanalysis*, 1998, p. 26). That is what, he says, “in the teaching of Lacan, is announced under the rubric of the....the signifier of the barred Other, which shattered when he gave the reading of it which made the Name-of-the-Father plural. ... Not only does this reading of the matheme pluralize the Name-of-the-Father, it disintegrates it, devastates it from within, by equivocation, by attacking the bond of the signifier with what one believes to be its signified” (*Ibid.*).

- 18 Germán García cited by Miller, “The Desire of Lacan”, *Lacanian Ink* 13, 1998, p. 39.
- 19 “The idea that believing is religiously important turns out to be a modern idea. It has arisen in recent times, in ways that can be ascertained and demonstrated. I might almost sum up the implication of my thesis... by saying that a great modern heresy of the Church is the heresy of believing. Not of believing this or that, but of believing as such. The view that to believe is of central significance – this is an aberration.” Wilfred Cantwell Smith. *Belief and History*. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1977. P. v.
- 20 Clarice Lispector. *An Apprenticeship or The Book of Delights*. Translated by Richard A Mazzara and Lorri A. Parris. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986.
- 21 Morel notes the case of a woman who experienced a kind of bliss while working in her garden, something she did not relate to a religious experience and which is to be distinguished from the sexual or phallic *jouissance* and the from the *jouissance* of the symptom also referred to in the case. Morel, G. ‘Feminine Conditions of *Jouissance*.’ *Journal of the Centre for Freudian Analysis and Research* 3, 1994.
- 22 Rómulo Lander, for example, writes that “Feminine *jouissance* refers to the natural ability for suffering characteristic of the feminine psychic structure. This is a Freudian thesis, and it is based on a relentless logic that appears in his text on the economic theory of masochism”. *Subjective Experience and the Logic of the Other*. Translated and edited by Judith Lilc. New York: Other Press, P. 64.
- 23 Giorgio Agamben, *The Coming Community*. P. 86.
- 24 *Ibid.*, p. 87.
- 25 Juan Davila. Guy Brett and Roger Benjamin with Writings by

- Juan Davila, *Juan Davila*. Melbourne: The Miegunyah Press in association with the MCA, 2006. P. 213.
- 26 Davila is referring here to Walter Benjamin’s concept of inner necessity.
- 27 Jorge Mario Eastman is reported to have said of Davila’s rendition of Simon Bolívar: “This painting is blasphemous from a historical point of view and pornographic as art”, *The Independent*. London, August 12, 1994.
- 28 Giorgio Agamben, *Profanations*. Translated by Jeff Fort. New York: Zone Books, 2007. P. 51.
- 29 *Ibid.*, p. 47.
- 30 Juan Davila, “Courbet’s Curtain,” *Juan Davila*, pp. 216-7.
- 31 *Ibid.* Davila is referring here to his paintings, *Woman with a Parrot*, 2003 and *Untitled*, 2003. He notes that “Michael Fried in his book *Courbet’s Realism* (1990) refers to ‘the obvious painterliness and strident colorism of the vivid-hued parrot, a ‘phallic’ creature. Today we can view the parrot quite differently...It can only be an expression of tremendous anxiety.” P. 216.
- 32 Noted in the first two versions of Malévitch’s *Du cubisme et du futurisme au suprématisme*, cited by Jean-Luc Marion, *The Crossing of the Visible*. Translated by James K. A. Smith. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2004. P. 92, note 20.
- 33 Michael Foucault, *The Order of Things. An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*. New York: Vintage Books, 1973. Pp. 374-5. Foucault goes on to comment on psychoanalysis ‘recognizes itself’ in psychoses, “as if the psychoses were displaying in a savage illumination...that to which analysis must make its laborious way.” P. 376.
- 34 *Ibid.*, p. 16. He concludes: “Perhaps there exists, in this painting by Velázquez, the representation as it were of Classical representation, and the definition of the space it opens up to us. And, indeed, representation undertakes to represent itself here in all its elements, with its images, the eyes to which it is offered, the faces it makes visible, the gestures that call it into being. But there...is an essential void: the necessary disappearance of that which is its foundation/ of the person it resembles and the person in whose eyes it is only a resemblance. This very subject – which is the same/ has been elided. And representation, freed finally from the relation that was impeding it, can offer itself as representation in its pure form.” The only thing is that the gender of the elided subject has been elided too, and that rather than being the sovereign, it might have been his daughter.
- 35 Juan Davila, “Courbet’s Curtain,” *Juan Davila*, p. 211. Kaja Silverman has similarly noted: “Abstraction is often celebrated as the vehicle through which art established its autonomy. Art had to get rid of similitude, because only by being unlike everything else

could it shake off the burden of representation and become a thing unto itself. But the notion of an autonomous artwork is closely linked to that of the solitary male subject and is susceptible to the same critique. Not only did a number of modernist artists try to prove that they were self-sufficient by creating autonomous works of art, but their repudiation of aesthetic referentiality was yet another way of rejecting analogy.” Kaja Silverman in conversation with George Barker, “Primal Siblings”, *Artforum* Feb 2010. Accessed <http://artforum.com/inprint/issue=201002&id=24767>). Davila’s recent work in portraiture, like that of Gerhard Richter, addresses this question of being and similitude.

- 36 Juan Davila, “Courbet’s Curtain,” *Juan Davila*. P. 221.
- 37 Juan Davila, Correspondence, September 2008.
- 38 *Ibid.*
- 39 Russell Storer, Exhibition Guide, *Juan Davila*, 30 November 2006—4 February 2007.
- 40 As Mark Epstein has recently written, “we can know the unacceptable, but we can only feel the unintelligible. And we cannot claim the sense of vitality that we crave unless we learn how to feel that which we cannot know, a capacity that both meditation and psychotherapy are capable of encouraging”. He cites A Phillips: “This other unconscious – that which is out of bounds,...like the fact of one’s infancy, or the fact of one’s forthcoming death, or the future itself – is a way of describing both the limits of what we can know and the areas of our lives in which knowing, and the idea of expertise, may be inappropriate. The unacceptable, to some extent, can be known; the unintelligible can only be acknowledged.” (A. Phillips. *Terrors and Experts*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995, p. 17 quoted by Mark Epstein, (“A Strange Beauty. Emmanuel Ghent and the Psychologies of East and West”, *Psychoanalytic Dialogues*, 15(2): 125-138, 2005. P. 136.)
- 41 Serge André, “Writing begins where psychoanalysis ends”, *Umbra*, 2006, p. 169.
- 42 Giorgio Agamben, *The Coming Community*, p. 68.
- 43 Walter Benjamin, “The Image of Proust”, *Illuminations*. Edited and with an Introduction by Hannah Arendt. Translated by Harry Zion. London: Fontana Press, 1992. P. 199.
- 44 *Ibid.* P. 199-200.
- 45 Sigmund Freud, ‘Three Essays on Sexuality’. Translated by James Strachey. The Pelican Freud Library Volume 7, *On Sexuality*. Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, 1977. P. 98.
- 46 Benjamin notes, “The deterioration of experience manifests itself in Proust in the complete realization of his ultimate intention. There is nothing more ingenious or more loyal than the way in which he nonchalantly and constantly strives to tell the reader:

Redemption is my private show.” (*Illuminations*, p. 196). I am reminded here of Freud’s art collection as described by Janine Burke: “Much Egyptian art, especially the small objects Freud collected, was destined for the tomb, accompanying the deceased on their journeys to the afterlife. It was an art of mourning that Freud began to collect while mourning his father and it expanded until his rooms, crowded with magical artifacts, began to resemble the tombs from which they were taken. Tombs, after all, not only house the dead but pay homage to them and what is mourning but an act of homage?” Janine Burke, *The Gods of Freud. Sigmund Freud’s Art Collection*. Sydney, Australia: Random House, 2006. P. 223. The details are a little vague but: “As time went by, travelling with the gods became a necessity. During the 1930s, most of the collection would be packed by his wife Martha and Paula Fichtl, the maid, and transported to his summer residences near Vienna.” *Ibid.* P. 5.

