



THORNTON WALKER

The Breaking Wave

MEDIA RELEASE

Thornton Walker: Grand New Horizons

littoral: seashore, ecological zone along the shore...

literal: ...not going beyond the actual facts...

Webster's Dictionary

The prototype painting for this – magisterial – exhibition is *Peaking wave and rocks, Tasmania*. It adds new horizons to the natural one, three at my count. Walker's littorals, while remaining in the full realistic tradition, are not literal. Nor are they painted en plein air, they are studio works which nevertheless have the air of remote locales in Tasmania.

The painting made after the death of the artist's mother *The Remembering* recalls earlier works part imitating the object painted, part blank and inscribed. Here with this:

A wooden hen
egg in mouth
straddles the coffin

HAKOIN

The crests of the ubiquitous waves in the landscape paintings have the sharp glitter of the rims of the Chinese bowls which Walker used to render in trompe l'oeil – levitating in spacelessness. The wash of waves on the shore looks exactly like the wash of waves on the shore: when it does. When it does not, you can see 3 inch wide under-painting, raw in *Moon rising, breaking waves* and dribbles of paint in *Peaking wave and rocks*. These non literal elements remind us that paintings are made of paint. The present works are poly-stylistic at once in and outside the landscape genre. However the poly-stylistic is like polyphonic in music different voices are – beautifully – united.

The enamel plates on linen napkins remind us – as I once wrote in the book on Thornton Walker, – the tablecloth in Zurbarán's famous painting *St. Hugo of Grenoble in the Carthusian Refectory* (1633), (Museo de Bellas Artes, Seville). Walker can do literal. In his littoral paintings there are traces of 1633: and there is a revival of the landscape genre, with a stylistic signature of 2019. *Peaking wave and rocks* with its dribbles lives in perfect harmony with *Moon rising, breaking wave* – this work is redolent of Caspar David Friedrich. And superbly up to date. Visible under paint and dribbles are not just there. The relation is symbiotic. The show is marvelous - indeed.

These landscapes-seascapes build on Walker's earlier paintings, uniting his realist-abstractionist visions into one: this show is of an artist at his peak, renewing and reviving a genre so familiar to Australian eyes. Walker's choice to visit the landscape of Tasmania allows him to escape the Australian sun-glare and the vagaries of Melbourne's climate to paint an atmosphere, if not European, nevertheless like enough to let in, so effortlessly, the hint of the Romantic which landscape painting has in England and Germany. With Walker – in this show – you are both here and there. And it all hangs so well together that it looks easy. It's not. 'This looks easy' is the mark of a Master of the craft. This Thornton Walker, most definitely, is.

Patrick Hutchings, 13 March 2019

The Breaking Wave is current until 19 May 2019.

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