

**John Cullinane 2007**  
**Abrasive Beauty**

‘The world of the happy is quite another than that of the unhappy.’ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus* 6-43

John Cullinane is almost – but not quite – a surrealist. He paints less the Unconscious than the world-as-fractured. Into the wide Western Australian landscapes, he crowds emblematic figures: the vast is suddenly cluttered. *Promethian Landscape* is a beautifully choreographed rout: Prometheus himself is a clown on wheels, and not as Classical images show him. Cullinane paints up stories and motifs from Classical mythology, but in a contrarian way. Decorum is fractured: there is composition, but it is not Renaissance. Look at *The Slander Room* and read it against your memories of Botticelli’s *Calumny* in the Uffizi. The sins match more or less, but nothing else does. *The Pioneer* is not heroic in the landscape, just bull headed. *Mining Country*, elegant as it is, shows two eyes on the main chance, a surveyor’s marker nose and a square hole in the ground. The hole completes a face, but no words will come from it. Only wealth. From foundation, to the nickel boom, to the Pilbara bonanza, Australia’s Western Third has bred capitalists of all sizes and complexions.

*Scientific Landscape* is a satire on scientific observation as all one eyed: the elegant pun of *Pan-theistic Landscape* suggests a pastoral far from pastoralism and its exploitations. *Harpy Landscape*, with buildings and winged, Fury seems to find the city of Perth more ominous than the real place it is. *Home Seekers* are elegant but rather frightening birds; their habitat gone, they come home to roost. *Financial Landscape* with obscenely overpaid CEOs on towers of concrete, the bungling puppet masters of the rest of us, fits the present financial crisis perfectly. That all our ills are not due to ‘late capitalism’, Cullinane reminds us in the *Oedipus Complex*: Camus inspired *Witness, Victim and Psychopath*. Only occasionally as in *Sound and Vision* do we get reassurance. Even the *Chorus* which seems to be set in a Perth park, will not be singing in Beethoven’s Ninth: the painter avows

‘This is a reflection on the emptiness of modern culture’. There is a lampoon on all of us in the *Irrationalists Landscape*: everyone is preoccupied with something that will possibly turn out in the end to be pointless.

Structuralism is over, but *The Structuralist* is a fascinating work. The Man-Aeroplane seems to harken back to something half-remembered from Nolan, but the butchered trees take all the Nolanesque heroics out of the landscape. The electric pylons are needed – how else could we listen to shock Jocks?

If this all sounds like a litany of woe, so be it. The paintings are oddly beautiful: but they get their edge from anger. The optimistic, the unspoiled, is outweighed in these paintings by discords: the feeling is of Shostakovich, not Mozart or Beethoven. The promises of Enlightenment, in 1788 at Botany Bay, faded. Smaller ones failed: in 1829 on the beaches outside Perth, where pianos and fine furniture rotted on the beach, and the new town in the Prospectus proved to be no more than sandhills. Cullinane shows us that what progress we have made, how we construct some decencies in life, is a gritty business. His figures all look odd, their faces bewildered: as goofy as Delvaux’ ladies.

What happened to the New Southern Eden? Original Sin came on the ships along with the rats. There are no clean, new beginnings.

All the Classical stories are about evil and the overcoming or not overcoming of it. So all of them are now still topical. Cullinane does not simply browse through Greek Myths, and pick, idly, a motif for a painting. On the contrary, he selects what is apposite – up to the minute, even. Then he shatters Classical images, replacing heroic figures with modern sleepwalkers, blundering through ‘what they have done – and what they have failed to do’ – and *what has been done to them*. For *The Committee* are all dunces. And *Jason’s Dream*, with its three gigantic, fallen Greek Heads on Western Australian soil, might be taken as the key to reading of the rest of the exhibition. The mighty are all fallen. And we all Fallen with them.

If the epigraph to this essay puzzles you, just look at the Exhibition.

Patrick Hutchings is a Senior Fellow in the Department of Philosophy in the University of Melbourne and an Editor-in-Chief of *Sophia*