- 47 Giorgio Agamben, *Profanations*. P. 77.
- 48 Eric Laurent, “The Use of Fantasy”, *Lacanian Ink*, 1990.
- 49 Søren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*. Dialectical Lyric by Johannes *de silentio*. Translated by Alistair Hannay. Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1985. P. 42.
- 50 Søren Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments*. Edited and translated by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987. P. 59.
- 51 Steven M. Emmanuel, *Kierkegaard and the Concept of Revelation*. NY: State University of New York Press, 1996. P. 78
- 52 Giorgio Agamben, *The Time That Remains. A Commentary on the Letter to the Romans*. Translated by Patricia Dailey. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2005. P. 136.
- 53 Giorgio Agamben, *The Time That Remains*. P. 137.
- 54 Jacques Lacan, *Anxiety. The Seminar of Jacques Lacan. Book X. 1962-1963*. Unpublished translation. This is where sublimation and profanation may coincide, though rather than speak of sublimation per se, it is important to use the term sublimations, to avoid the master discourse standard of pronouncing how or what so called contemporary art or ‘all’ art sublimates.
- 55 Miller, “Profane Illuminations”, *Lacanian Ink* 28, 2006, p. 24.
- 56 Kaja Silverman has I believe picked up this moment in her writing on the work of Gerhart Richter. Her comments on abstraction and similitude are also relevant here. See Silverman, *Flesh of My Flesh*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2009.

- 57 Serge André, “Writing begins where psychoanalysis ends”, *Umbra*, 2006, p. 173.
- 58 *Ibid.*
- 59 Juan Davila, ‘Tod / Etcetera / Rat Man’, Homage to Freud / On Perversion, 1980. *Papers of the Freudian School of Melbourne*, 1981.
- 60 Juan Davila, personal correspondence.
- 61 Juan Davila, personal correspondence.
- 62 Juan Davila, correspondence, 03.06.09.
- 63 Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007. P. 345. “The idea here is that our existence, or vitality, or creativity depends, not just on the unhuman outside of us – for instance, on the overwhelming power of raw nature which awakens heroism in us – but on the wild and pre-human in us which resonates to that alien external power. We have gone beyond Kant, where the sublime awakens our suprasensible moral agency, and where the ‘starry skies above’ can be linked together with ‘the moral law within’, as two realities which fill us alike with ‘wonder and respect’. We are now in the domain of Schopenhauer, where our vital energy comes from a Will which is wild, unprincipled, amoral. ...the fact that we can conceive of giving this kind of moral meaning to the wilderness within us – this is only comprehensible within the world animated by the modern cosmic imaginary. This is one which relates to a universe which is not necessarily structured and limited by a rational, benign plan...” P. 346.
- 64 *Ibid.*, p. 703.
- 65 *Ibid.* p. 702.
- 66 Juan Davila, personal correspondence, notes, 28.02.2010.
- 67 Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, n.13, p. 194.
- 68 Judith Butler, *Antigone’s Claim. Kinship between Life and Death*. NY: Columbia University Press, 2000. Pp.80-81. “The melancholic, Freud tells us, registers his or her “plaint,” levels a juridical claim, where the language becomes the event of the grievance, where, emerging from the unspeakable, language carries a violence that brings it to the limits of speakability....In confronting the unspeakable in *Antigone*, are we confronting a socially instituted melancholia in which the unintelligible life emerges in language as a living body might be interred into a tomb?”
- 69 Kaja Silverman, interview with George Baker.
- 70 Giorgio Agamben, *The Time that Remains*, p. 42.

After Image

A conversation between Juan Davila and Kate Briggs

KATE BRIGGS: In another chapter, the next instalment, a new body of work, Davila embarks on a new enterprise, on the one hand contemplating what has been constructed to date, then turning to address once again a mythical narrative and, now, its afterimage or effect.

JUAN DAVILA: Looking back to the group of works, about 30 paintings, that I have done in the last 4 years one can begin to see the development of an argument. The portraits of women, by themselves and in the landscape, the argument about the gaze and the approach to what is called nature seem to be the major themes that have emerged. Still, there is so much that is not yet addressed.¹

KB: Looking back there is so much that is not yet addressed...like Eurydice falling or the moment where the distinction opened between sight and seeing, between the object and its representation is rendered or defined by a semblant.² The surrealism of the trajectory of the drive, sketched in these six works, take us from the moment of encounter to its after image, a state of reception distilling in form, *jouissance*.

In the first of these paintings we find a man sitting on the ground in a clearing. He is in front of a camp fire and looking at someone or something that is out of the frame to our left hand side, his arm is outstretched, as if in this moment of quiet repose he is grasping towards something unknown. Reading the title, *A Man Renounces Love*, 2010, one is stopped short, sobered, caught as it were between these moments of his gaze and his hand, fixed there for a second in the snapshot of the painting. His other hand

rests quietly on his knee. He is dressed in blue work pants and sharply polished shoes, but wearing no shirt. Neither elderly, nor young, history is carried with him, and we are watching him in this mythical moment, a turning in the rendition of his soul. Our eyes are drawn from the yellow aura around his face, through the sweep of the clearing to the light on the horizon and into the yellow sweep of the sky. Where yellow transposes to deep azure blue around the upper limits of the frame, the foreground is worked in the orange red reflection between the fire and the ground, with the intensity of the moment figured in the blurring of more realist depiction of leaves as we enter the foreground nearing the place where we stand viewing this scene. For just as the flames of the fire merge into impressionistic colour of movement, the leaves of shrubs and bushes to right and left of us blur as they might in a photograph taken by someone who is moving. The blurring depicts for me the movement of the real.

You have captured the gaze, the uncanny moment of an encounter in the real, and the ambiguous staging of this event tends both to illustrate the work of a painting as a lure for our gaze, and to nonetheless operate in the realm of the iconic. What is happening in this scene? What is this man doing dressed with his city shoes, with his elegant silver hair, his outstretched hand; is he a father, a hostage? What ever we imagine might articulate a dialectic of sacrifice and faith in the face of the real. To dim the lights and see the rather religious ambience of the gesture, the humanity in the gesture of his outstretched hand, the yellow aura around his body, the light on the horizon, the contextualizing colour. It is a masterful work. Iconic. Then to see from another



Juan Davila, photographed by Mark Ashkanasy 2010

Kate Briggs, photographed by WH Chong 2010

perspective the ‘after image’, (*After Image. A Man Renounces Love*, 2010), with its three dimensional snapshot of the moment and movement of experience, is truly extraordinary. Between them the moment of an encounter we might imagine but cannot know. It is quite stunning. Stunning because, after all, we cannot see how love works.³

JD: Viewing this painting, I sense that something elusive has been captured for a second. No second glance can repeat the experience of the first. There is a sense of beauty in this moment of encounter, something that does not happen often.⁴

These last paintings seem to try to shift the representational aspect to things not considered before, for example, impossible space, infinity, shifting of scenarios. This produces a similar effect to the one that occurs with identification, for instance in identifying with nature where one magnifies and intensifies its forms in an attempt to liberate something in us, a sort of release of imagination or a utopian fantasy.

