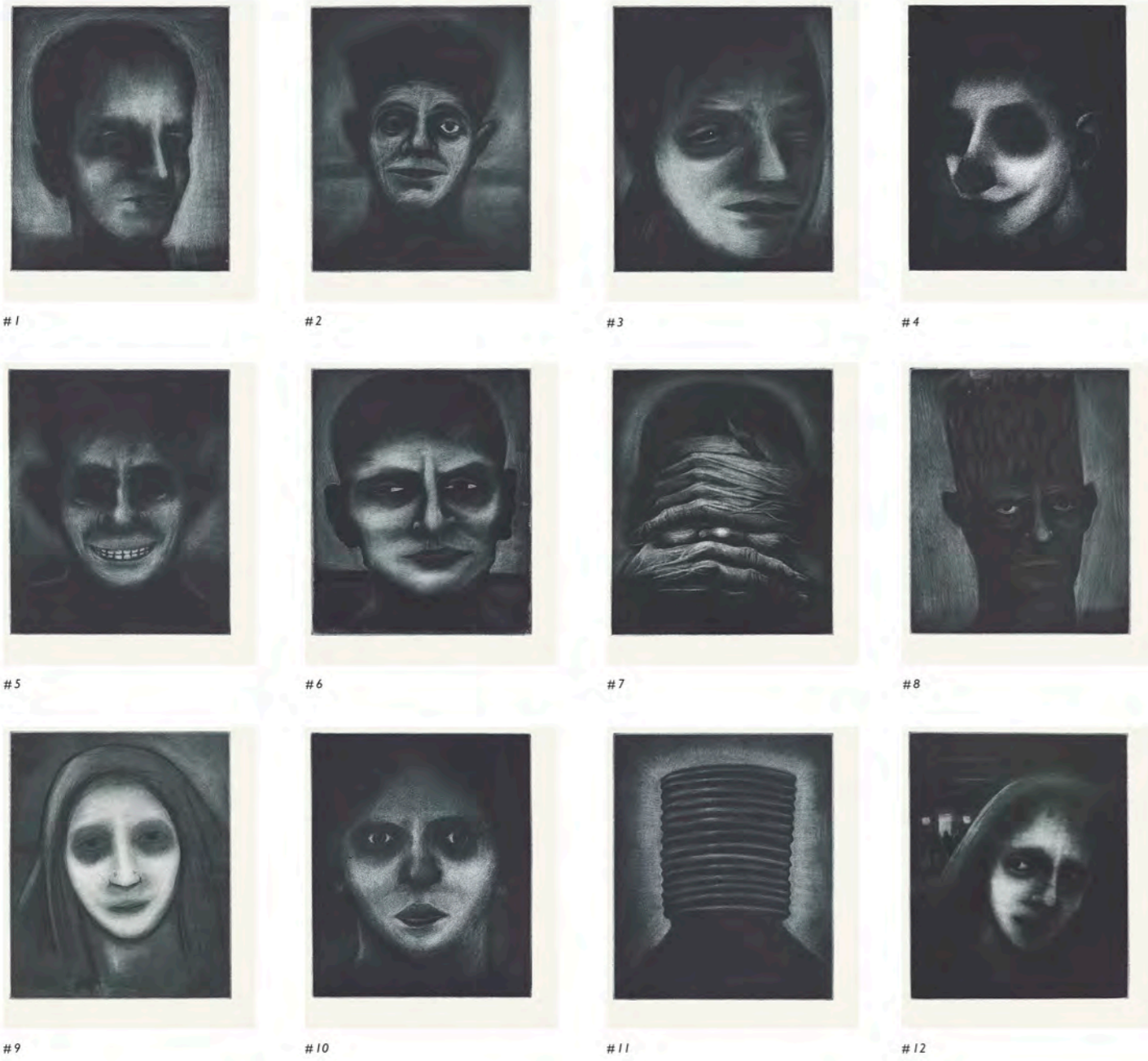


GEOFFREY RICARDO

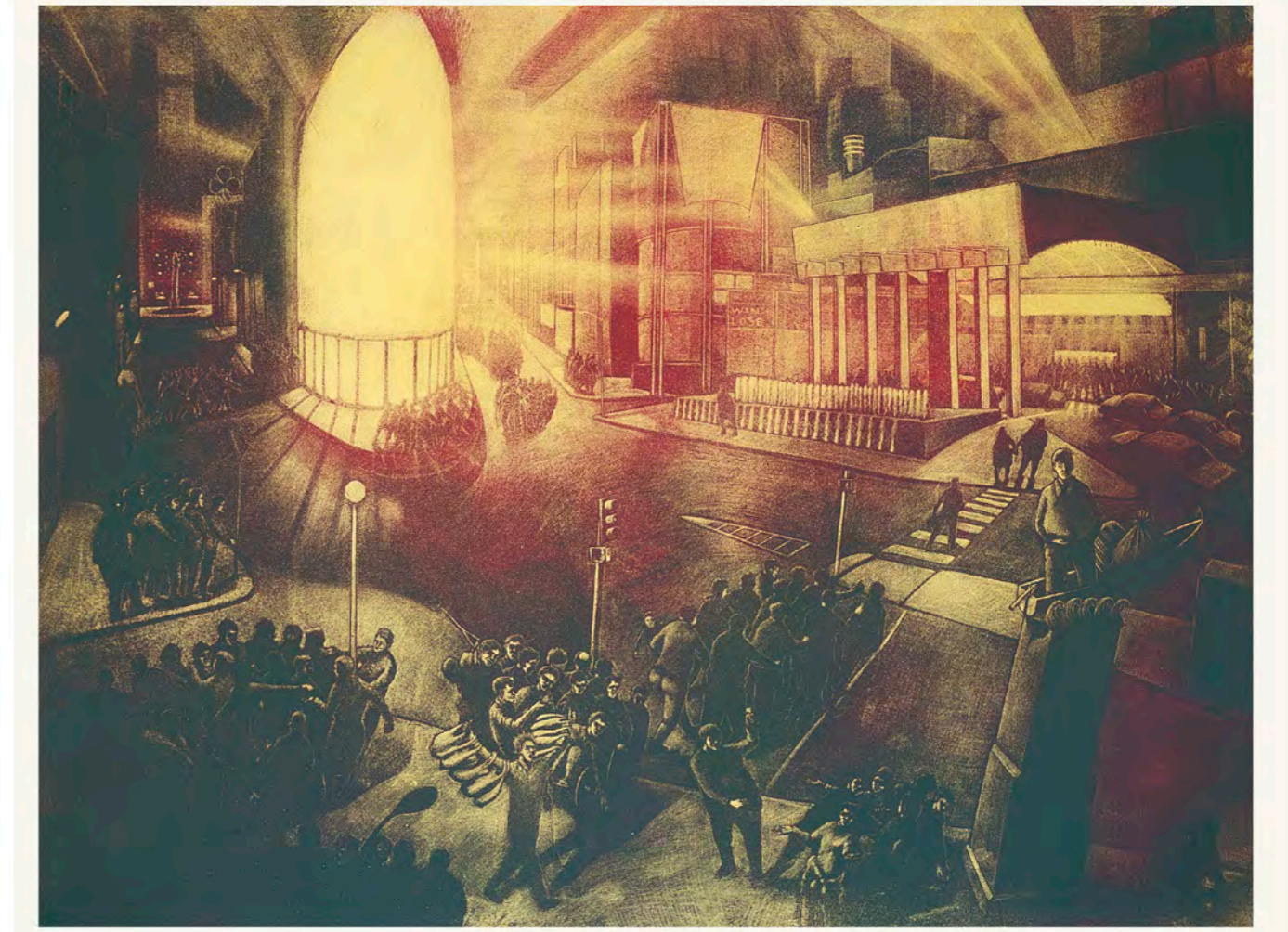
GEOFFREY RICARDO



A Rogues' Gallery #1-12 1998 aquatint edition of 20 18 x 14.8 cm (image)



The urbane heart 1999 drypoint and aquatint edition of 25 89.5 x 118 cm (image)



Front cover:
Illuminated city 1999 drypoint and aquatint
edition of 25 89.2 x 117.6 cm (image)