2. Irrationalist Landscape



4. Chorus



5. The Pioneers



14. Financial Landscape



20. Witness, Victim and Psychopath



19. Pantheistic Landscape



24. Scientific Landscape



7. The Slander Room



10. Jason's Dream



12. Venus



23. The Committee



22. Oedipus Complex



25. Harpy Landscape



8. Narcissus Landscape



6. Narcissus Room



- 1 **Promethian Landscape** 2007  
(Cover Image)  
oil on linen, 122x168cm
- 2 **Irrationalist Landscape** 2007  
oil on linen, 122x168cm
- 3 **The Constitution** 2007  
oil on linen, 122x168cm
- 4 **Chorus** 2007  
oil on linen, 122x168cm
- 5 **The Pioneers** 2007  
oil on linen, 122x168cm
- 6 **Narcissus Room** 2007  
oil on linen, 91x121cm
- 7 **The Slander Room** 2007  
oil on linen, 91x121cm
- 8 **Narcissus Landscape** 2007  
oil on linen, 91x121cm
- 9 **The Riddle** 2007  
oil on linen, 91x121cm
- 10 **Jason's Dream** 2007  
oil on linen, 91x121cm
- 11 **Looking Back** 2007  
oil on linen, 91x121cm
- 12 **Venus** 2007  
oil on linen, 76x101cm
- 13 **Breaking News** 2007  
oil on linen, 71x101cm
- 14 **Financial Landscape** 2007  
oil on linen, 71x91cm
- 15 **Sound and Vision** 2007  
oil on linen, 56x61cm
- 16 **Homeseekers** 2007  
oil on linen, 46x61cm
- 17 **The Structuralist** 2007  
oil on linen, 46x56cm
- 18 **Proteus** 2007  
oil on linen, 46x56cm
- 19 **Pantheistic Landscape** 2007  
oil on linen, 41x51cm
- 20 **Witness, Victim and Psychopath** 2007  
oil on linen, 41x51cm
- 21 **Mining Country** 2007  
oil on linen, 41x51cm
- 22 **Oedipus Complex** 2007  
oil on linen, 41x51cm
- 23 **The Committee** 2007  
oil on linen, 41x51cm
- 24 **Scientific Landscape** 2007  
oil on linen, 41x51cm
- 25 **Happy Landscape** 2007  
oil on linen, 31x41cm



15. Sound and Vision



17. Structuralist



18. Proteus



21. Mining Country

## John Cullinane Biography

### Born

1957  
Subiaco,  
Western Australia

### Education

1987 Painting and Ceramics, WACAE  
1986 Diploma in Fine Art, Claremont School of Art  
1980 Certificate in Drawing, Perth Technical College  
1973 Drawing, Perth Technical College

### Solo Exhibitions

2007 New paintings, Brigitte Braun Gallery Melbourne  
2006 New Paintings, Fortyfivedownstairs, Melbourne  
2005 New Paintings, Artplace, Perth  
2004 New Paintings, Fortyfivedownstairs, Melbourne  
2003 New Paintings, Artplace, Perth  
2001 New Paintings, Artplace, Claremont, WA  
2000 Gaswerk Galerie, Schwabach, Germany  
1999 New paintings, Artplace, Claremont, WA  
1997 From the sketchbook, Artplace, Claremont, WA  
1994 Access Contemporary Art Gallery, Sydney  
1993 Artplace, Claremont, WA  
1992 Artplace @ ArtsHouse, Perth

### Group Exhibitions

2004 Artplace Group Show 2004, Artplace, Perth  
Melbourne Art Fair 2004, Melbourne, VIC  
2003 Artplace Group Show 2003, Artplace, Perth  
Bank West Contemporary Art Prize, PICA, Perth  
2002 Artplace Group Show 2002  
Melbourne Art Fair 2002  
2001 Art 01 The Western Australian Art Fair, Artplace stand  
Redland Art Prize, Sydney City of Perth Art Prize  
1999 Artplace Christmas Show, Artplace, Perth  
1998 Review '98 - Director's Choice, Gallery 101,  
Melbourne 6th Australian Contemporary Art Fair, Melbourne  
Conrad Jupiters Art Prize, Gold Coast City Art Gallery  
Artplace at 101, Gallery 101, Melbourne  
The Albany Art Prize, Vancouver Arts Centre, Albany  
New work by Artplace artists, Artplace, Perth  
1997 Censorship Show, Artplace, Perth  
1996 5th Australian Contemporary Art Fair, Melbourne  
Figuration, Art Gallery of WA  
Five figurative Painters, Festival of Perth,  
Artplace Perth  
Six Western Australian Painters, Beaver Galleries, Canberra  
Out of Australia, Perth Institute of Contemporary Art  
Sir Charles Gairdner Invitation exhibition  
1995 Fourth Contemporary Art Fair ACAF#4, Melbourne  
1994 Mandorla Art Prize (finalist)  
1993 The Advantage of Isolation, Artplace, Claremont  
The Advantage of Isolation, Blaxland Gallery, Sydney  
52 New, Artplace, Claremont  
1992 Sir Charles Gairdner Invitation Exhibition  
Tresillian Art Award (Drawing)  
Mandorla Art Prize (finalist)  
Alice Prize  
1991 Albany Art Prize  
1990 Matilda Bay Art Prize (finalist)  
1989 Tresillian Art Award, works on paper  
Matilda Bay Art Prize (finalist)  
Albany Art Prize  
1987 Luv A Duck, University of Western Australia  
1986 Graduate Exhibition, Claremont School of Art