The “Wilderness” landscapes that I worked on acquired an iridescent shimmer of colour, spatial ambiguities, a sense of delirium and dreamlike fantasy, an introspective space that is subjective and somewhat visionary. The contrast with the other landscapes painted in *plein air* is great. In the outdoor painting of nature one captures a fleeting vibration of the field of vision, something quite contrary to what photography can achieve where all details are recorded but rarely obtain that extra, poignant moment. In contrast with 19th century landscapes recorded in photographs or painting, I have combined realism and abstraction, undulating and watery forms, chance painterly procedures and free floating imagery. That helps to bring out a marvelous world buried within us. This is a space beyond the shopping mall culture that suffocates all of us. The discussion of automatism as a form of using language without

the use of our conscious faculties has long been forgotten in the art scene, which now deals only with products, big toys for the canon of collectors and curators. Automatism was once believed to give access to a world beyond the realm of external reality. The fallacy of this is that we cannot know if we are capable of relinquishing our conscious faculties. Can we be free and uninhibited and relent control? Is painting a language? In any case the attempt to use chance techniques in art, to think of our own irrational and self destructive world, to imagine a universe beyond the surface of our perceptions, is a sort of approach to the mystery of science’s micro and immense spaces. The inner space of our mind and emotion is not really mapped by science. Artists camouflage it in a theory of form. Art cannot resort to the solution of mimicry used by animals as camouflage in front of danger, humans are left with unsettling feelings. Spaces in nature do not always appear as sublime, but often as a devouring and destructive force. We can see fantastic forms and animals in clouds and in the shape of trees; we can feel how the weather moves but we cannot understand nature as the primordial mayhem of cosmic violence or its fecundity. Artists only recently have shifted from urban spaces to being a nature-oriented group. They project memory and imagination on to it, many of them focusing on this as the most important political issue today. Others, the “Toorak landscape painters” use a sort of photographic rendering or a gross glue of paint to fix a nationalistic image. They often have a “poetic” approach, semi romantic, corporate and conservative. The art scene generally reflects the corporate eye which in turn only reflects money.⁵

I have been studying the paintings of Arshile Gorky and all the painters of his era who depict space: André Masson, Odilon Redon, Joan Miró, Roberto Matta, Vasily Kandinsky, Ives Tanguy, Wilfredo Lam, etc. Emily Kame Kngwarreye’s work is interpreted a bit too quickly

as having to do with a depiction of the land. What about her ease and pleasure? These painters whom I mention were concerned with the possibility of an inner space, the unconscious and automatism. Gorky has the most supremely evocative titles for his works: “The Unattainable”, “Apple Orchard”, “The Plow and the Song”, “Soft Night”, “Young Cherry Trees Secured against Hares”, “They Will Take My Island”, “Scent of Apricots on the Fields”, “How my Mother’s Embroidered Apron Unfolds in My Life”.

The Moral Meaning of Wilderness exhibition is a tour of the various approaches to the landscape: plein air painting, studio landscape work, sublime landscape, historical evocation of a landscape, modernity and the landscape, natural disaster, childhood memory of a landscape, woman in the wilderness. The *After Image* works seem to refer to fantasies, inner space, unnameable objects, microcosm and immense space. Within the representation of “the land” one easily forgets that we are dealing with complexity and a field of projections. The political, the sublime, the moral stance, corporate destruction and the future of our environment come to mind.

The other concern I have is in regard to the pictorial materials and techniques used to address this sort of representation. Nature teaches us about the organic flow of forms. Ruskin had a horror of this possibility, settling instead for the academic depiction of every leaf, rejecting the impressionists’ use of colour and separate brush strokes as closer in spirit to the wild. But the wilderness that is the mystery for me has to do with desire and its total suppression (moral, nationalistic and corporate) in culture.⁶

Gaze is Wilderness. The gaze is always elsewhere, its treasure unknowable.⁷

KB: What then is conveyed in the moment of a glance? What is rendered visible? Can we speak, as Franz Rosen-

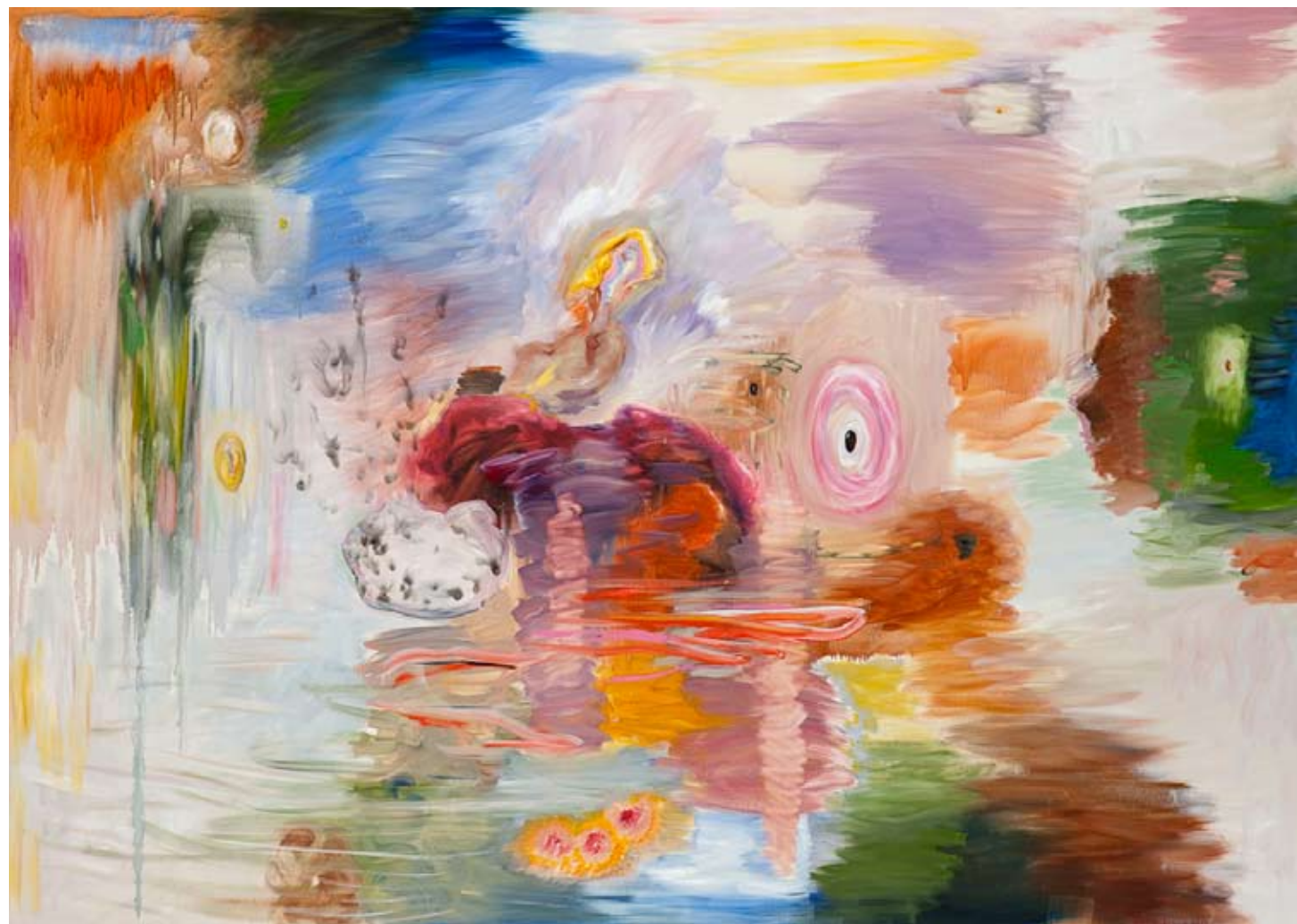
zweig does, of a content generated “as speech of the unspeakable, a first, speechless mutual comprehension, for all time indispensable beneath and beside actual speech”? If art transmits something of this ‘speech of the unspoken’ before speech, which defines us as human and particular, the individual, according to Rosenzweig, nevertheless remains with this unspeakable interior. In the moment of a glance, a thread is drawn yet “the life aroused in the beholder does not arouse the beheld to life; it at once turns inward in the beholder.”⁸ Does Rosenzweig not describe here the trajectory of the drive revolving toward and around an ‘object’ located in another, if only as gaze? This object demarcated as gaze entreats us to consider its formation in art and the animation in viewing. Davila here addresses this moment in a double effect; the canvas of representation is accompanied, partnered, by another rendering of its effect. Using an after image in this way evokes works by Arshile Gorky who reworked images to present visual enchantments with similarly captivating annotations. For example, his breathtaking account of the apple orchard.⁹