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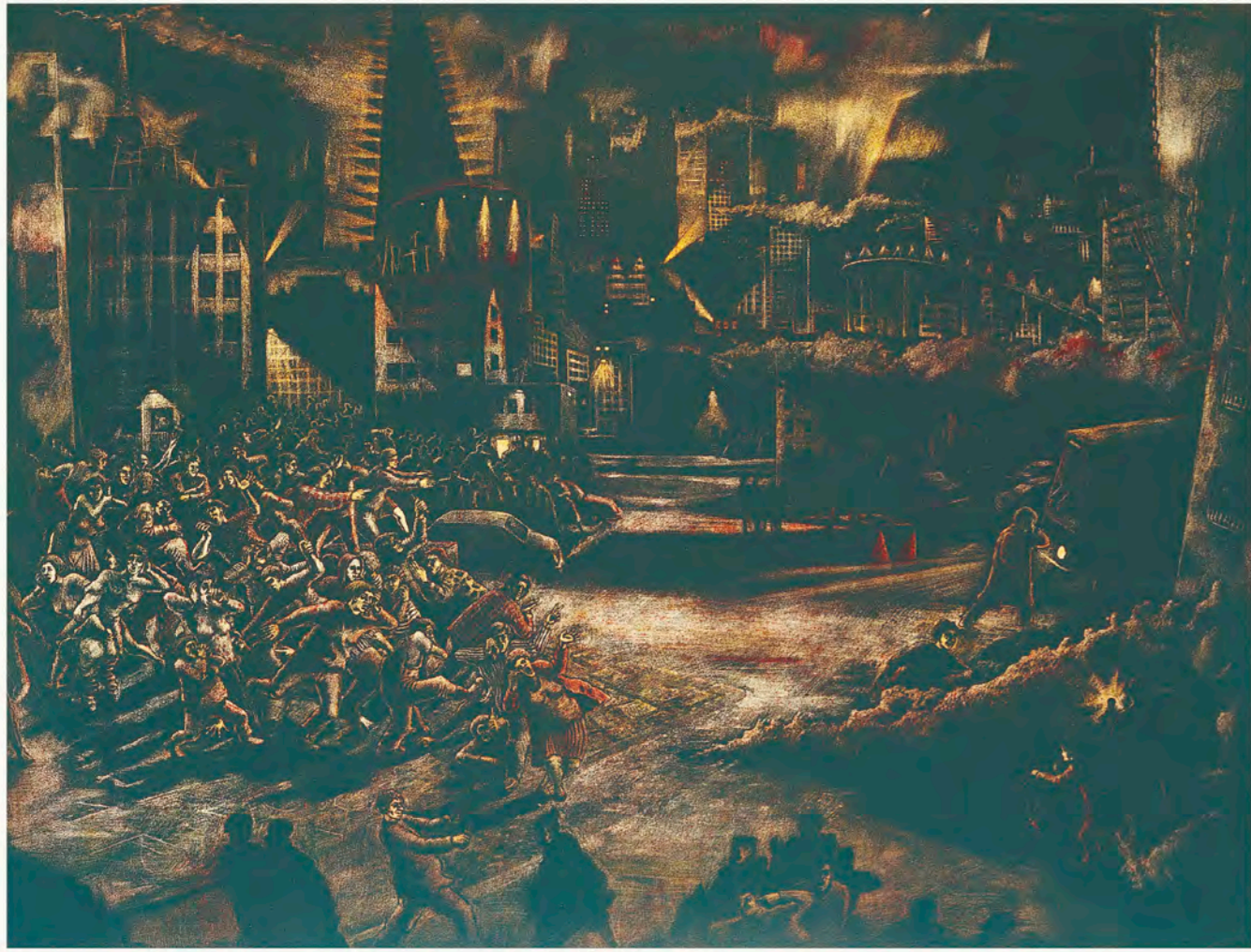
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A DARK CITY NARRATIVE

AUSTRALIAN GALLERIES



The cellular city 1996 drypoint and aquatint edition of 25 89.5 x 118 cm (image)



The floating city 1999 drypoint and aquatint edition of 25 89.3 x 118 cm (image)



Love street 1999 drypoint and aquatint edition of 25 89.3 x 118 cm (image)



Geoffrey Ricardo 1999 Photographed at Neville Street Studios, Melbourne by Jennifer Bowskill

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

1964 Born Melbourne, Victoria
 1984-86 Bachelor of Arts (Printmaking), Chisholm Institute of Technology
 1989-90 Graduate Diploma of Art (Printmaking), Monash University
 1996 Master of Arts, Monash University

Geoffrey Ricardo lives and works in Melbourne. He has received numerous awards and commissions including a major tapestry commissioned by the Festival of Perth in 1993 and woven by the Victorian Tapestry Workshop. His work is represented in major public and private collections throughout Australia and overseas.