### Awards/Commissions

2007 Book cover Australian Pastoral, by Jeanette Hoom  
2000 Artist in Residence, Galerie Gaswerk  
Schwabach, Germany  
1998 Winner Albany Art Prize  
1994 Artist in Residence, New Norcia  
1992 Book cover, One More River, by Brenda Walker  
1991 Banner, Waterside Workers Federation  
1990 Book cover, Crush, by Brenda Walker  
1989 Best Figure Study, Albany Art Prize

### Publications

2007 Patrick Hutchings "Abrasive Beauty", exhibition catalogue  
2006 David Bromfield, The paintings of John Cullinane, exhibition catalogue  
2004 Felena Alach, Well executed, creative spaces, Shout, Oct-Nov  
Jennie Fitzhardinge, "Just the ticket",  
Sunday Times, September 26  
2003 Judith McGrath, www.artseeninwa.com, May,  
Arts-Today section pg 7, The West Australian, May 7th  
2001 Neville Weston, "Surprising Vision",  
The West Australian, big weekend, Sept. 15  
Rosemary Hunter, "Other worlds", Perth Weekly, September 5th  
2000 Australian Painting 1788 - 2000, Oxford University Press; p585; 2001  
Ute Maucher, "Venus steht am Strand" Abendzeitung, Nürnberg,  
Germany, 22.7  
Eva Kettler "Das Licht der Romantik" Nürnberger Zeitung, Nürnberg,  
Germany 18.7  
"Mythologie puzzelt beim Betrachten entgegen, Schwabacher  
Tagblatt, Schwabach, 20th July  
David Bromfield, "Mastering the craft of magic", Big Weekend, The  
West Australian, 12th June  
1999 Evi Ferrer, "Heights of inspiration", Perth Weekly, 2-8 June  
"Off to the art fair", Local News, 24 June  
1998 Patricia Gill, "Prize winner invites closer look", Albany Advertiser, 7 April  
Patricia Gill, "Albany Art Prize a dream come true for Perth artist",  
Albany Advertiser, 9th April  
Ron Banks, The West Australian, 14th April  
David Bromfield, "Cullinane's travels",  
The West Australian, 28 June  
1997 Dorothy Erickson, "Shooting stars - Brigitte Braun's Artplace", Artlink, 17:3  
Neville Drury, Images III, Craftsman House, NSW  
1996 Jill Bryant, Australian Imaginings, Hodder Headline Australia,  
(image p. 5) 1996  
Paul McGillick, The Figurative Edge, Art and Australia,  
Vol.34 No.1, Spring '96  
Anna Herriman, Six Western Australian Painters, exhibition catalogue,  
Paul McGillick, Perth Dreamscape finds its painters, Financial Review, 9.2  
Sonia Barron, Showing six who characterise  
painting in WA, Canberra Times 17.2  
Nikki Miller, Art Circuit, The West Australian, 28.2.  
John Stringer, Richard /Woldendorp, Artists in Residence, Sandpiper  
Neville Drury, Images 2, Craftsman House  
1994 Margaret Moore, "Fifty times two", Artlink,  
Vol.13, No.2, p 80  
Dorothy Erickson, "Dip into the West",  
Bulletin, 16.2. Ron Banks,  
"Dream Show for Artist",  
The West Australian, 9.6.93  
Judith McGrath, "Paint poses few puzzles",  
Sunday Times, 13.6.93  
David Bromfield, "On Show" Big Weekend,  
The West Australian, 26.6.93

### Collections

National Gallery of Australia, Murdoch University, Parliament House  
Canberra, University of Western Australia, Art Gallery of Western  
Australia, Curtin University, Edith Cowan University, Royal Perth  
Hospital, City of Wanneroo, SGIO, Town of Albany, New Norcia Art  
Gallery, Kerry Stokes, Central Metropolitan College of TAFE, Barry  
Humphries, Bank West, and private collections in Australia, Germany,  
Ireland, England, Canada and U.S.A.



3. Constitution



16. Homeseekers



11. Looking Back



9. The Riddle



13. Breaking News

## John Cullinane New Paintings

Opening drinks with the artist  
Saturday 17 November  
3.00 - 5.00 pm

Exhibition 17 November -  
8 December 2007.  
Wednesday - Saturday  
1-4 pm & by appointment

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