In the after image of the gaze, we see its momentum, its tenor, its tension. *Jouissance*, experienced in the moment of the subject’s disappearance, is here distilled, recorded, rotated to be delivered as an impression we might receive on looking...where the act, of sublimation, meets its object as a semblance in the real. We have negotiated this passage of the invisible, this invisible passage to claim a space of inheritance, one that speaks of beauty and its other, one that speaks of life and living, one that speaks of death. One that speaks with a clinical eye focused on the entreaties of love and the sadness inviolate of its destruction.

In a second narrative painting, *That is No Man*, 2010, we find the betrothed floating in a dance of circumstance. I’d say it is an image of hostile possession, the object like a meteorite flying out of the apocalypse of hysterical



A Man Renounces Love, 2010, oil on canvas 200 × 280 cm



After Image. A Man Renounces Love, 2010, oil on canvas 200 × 280 cm

abnegation: That is no man! Is this a comment said about her or is it the effect of her demeanour as directed to another? Her refusal in disdain of the other – is it fuelled by angry envy of this object whose possession she resents? The after image, *After Image. That is No Man*, 2010, gives among other things, an impression of dark anger. Yet who is she? I am suddenly conscious of writing such things about an image modelled on someone, a woman perhaps who did not have her father’s love.

JD: We were talking about hysteria. “Das ist kein Mann!” In the Wagner saga the fearless hero, Siegfried, approaches the woman asleep surrounded by fire. She was condemned to this exile for acting on her Father’s secret desire. After lifting the shield that covered her chest, Siegfried says:

That’s no man!
A searing spell pierces my heart;
a fiery anxiety fills my eyes:
my senses swim and swoon!
Whom can I call on to help me?
Mother, mother! Think of me!
How shall I wake the maid
so that she opens her eyes,
will the sight dazzle me?
Am I bold enough to dare?
Could I bear their brightness?
All about me sways
and staggers and reels!
A painful yearning sears my senses;
my hand trembles on my beating heart!
Why have I become a coward?
Is this fear?
O mother, mother, this is your valiant child!¹⁰

Photography can record only a limited range of the world. The after image is fleeting, unattainable, silent, conscious and not conscious; it is not abstraction or automatic expression...it is unnameable, like the fury of Brünnhilde, rejected by the father.¹¹

KB: And so, with the hysteric’s dream of love and partition, the question is how to possess without invoking the wrath of the Other who condemns, who condemns though not enough to dislocate the subject entirely, but rather includes her, entranced as a subject of desire in a field without reckoning, without response. There where the father has withdrawn to his own enjoyment, leaving his daughter stranded in dismay, she pitches her tent like Dora in an oval of discontent. How then to make this frustration practicable, on the side of usable intent? How to put someone to work, in soliciting an answer to this question of the cause of desire? In this painting we don’t find envy directed to an other woman, but rather the beautiful severity of the gaze, an aura of light like dusk, in a public place like a park or by the sea. This work demolishes the idea that painting is dead, for the gaze here is captivating. It is not contained, and the young man is disembodied. Looking to infinity, he floats as if lost in a dream.

The hysteric speaks; she says too much, even when mute. For she is waiting with this knowledge in hand, in the wings, there where it is not wanted – on the stage, she holds it in the periphery of her vision, like an intent, the passion of her gaze. It is there, emboldened by the nothing to which she is wed, that we see her domain – having traversed from centre to periphery and back again, the object of her desire cast aside yet emanating still a mysterious light and all the while she ignores him. Here, we don’t know what the relation between them might be, but the passion for nothing, evident in anxiety when this might come about, when this

might come to pass, is countered in the stolid foundation of her being and footing on the ground. Emanating from the earth, perhaps like Brünnhilde in Wagner’s Ring Cycle, we see the public field appear and recede around and in relation to her gaze. Evocative traces of fury might be felt in rejection by the father, but she has inhabited that border to take command. Rejection has not destroyed her but rather created a force field around her. The eyes painted tightly draw our attention. Held by the gaze wherever we, as viewer, manoeuvre, her eyes command us. From there her body, organized in its stolidity, nonetheless drifts out of close focus into softer impressions and lighter strokes of paint. The overall effect is luminous, a warm and undulating pulse of attention draws into this aesthetic – a formation of the unthought, bearing and terrain of the hysteric who thinks, beyond logic, with her senses.

Where knowledge itself, with Nietzsche, is seen as a crime against nature, the hysteric summons herself to assert such inhumanity. Sick with knowing, the hysterical body suffers, yet this particular woman has passed through that call to the Other, demonstrating (as J.H. Matthews said of Gorky) “the possibility of using the real, without paying the unacceptable price of falling victim to it”.¹²

JD: I recall saying to you that I intended to address a love story and the mythological. A sort of creation of the world order by cunning. We have addressed the gaze and the ecstasy in that regard. In the *After Image* paintings I have begun to try a narrative, for example, the father’s ambivalence and his punishment. The fearless hero defies the father and kills the monster. The hero finds his soul mate and then betrays her. He is slain. The woman self-immolates and the world order collapses.

Imagine the father’s defence against the hysteric’s attack, he can only try to perfect his master’s discourse.

He must have money, gold transformed into a ring that gives power. It must be symbolized, made into a signifier. The discourse of the capitalist despises the other. The underling thinks that he can buy the way out with money, but he is captured like an animal. He has the humiliation of being seen in chains by the other ones exploited. He is crushed, dispossessed, slinks off home. Truly free?

The other (Al Qaeda) is a constant threat to the Gods. The God’s curse is not a mere physical treat, it is an arcane, mysterious threat that one cannot destroy. The bartered woman (Freia) is the object of exchange. But the father covers her loss with gold, covering her gleaming gaze with it. However, the hysteric needs to be in the gaze if she is to do her work of exposing the castration of the master. I sense that murder will follow, something to paint later on.

It is in this setting that I have painted the dispossessed’s renunciation of love, the hero’s recognition of the hysteric and the birth of a fearless hero who will defy the Oedipal bind.¹³

KB: Tied together in the romance of experience is the mythic will to meaning over the unutterable voids that we cannot comprehend: birth, death, sexual difference, life. To live without fear – this is our cultural challenge, a challenge we both create and negate as we live out the daydream of experience, our epic narratives attempting to cover our loss.

