

Peter Neilson – *Held in the Gaze of a Stranger*
22 October – 9 November 2024
Australian Galleries Melbourne
35 Derby Street Collingwood VIC 3066

Opening Night: Tuesday 22 October 6pm – 8pm

Symposium

*“The title of the 2024 exhibition of my paintings at Australian Galleries, Melbourne is *Held in the Gaze of a Stranger*. It is a reminder to me that the work of art, is not only being looked at, but is also looking back at us, with a steady gaze.*”

Because our lives are being directed more and more, and largely without consent, via ‘thinking’ devices in every household, the paintings worth painting in this moment of history are, for me, to be found among the ones that are handmade, start to finish, by one person, acting alone.

However, in passing, a quiet thank you to the canvas-maker, the stretcher-maker, the paint-maker, the gallery, owner and staff, and all the authors of all the books I’ve read, and their publishers and staff and all involved in the distribution of those books, and the café staff that made and served up the coffees while I read those books. Oh, and to all the friends and kith and kin with whom I discuss all and everything, and who I learn from every single day.

Come to think of it, just to get here to see this exhibition, perhaps we should extend our thanks to the road-makers, the car-mechanics, the street sweepers, and streetlight globe-changers and a thousand others including the engineers and workers who checked the safety of the bridge we crossed over just to make it here in one piece. So, on second thoughts, perhaps we do not act “as one, working alone”.

As the American poet Robert Frost wrote in the finishing lines of his poem *The Tuft of Flowers*, ‘Men work together, I told him from the heart, / Whether they work together or apart.’

Being the individual I-am-becoming these paintings are for me in this moment of history, worth painting.

Finally, some further thoughts related to the discontinuous, disjunctive compositional structure of my paintings, which it seems is as old as old.

From *The Penguin Book of Haiku*
Translated and edited by Adam L. Kern
Pub. Penguin Random House UK 2018

According to traditionalist accounts haiku has two major requirements . . . The first, though broadly undervalued requirement, is the ‘cutting word’ (*kireji*) or ‘cut’ (*kire*), a device that brings about a strong dramatic pause in the meaning of a verse as well as its rhythm. The cut overcomes brevity by rending the verse into two superficially unrelated portions, beckoning the reader to step in and, through a strategy of intuition or inspiration or allusional detective work, if not cold logic, search for some underlying connection. The cut, it might be said, splices as well as dices. It establishes twin cathodes that the reader must bring [together] . . . generating an imaginative spark. A technique of disjunction, says Richard Gilbert, the cut triggers a cognitive shift. . . . This disjunctive logic of the cut, by creating negative space (*ma*) enjoining reader involvement, is the logic of linked verse and of the wit in witty linked verse.”
(Quote slightly altered).

Peter Neilson, 2024