SOLO EXHIBITIONS

1990 Australian Galleries, Melbourne
 1992 Australian Galleries, Sydney
 Australian Galleries, Melbourne
 1994 The Lawrence Wilson Art Gallery, University of W.A.
 Grahame Galleries & Editions, Brisbane
 1995 Australian Galleries, Sydney
 Australian Galleries, Melbourne
 1996 Delaney Gallery, Perth
 1997 Chapman Gallery, Canberra
 Australian Galleries, Sydney
 Australian Galleries, Melbourne
 BMG Art, Adelaide
 1998 Cullity Gallery, School of Architecture and Fine Art, University of Western Australia
 1999 Australian Galleries, Melbourne

COLLECTIONS

Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney
 Canson Australia Pty Ltd, Victoria
 City of Whitehorse, Victoria
 Downlands College, Queensland
 Geelong Grammar School, Victoria
 Gold Coast City Art Gallery, Queensland
 Griffith University (Gold Coast Campus)
 Holmes A' Court Collection, Western Australia
 Latrobe Regional Gallery, Victoria
 Monash University, Victoria
 National Gallery of Australia, Canberra
 National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
 Parliament House Art Collection, Canberra
 Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane
 Queen Victoria Museum & Art Gallery, Tasmania
 Star of the Sea College, Victoria
 The Melbourne Club, Victoria
 University of Central Queensland
 Warrnambool Regional Art Gallery, Victoria

A DARK CITY NARRATIVE

PETER TIMMS

He is almost hidden in a corner in the foreground, bending forward grotesquely, a fierce grin distorting his features. In his hands, a string-puppet, which he holds up before the crowd as a priest might brandish the holy cross to ward off evil. The puppet is a symbolic mirror and the puppeteer, we can assume, is the artist, who must warn of moral danger but whose fate it is to be ignored. In any case, the people surging forward, mobiles clutched to their ears, are not really there, so how could they notice him? This is *Cellular city*. Their minds are somewhere other than their bodies, and, given the squalor of the street, that is not a bad place for them to be.

In *Illuminated city*, high above the crowd in the street, a boy stands in a boat on a pedestal, looking around with detached amusement. Below, amid the groups of lolling men, a crutch lies discarded on the cobblestones.

Every so often in Geoff Ricardo's nightmare streetscapes we find, in the puppeteer or the boy in the boat or the abandoned crutch, signs that suggest (albeit ambivalently) the possibility of escape. Self-awareness is the key, but self-awareness is notoriously illusive.

Ricardo's blank-faced, anonymous people think they have it. They are unquestioningly confident of their own importance and of their gregariousness. But this is self-delusion. In fact, they are idle people: filling in time, looking for ways to entertain themselves,

seeking after distraction. The dark city they inhabit, devoid of any connection to the natural world, can offer them no home and no enlightenment, so they are doomed to repeat an endless cycle of frustration. When the lights go out at the shopping mall (before they have filled their trolleys), blind panic is the only option.

The sense of heightened, distorted reality the artist brings to his busy, chaotic scenes underlines their purpose as moral fables (something unfashionable in this age of ambivalence), making them almost biblical in their intensity. But whereas Ricardo's earlier prints, suffused with the logic of the dream, were mainly about psychological states, these new, more savage and unforgiving

ones have a strong political dimension as we'll see. In works such as *Gasbags* and *Elephant gingham*, people formed themselves into bumbling yet amiable huddles, working dumbly together at some absurd and pointless task. Now, the view is broader and less intimate. Now they have become a mob, which is not a gathering of individuals, but a threatening entity. The mob was one of the principle performers in the political struggles of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, and its gradual metamorphosis into the disciplined, organised demonstration of the later nineteenth century signals the development of modern political consciousness. Are we then to read Ricardo's images not just as signs of moral decay but as a warning

against loss of faith in political action; the first step towards oppression? Such a warning is signalled in the total self-absorption of his characters, their inability to respond to each other. The love in *Love street*, for example, is not the giving kind, but the narcissism of the advertising industry and the sex shop. Even the young couple embracing, oblivious to the mayhem around them, strain over each other's shoulders to admire their own faces in hand mirrors.

The world of these prints is as cynical as anything from Jacques Callot or Goya or Brueghel. Everyone is on the make, looking after number one; survival depends on outwitting the next guy without stepping

out of line. But no one has the slightest idea of how much it's costing them.

Or of who's pulling the strings. Absorbed as they are in delusions of free-will, they remain unaware of that other puppeteer (God, Providence, the corporate boss, the politician) who, although unseen, is an all-pervading presence in Geoff Ricardo's dark city of the mind.

August 1999