JD: Regarding *A Man is Born Without Fear*, I changed the painting to make more clear the family, the child’s relation to the mother and emphasized the secondary object floating “in the future.” The white child, the hero to be, is next to the primary object, the breast, but is not attached to it. The hero is an idealized person who does not need the symbolic order. He does not need the breast or the gold later on. He has no



That is No Man, 2010, oil on canvas 200 × 280 cm



After Image. That is No Man, 2010, oil on canvas 200 × 280 cm

fear. According to the myth he is the son of a brother and sister love, product of incest. I have him as a “white boy” born of an indigenous mother and a half-caste father.

If you look at the work *That is No Man* we have him grown up and encountering the first glance of a woman, something he has never seen and fears for the first time. Love and betrayal brings his death, another floating symbol in the pictorial space. She, unable to bear his betrayal, bursts into anger and destructive fury which ends in her immolation and the destruction of the edifice.

Parallel to this, the person represented in *A Man Renounces Love* reaches out to the gold floating outside the picture, abandoning the risk of love for power. The fate of the office worker, for example. Narrative in painting can occur in many levels and time frames, the after image even more so.¹⁴

KB: The risk of love. From the romantic imagination of any adult or any child, this challenge is evoked, awakened, inspired by *jouissance* and the hope of its reception. Where the name of the father functions to link *jouissance* and the signifier, desire is created on the side of life, where enjoyment may be affirmed along the folds and amid the tempest of mythological time.

The question of the father is renewed as soon as we consider the idea of a man born without fear. We might imagine children are born without fear; that fear is instilled in a child as it encounters the symbolic, as a price perhaps for being humanised.¹⁵ The child in this painting looks happy, the mother content. It is harder to see the expression on the father’s face, his eyes seem closed. Landscape glitters around them – blue light on a bush, blue flowers, sublime painting of water. Though a nuclear reactor is evident on the horizon, the scene is not particularly apocalyptic. It speaks to the future, an accolade to the hovering yellow object.

Shaped like an ear or a molten blob or one of Gorky’s ink on paper works, *The Eye Spring*, 1945, it hovers in the sky separate and almost serene; simply there as the destiny of the gaze in this orbit of image and effect.

We are put to work, to engage with this eye spring object, to wonder what it is doing here. We might recall the roles assigned the object in psychoanalysis and art. Freud considered sublimation to be a use of the drive without repression, one that engaged a social link determining value. The parallels between the functions of a work of art and the process of psychoanalysis are many: each might show us what we cannot see, might allow us to isolate something of our subjectivity, to veil and unveil a piece of the real. In the sublimation involved in creative activity, there is necessarily a loss which involves a separation from the object in order to create it, yet this loss is also recuperated in the form of a satisfaction that is not sexual and “does not exclude the discourse about it.”¹⁶ While the effect of a work of art may not be the same for the artist and the viewer, we can in any case recognise the work of art as distinct from a formation of the unconscious, for as Davila underlines again and again, it is produced and thus to some extent, decipherable.

Seized with enthusiasm for Gorky’s nature-based abstractions, André Breton wrote in a preface for the catalogue of Gorky’s first solo exhibition in March 1945: “I say that the eye is not open when it is limited to the passive role of a mirror... *The treasure of the eye is elsewhere!*”¹⁷ Commenting that other painters might consider a watch case from every angle without ever guessing there was a spring hidden inside, Breton commended Gorky on being “the first painter to whom this secret has been fully revealed.”¹⁸ This metaphor of the eye-spring provoked from Gorky a series of drawings tracing an eye at the centre of a spiral suggestive of a spring. Breton’s reference to painters of the watch case was most likely a reference to Salvador Dalí’s



André Breton with Celia Claro de Willshaw, Davila’s grandmother, in Paris 1960s.

The Persistence of Memory, 1931, where watches are seen melted across an angular plane, a dead branch, the stretched out surface of a human face. Distinguishing Gorky from the madman who enjoys “illusions of false recognition,” Breton delineates Gorky’s use of the real as attempting neither to simply record the visible nor withdraw from reality. While having recognised the ‘invaluable ferment’ of Dalí’s ‘paranoiac-critical method’ in a lecture on surrealism originally published in 1934, the distance he takes from that here is worth considering.¹⁹

Is the golden object there in this painting to signal its own occasion, something emerging to organize and also to veil the real, or is it there to speak to these discourses? Is it there to indicate the real produced in nature by science and technology, depicted by the nuclear reactor? “Science doesn’t stop producing [the] real where there was nature... By the production itself, the scientist unveils the death wish contained in knowledge”.²⁰ As Eric Laurent notes, this foreclosure of the subject by science is one way of putting an end to the suffering related to living. Another form of this eradication of the subject and subjectivity is described by Gérard Wajcman as the order of transparency to which the hypermodern world is subjected. We are in an era where the expansion of the means of technical surveillance leads to the phantom or fantasy of creating “a man without shadow, a totally transparent subject, in body and soul.”²¹ The mythological narrative, its pictorial depiction, and the after image are forms of response to this eradication of the subjective by the discourse of science and its technological means. They are also a response to complacency. Psychoanalysis and art then are partnered to “dispel the illusion of transparency,” to defend the shadow as “a cause of truth”; as ‘two discourses of the other side of transparency...art and psychoanalysis are necessary.’²²

Breton had visited Freud in Vienna soon after the end of the First World War and his first book, published in 1921, was an experiment in ‘unconscious’ or automatic writing. His *Manifeste du surréalisme*, published in 1924, states that: “We are still living under the reign of logic... forbidden is any kind of search for truth which is not in conformance with accepted practices.... Freud very rightly brought his critical faculties to bear upon the dream. It is, in fact, inadmissible that this considerable portion of psychic activity... has still today been so grossly neglected.... I believe in the future resolution of these two states, dream



A Man is Born Without Fear, 2010, oil on canvas 200 × 280 cm



After Image. A Man is Born Without Fear, 2010, oil on canvas 200 × 280 cm

and reality, which are seemingly so contradictory, into a kind of absolute reality, a surreality, if one may so speak. It is in quest of this surreality that I am going, certain not to find it but too unmindful of my death not to calculate to some slight degree the joys of its possession.” He described surrealism as “based on the belief in the superior reality of certain forms of previously neglected associations, in the omnipotence of dream, in the disinterested play of thought. It tends to ruin once and for all other psychic mechanisms and to substitute itself for them in solving all the principal problems of life.”²³ Davila quite literally grew up with these texts. The brother of his maternal grandmother, Celia Claro de Willshaw, was married to Elisa Bindhoff who became Breton’s third wife in 1945. Breton remained in contact with the family once they returned from Paris to Chile and would send books and stories. The surrealists were thus not only part of the family mythology but in their direct circle of acquaintance. Davila’s first love in art was invited by the reception of these materials sent by Breton to Davila’s mother and grandmother. These passages by Breton remind us how the other side of the will to transparency was articulated in the twenties, and while its resonance might be felt in places, it has, as Davila comments, been largely forgotten from the discourse of art.

In early 1944 Breton met Gorky in New York and, according to Mougouch, as Gorky’s wife was known, responded to all the memories and mythology of Gorky’s childhood along with the paintings which he championed: “Gorky is, of all the surrealist artists, the only one who maintains direct contact with nature — sits down to paint before her. Furthermore, it is out of the question that he would take the expression of this nature as an end in itself... Here is an entirely new art... the terminal of a most noble evolution, a most patient and rugged development which has been Gorky’s for the past twenty years; the proof that

only absolute purity of means in the service of unalterable freshness of impressions and the gift of unlimited effusion can empower a leap beyond the ordinary and the known to indicate, with an impeccable arrow of light, a real feeling of liberty.” Let us pause to consider this moment of 1945.

In July, a watercolour by Mark Rothko appeared in the Sunday edition of *The New York Times* sparking a discussion as to whether the artist was working toward or away from reality. Rothko wrote a letter to the paper stating: “If there are resemblances between archaic forms and our own symbols, it is not because we are consciously derived from them but rather because we are concerned with similar states of consciousness and relationship to the world... If previous abstractions paralleled the scientific and objective preoccupations of our times, ours are finding a pictorial equivalent for man’s new knowledge and consciousness of his more complex inner self.”²⁵ In a letter to the editor a few weeks later, Adolph Gottlieb similarly notes: “Painting is the making of images. All painters strive for the image but some produce only effigies. This outcome is determined not by the degree of resemblance to natural objects; rather it is by the invention of symbols transcending resemblance that imagery is made possible. If the painter’s conception is realized in the form of an image, we are confronted with a new natural object which has its own life, its own beauty and its own wisdom.”²⁶ In August, two days after the atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima, Gorky’s wife, gave birth to their second daughter. She wrote to a friend: “Imagine the horror [and] irony of lying in a maternity ward with every denomination of humanity & their little ones & hearing & reading of the atomic bomb — Sometimes I feel we are dinosaurs indeed there is another world where men breathe & breed disaster & death. One wants to grip life by the scruff of the neck and assert its reality.”²⁷ In a perhaps similar vein, Barnett Newman wrote, “The war, as

the Surrealists predicted, has robbed us of our hidden terror, as terror can only exist if the forces of tragedy are unknown. We now know the terror to expect. Hiroshima showed it to us. We are no longer then in the face of a mystery. After all, wasn’t it an American boy who did it? The terror has indeed become as real as life. What we now have is a tragic rather than a terror situation. After more than two thousand years we have finally arrived at the tragic position of the Greek and we have achieved this Greek state of tragedy because we have at last ourselves invented a new sense of all-pervading fate, a fate that is for the first time for modern man as real and as intimate as the Greeks’ fate was to them... In this new tragedy that is playing itself out on a Greek-like stage under a new sense of fate that we have ourselves created, shall we artists make the same error as the Greek sculptors and play with an art of over-refinement, an art of quality, of sensibility, of beauty? Let us rather, like the Greek writers, tear the tragedy to shreds.”²⁸ The role of the semblance is clarified in this endeavour to grip life, to navigate both terror and the tragic.²⁹

It is illustrated in *After Image. A Man is Born without Fear*, 2010; an event of turbulence, of anguish and of loss. The black to the left and foreground of the canvas seems oceanic, like a tidal wave, an ocean at night or a burnt out landscape, a grey swell of emotion reminiscent with loss and gravity in the process of being bereft. Like a eulogy to Gorky whose life ended in suicide after being reduced to watching, while ill and immobilized, his wife’s brief affair with Roberto Matta. Indeed the rounded bluish object in the top right hand of the canvas is Matta-esque. There are moments of beauty, where a line folds against another hue, or the sea spray feathery forest created above mid centre by the chance formation of softly flowing paint traces the astonishing delicacy of life. There is the chilling mark of a white suture, then the pattern and shape repeated in a

brilliant blue; the pink a smudge of pure colour, radiant in the foreground and pensive on the horizon sky. Perhaps the form to the left, the shape marked with grey and gold is the object from the narrative image distorted like an anamorphosis. Turning back to look at *A Man is Born Without Fear* we see the object notating the distinction between seeing and the seen, between looking and the gaze, between the surface of the sensible and its image. This effect is given in the eight golden orange highlights marked across the surface of the canvas, the reflection or effect marked on the side of the rock and the burning bush below it. We return to the mythical family, the Madonna and child. Rather than grasping the breast, the child is holding one of his mother’s fingers in each hand; he is resting against her, shielded and content. There is hope, a future conveyed in her gaze. It is an optimistic image of survival with the sense that whatever happens to the natural world, something of humanity, the resilience depicted between mother and child, will endure. The *After Image* is slashed with orange red lines, evoking anger at the reason for anguish, that something is being taken away. These marks are condensed, form and colour in one, non-representational. Whatever menaces in the other, here is echoed. We are taken into the depth of this landscape, created in an encounter of energy and paint that leaves us to wonder what role the painter has within it. It is the dramatic, harsh conclusion to a story told. It is enough to make me weep.

This painting is perhaps a rendition of our division, where our *jouissance* itself is divided as we gaze at a work of art. Enthralled and embellished, we rescind. Is it that we are witnessing here the uncanny effect of watching our own division, where truth hovers in and out of perspective, scattered and fragmented, as it might be traced in the absolutely intimate moment, when we look into the patterns of colour and light presenting before our own closed eyes.

NOTES

- 1 Juan Davila, edited email correspondence, 20.2.2010.
- 2 Eric Laurent, “The Sacred of the Congress and its Silence”, Translation by Manya Steinkoler. Not reviewed by the author. This text appears in French as “Le Sacre du Congrès et son silence” at <http://amp2010paris.wordpress.com/2010/04/06/le-sacre-du-congres-et-son-silence/>
- 3 Edited correspondence from author to Davila, 27.3.2010. Gérard Wajcman notes that “there is something one cannot see: how love works, the secret of sexuality.” “Intimate Extorted, Intimate Exposed”, *Umbr(a)*, 2007, p. 55.
- 4 Juan Davila, edited email correspondence, 28.3.2010.
- 5 Juan Davila, edited email correspondence, 28.2.2010.
- 6 Juan Davila, edited email correspondence, 25.2.2010.
- 7 Juan Davila, edited email correspondence, 28.2.2010.
- 8 Franz Rosenzweig, *The Star of Redemption*. Translated from the Second Edition of 1930 by William W. Halo. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1985. P. 81.
- 9 Arshile Gorky, notes on his painting series, *Garden in Sochi*, 1942. *Theories of Modern Art. A Source book by Artists and Critics*. Herschel B. Chipp, Ed. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968. Pp. 535-6. Gorky arrived in the US in 1920 having survived the Armenian holocaust in which his mother starved to death. He was accepted into the inner circle of the surrealists in exile in New York, where adventures with psychic automatism and collaborative painting were giving rise to proto-abstract expressionist works of painters like William Baziotes, Jackson Pollock and Gerome Kamriowski.
- 10 Richard Wagner, *Seigfried*, Scene three, 1869. Translation Deutsche Grammophon, 1984.
- 11 Juan Davila, edited email correspondence, 27.4.2010.
- 12 J.H. Matthews, cited in Michael R. Taylor, “Gorky and Surrealism”, *Arshile Gorky. A Retrospective*. Edited by Michael R. Taylor. New Haven: Philadelphia Museum of Art in association with Yale University Press, 2009. P.113.
- 13 Juan Davila, edited email correspondence, 4.5.2010.
- 14 Juan Davila, edited email correspondence, 14.5.2010.
- 15 And fear is perhaps most intense where attachment to the mother is insecure, or where the child is left bobbing around in the wash of her reactions without hope of a horizon. For the child is looking to incarnate the object of her desire, whatever that might be, and the mother’s recognition of something, a law beyond her own whim (that which we refer to as a function of the father, be it a job or a person or even an idea), is like a beacon for a child otherwise left floating in an anxiety of not knowing its place.
- 16 Marie-Hélène Brousse, “A Sublimation at Risk of Psychoanalysis”, *Lacanian Ink* 24/25, 2005. Pp. 68, 72.
- “I say that the eye is not open when it is limited to the passive role of a mirror.that eye impresses me as no less dead than the eye of a slaughtered steer if it has only the capacity to reflect / what if it reflects the object in one or in many aspects, in repose or in motion, in waking or in dream? *The treasure of the eye is elsewhere!*” André Breton, “The Eye-Spring: Arshile Gorky,” *Arshile Gorky. Goats on the Roof. A life in letters and documents*. Edited by Matthew Spender. London: Ridinghouse, 2009. Pp.257-8. Another version of text appears in Breton, *Surrealism and Painting*, New York: MacDonald & Company, 1972. Pp. 199-201.
- 18 André Breton, *Surrealism and Painting*, New York: MacDonald & Company, 1972. P. 199.
- 19 André Breton, excerpt from a lecture, English translation by David Gascoyne in Breton, *What is Surrealism?*, in *Theories of Modern Art. A Source book by Artists and Critics*. Herschel B. Chipp, Ed. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968. P. 415. Breton defined surrealism as “Psychic automatism in its pure state, by which one proposes to express – verbally, by means of the written word, or in any other manner – the actual functioning of thought. Thought, in the absence of any control exercised by reason, exempt from any aesthetic or moral concern.” It is somewhat ironic that having escaped France and brief episodes of detention by the Vichy authorities who considered him ‘a dangerous anarchist’, Breton and his wife, with the help of a Harvard educated Quaker, Varian Fry, arrived in the USA in 1941 considering it “the Christmas tree of the world” unaware that they would remain under the surveillance of the FBI for the duration of their stay. <http://www.Warholstars.org/abstractexpressionism/artist/andrebreton/andrebreton.html> retrieved 17.05.2010.
- 20 Eric Laurent, “Partial Summary of a reading of ‘Triumph of Religion,’” translated by Maria Cristina Aguirre, *NLS Messenger*, No. 217, 03/12/2005.
- 21 “If one function of art is to show what one cannot see, we must nevertheless not limit ourselves to thinking that what we cannot see is what is prohibited, that poor taste would be the proper response to the conservative attitudes of a “moral majority” who would force us to conceal what we cannot see. Not because the intimate would be any less threatened by a prohibition than by an obligatory admission – Foucault warned us against this – but because it is purely and simply threatened with dissolution.” Gérard Wajcman, “Intimate Extorted, Intimate Exposed”, *Umbr(a)*, 2007, p. 49.
- 22 *Ibid.*, p. 55.
- 23 André Breton, *Manifeste du surréalisme*, 1924, retrieved 17.05.2010, <http://www.Warholstars.org/abstractexpressionism/artist/andrebreton/andrebreton.html>. All citations in this paragraph and the one after next are retrieved from this site.
- 24 André Breton, “The Eye-Spring: Arshile Gorky,” *Arshile Gorky. Goats on the Roof. A life in letters and documents*. Edited by Matthew Spender. London: Ridinghouse, 2009. P.259.
- 25 Mark Rothko, *The New York Times*, July 8, 1945.
- 26 Adolph Gottlieb, *The New York Times*, July 22, 1945.
- 27 Agnes Magruder, letter to Jeanne Reynal dated August 22, 1945; original grammar retained. *Arshile Gorky. Goats on the Roof. A life in letters and documents*. Edited by Matthew Spender. London: Ridinghouse, 2009. P.259.
- 28 Barnett Newman, from “The New Sense of Fate,” 1945.
- 29 For *jouissance* is a limit that “is questioned, evoked, tracked, and elaborated only on the basis of a semblance.” Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar, Book XX, Encore*. Translated by Bruce Fink. NY: Norton & Co, 1998. P. 92. And “Placing the subject in the position where the Other was initially posited, psychoanalysis forces us to recognize that the work of the subject alone produces the master in his semblance. The decision to apprehend one’s *jouissance* in that place will have all the hallmarks of a risk or gamble. Decisively separated from its support in the master’s knowledge, it will always be an act of faith. ... Far from distancing itself from semblance... psychoanalysis should maintain the possibility that this semblance of being might be our only chance to decide, to intervene politically.” Peter Degabriele, et al. (Eds). “Semblance without illusions”, *Umbr(a)*, 2007, p. 8.

CURRICULUM VITAE: JUAN DAVILA

BIOGRAPHY

Born 1946 in Santiago, Chile
1965-1969 Law School of the University of Chile
1970-1972 Fine Arts School of the University of Chile
Moved to Australia in 1974. Lives in Melbourne
Artist, Editor Art and Criticism Monograph Series in Melbourne

SELECTED INDIVIDUAL EXHIBITIONS

1988 Centro Cultural de la Municipalidad de Miraflores, Lima
1994 Juanito Laguna, Chisenhale Gallery, London
1995 Juan Davila, Recent Jet Sprays, Plug In Inc, Winnipeg, Canada
1996 Rota, Galeria Gabriela Mistral, Santiago
1999 Recent Drawings, Kalli Rolfe Contemporary Art, Melbourne
2000 Love’s Progress, Kalli Rolfe Contemporary Art, Art Fair 2000, Melbourne
2002 Woomera, Kalli Rolfe Contemporary Art, Melbourne
2002 Juan Davila: Works 1988-2002, Australian National University Drill Hall Gallery, Canberra
2003 Recent Works, “Courbet’s Origin of the World Renamed”, Kalli Rolfe Contemporary Art, Melbourne
2005 Juan Davila, Prints and Drawings, 1980s-2005, Kalli Rolfe Contemporary Art, Melbourne
2006 Juan Davila Retrospective, Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney,
2006 Juan Davila Retrospective, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, Australia
2007 Paintings and Works on Paper, L.A. Galerie Lothar Albrecht, Frankfurt, Germany,
2009 Juan Davila: A Panorama of Melbourne, Cowen Gallery, State Library of Victoria, Melbourne, Australia
2009 Juan Davila Graphic!, QCA Gallery, Queensland College of Art, Brisbane

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

1982 POPISM, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
1983 From Another Continent: Australia, the Dream and the Real, Museum of Modern Art, Paris

1989 Prospect 89, Frankfurter Kunstverein, Frankfurt
1989 Vollbild, NGBK, Kunstlerbahnhof Westend, Berlin
1989 The Australian Exhibition, Frankfurter Kunstverein, Frankfurt
1990 Transcontinental, 9 Artists from Latinamerica, Cornerhouse Gallery, Manchester and Ikon Gallery, Birmingham
1991 El desafio a la colonizacion, 4th Biennale of Havana, Cuba
1991 La cita transcultural, ICI, Buenos Aires
1992 America, Bride of the Sun, Royal Fine Arts Museum, Antwerp
1993 Currents ‘93 Dress Codes, ICA, Boston
1994 Unbound: Possibilities in Painting, Hayward Gallery, London
1994 Cartographies, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, Canada
1994 Cocido y Crudo, Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, Madrid
1998 Sao Paulo Biennale, Roteiros, Roteiros, Roteiros
1999 A sangre y fuego, EACC Espai d’Art Contemporani de Castello, Spain
2001 William Buckley: Rediscovered, Geelong Art Gallery, Australia
2001 A Bush Burial-variations on a theme, Geelong Art Gallery, Australia
Icon Interior, Howard Arkley and Juan Davila, Drill Hall Gallery, Australian National University, Canberra
2003 Witnessing to Silence, Art and Human Rights, ANU Drill Hall Gallery, Canberra
2003 Kelly Culture, Reconstructing Ned Kelly, State Library of Victoria, Melbourne
2003 onpaper, Australian Prints and Drawings in the National Gallery of Victoria, The Ian Potter Centre: NGV Australia, Melbourne
2003 Home and Away, Place and Identity in Recent Australian Art, Monash University Museum of Art, Melbourne, Australia
2004 ANU Art Collection, Acquisitions from the Past Ten Years, Australian National University Drill Hall Gallery, Canberra, Australia
2005 This & Other Worlds, Contemporary Australian Drawing, National Gallery of Victoria, The Ian Potter Centre: NGV Australia, Melbourne, Australia
2006 Arte Contemporaneo Chile: Desde el Otro Sitio/Lugar,

National Museum of Contemporary Art, Seoul, Korea and Museo de Arte Contemporaneo, Santiago, Chile
2006 Pie de Pagina, Fundacion Cultural Gil de Castro, Plaza Mulato, Santiago, Chile
2007 Documenta 12, Kassel, Germany
2007 Andy and Oz: Parallel Visions, The Andy Warhol Museum, Pittsburgh, USA
2008 Primary Views, Artists curate the Monash University Collection, Monash University Museum of Art, Melbourne, Australia
2008 The Naked and the Nude, Ballarat Art Gallery, Ballarat, Victoria, Australia
2009 Ecstatic Resistance, Emily Roysdon curator, Grand Arts, New York, USA

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY BY THE ARTIST

1990 ‘Letters to Guy Brett’, Transcontinental, Nine Latin American Artists, Guy Brett, Verso, London and New York
1995 ‘Dear A & D Reader’, Art and Design, Art and Cultural Difference issue, London
2001 ‘Art or Mart’, Meanjin 60, 4, 128-132, Melbourne
2002 ‘A Brief Commentary by the Artist’, catalogue Juan Davila: Works 1988-2002, Australian National University Drill Hall Gallery, Canberra
2003 ‘Woomera’, Artlink, vol 23 n.1, pp 18-19, Adelaide
2003 Courbet’s “Origin of the World” Renamed, catalogue, Kalli Rolfe Contemporary Art, Melbourne
2004 ‘Courbet’s Curtain’, Meanjin 63 (1) pp 211-218, Melbourne
2004 ‘Edwardian Mirage’, Meanjin 63 (3) pp 33-36, Melbourne
2006 ‘Juan Davila’, with Guy Brett and Roger Benjamin, Melbourne: The Miegunyah Press
2008 ‘A Panorama of Melbourne’, Primary Views, Clayton: Monash University Museum of Art, p20

SELECTED CATALOGUES AND PUBLICATIONS

1982 La historia de la pintura chilena (The History of Chilean Painting), Gaspar Galaz and Milan Ivelic, Catholic University of Valparaiso Ed.
1982 ‘Popism’, Paul Taylor, Real Life 9, New York
1982 The Visual Arts and the Law, Shane Simpson, The Law Book Co., Sydney
1984 ‘A New Internationalism’, Gordon Bull, Domus 77, Italy

1984 ‘POPISM: The Art of White Aborigines’, Paul Taylor, Flash Art 112, Italy
1984 La Cita Amorosa, Nelly Richard, Francisco Zegers Ed., Santiago
1984 ‘Australische Kunst der Gegenwart in Paris’, Anna Bock, Kunstforum Bd.69 1/84, Germany
1985 ‘Love in Quotes, on the Painting of Juan Davila’, Nelly Richard, Hysterical Tears, Greenhouse Publications, Paul Taylor Ed., Melbourne
1987 ‘Juan Davila’, George Alexander, +/o Revue d’art contemporain 46, Brussels
1987 ‘Art in Chile’, Guy Brett, Art Monthly 104, London
1990 ‘Transcontinental, Ikon/Cornerhouse’, Adrian Searle, Artscribe, Summer, London
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1992 Ecstasy and Economics, Meaghan Morris, EMPress, Sydney
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SELECTED PUBLIC COLLECTIONS

Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney

Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide

Art Gallery of Western Australia, Perth

National Gallery of Australia, Canberra

Australian National University Collection, Canberra

Heide Museum of Modern Art, Melbourne

Holmes a Court Collection, Perth

Lady Cruthers Collection, Perth

Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

Museo Extremeno e Iberoamericano de Arte Contemporaneo, Spain

Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne

Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane

Silvester Stallone Collection, Los Angeles

Smorgon Family Collection, Melbourne

State Library of Victoria

THE MORAL MEANING OF WILDERNESS

LIST OF WORKS

- | | | |
|---|--|---|
| 1. <i>Two Women on the Banks of the Yarra</i> 2003
oil on canvas
175 × 260 cm | 11. <i>331 Wattletree Road</i> 2008
oil on canvas
185 × 235 cm | 21. <i>Reverie</i> 2009
oil on canvas
200 × 280 cm |
| 2. <i>Two Women on the Banks of the Yarra</i> 2003
oil and collage on canvas
175 × 260 cm | 12. <i>Nina Sers</i> 2008
oil on canvas
180 × 150 cm | 22. <i>What About my Desire?</i> 2009
oil on canvas
204 × 270 cm |
| 3. <i>The Painter’s Studio</i> 2006
oil on canvas
175 × 260 cm | 13. <i>Untitled</i> 2008
oil on canvas
120 × 90 cm | 23. <i>Princes Highway, Melbourne</i> 2009
oil on canvas
180 × 150 cm |
| 4. <i>The Studio of the Painter</i> 2006
oil on canvas
175 × 260 cm | 14. <i>Untitled</i> 2008
oil on canvas
120 × 90 cm | 24. <i>Maria</i> 2009
Oil on canvas
84 × 71 cm |
| 5. <i>Australia: Nuclear Waste Dumping Ground</i> 2007
oil on canvas
185 × 235 cm | 15. <i>Untitled</i> 2008
oil on canvas
120 × 90 cm | 25. <i>Churchill National Park</i> 2009
Oil on canvas
200 × 300 cm |
| 6. <i>Guacolda del Carmen Gallardo</i> 2007
oil on canvas
185 × 235 cm | 16. <i>Untitled</i> 2008
oil on canvas
120 × 90 cm | 26. <i>Untitled</i> 2009/10
oil on canvas
120 × 90 cm |
| 7. <i>Albert Street</i> 2007
oil on canvas
185 × 235 cm | 17. <i>Two Women in Melbourne</i> 2008
oil on canvas
175 × 260 cm | 27. <i>Untitled</i> 2010
oil on canvas
190 × 240 cm |
| 8. <i>Albert Street</i> 2007
oil on canvas
185 × 235 cm | 18. <i>Woman by the River Yarra</i> 2008
oil on canvas
206 × 210 cm | 28. <i>Wilderness</i> 2010
oil on canvas
190 × 240 cm |
| 9. <i>John Batman</i> 2007
oil on canvas
185 × 235 cm | 19. <i>Melbourne’s Nuclear Plant at Wattle Park</i> 2008
oil on canvas
90 × 110 cm | 29. <i>Wilderness</i> 2010
oil on canvas
190 × 240 cm |
| 10. <i>761 Wattletree Road</i> 2008
oil on canvas
185 × 235 cm | 20. <i>Pulp Mill on the River Tamar</i> 2009
oil on canvas
90 × 110 cm | |

JUAN DAVILA
THE MORAL MEANING OF WILDERNESS

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