

Satirical Beasts of Ecological Doom



Artist Geoffrey Ricardo – sculptor, printmaker, painter, set designer

Big, burlesque and bold, the art of Geoffrey Ricardo takes us through a satirical landscape where his 'animalia' struggle to survive in a dark and decadent world. His iconic elephants, polar bears, kangaroos, rhinoceros, dogs, birds and seals are just some of the cast of characters in an anthropomorphic mix of myth, beast and man. Ricardo's sculptured beasts are essentially Australian; blunt in character, rough in texture, often sheets of scrap copper hammered together with splashes of strong coloured paint. Like giant cartoons they strut about on Ricardo's dimly lit stage, or out on beachfronts where they dominate the landscape.

Working from his studio in Melbourne's West, he is a restless and compelling artist. Highly skilled, Ricardo morphs from sculptor to painter, illustrator, printmaker, set designer and teacher. He has been known to explore his subjects with anthropological passion delving into diverse milieus. He once spent months examining post-mortems in a rural hospital and he travelled to the icescapes of Antarctica in the pursuit of deeper insight to convey his concerns about the state of the planet and the human condition.

Ricardo has exhibited regularly since 1990 and is represented in major public and private collections throughout Australia. He is readily collectable and affordable, particularly his small-scale sculptures and his quirky, expressive prints that appeal to both adults and children. There is a strong element of the grotesque in the menagerie of creatures and figures that inhabit his drawings and prints.

Ricardo has matured into an artist who is constantly revisiting his range of themes to develop his satirical narrative. He has one eye on the masters of the past, constantly referencing the iconography of his subjects, and one eye on the contemporary world, alert to the scientific, social and environmental conundrums that underpin his sharp wit. He has an energetic approach to experimenting in materials, technologies, genres, and mediums.



Emblematic Copper patinated and painted, height 280 cm. Photo taken Sculpture By The Sea, Bondi, 2012

His Kangaroo, entitled, Emblematic, half-man half-beast, is seen here overlooking the shores of Bondi Beach. It is assembled in copper scrap with a recycled steel shopping trolley as an empty pouch, the lurching figure counterbalanced by a potent red painted tail protruding skywards. In stark contrast to the gilded and finely illustrated kangaroos of the Australian coat-of-arms, it challenges our very sense of national and cultural identity. Like Sidney Nolan's Kangaroo, half-roo half-digger, a grim image melting in central desert heat, Ricardo captures a profound sense of solitary loss and doom. Like Nolan, Ricardo has a powerful grasp on the Australian psyche.



Anno Domino @ Aarhus, Denmark 2011

His Rhinoceros, wryly named Anno Domino, the most threatened of beasts, is a natural fit in Ricardo's cast of grotesques. Gargantuan and surreal by virtue of its age and size, it has artistic heritage from ancient Roman and Medieval times to Durer's famous woodcut of the 16th century and the Surrealists. Ricardo's massive and motionless beast, measuring approx. 3.5 metres high 5 metres long by 2 metres wide, has massive presence and a strong formal and anatomical credibility. It stands firm and motionless, a vast assemblage of malleable copper sheets manipulated, dressed and polished to give the animal three-dimensional weight, leathery skin texture and a realism that is quite emotionally charged. It is a powerful plea that addresses the perilous plight of the rhinoceros still slaughtered for its horn and facing imminent extinction.

Ricardo's signature beast is the elephant. It brought him into national focus in 1990 when the Australian Tapestry Workshop selected Elephant (swathed in red check cloth) for production as a monumental tapestry. It was to be the first of several tapestries based on his work that now grace the walls of galleries, embassies and corporate boardrooms.



Forward backward 2007 painted copper 41 x 41 x 85cms

His preoccupation with elephants has extended throughout his career and permeates his sculpture, paintings and prints. Ricardo's whimsical elephants have delighted and enthralled audiences as he skilfully manipulates his copper forms and plays with symbolism and metaphor - the 'elephant in the room', 'under the rug', the 'white elephant', 'elephants that don't forget', manipulating and stretching his trunk into 'Hind sight' or a suicidal gun barrel. Playful and imaginative, Ricardo's elephants have heroic attributes and the burlesque flavour of circus theatre, equally comic and tragic.



The self realiser 2006 patinated copper 35.5 x 136 x 3.5cms



Chinese Whispers 2007 Oil On Canvas 72x 130 cms



Hind sight 2007 oil on board 29 x 40cms

Ricardo's expansive portfolio is best explored through his limited edition prints where his full array of animals and grotesque creatures multiply and meander freely in this edgy space. Bold and contemporary, they emanate heart and soul. They are at home in any environment adding symbolic richness and depth of meaning to any living interior space.

A favourite amongst collectors, *New Tricks*, a Dalmatian spotted with hearts was in such demand that the artist was forced to create a new version, spotted with dollars.

I recommend an on-line search through his gallery of images at www.geoffreyricardo.com, a visit to Australian Galleries www.australiangalleries.com.au in Melbourne and keep an eye out for his latest installation, a 6.5 metre emblematic kangaroo at the junction of George and Roma streets, Brisbane.



New Tricks intaglio print, 1997, 80 x 120 cm



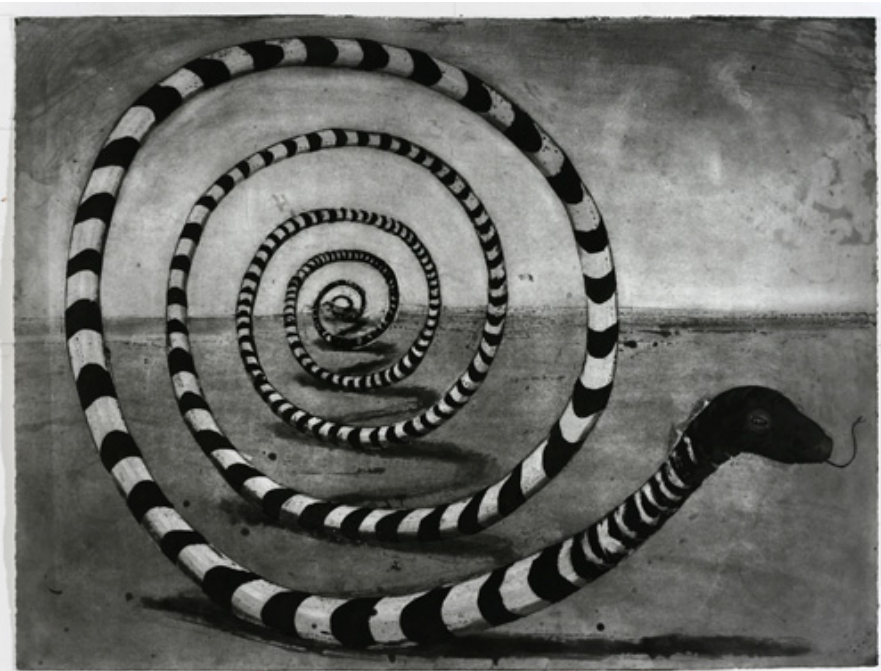
Porcupine intaglio print, 1997, 45 x 60 c



Zebra intaglio print, 1997, 80 x 120 cm



Cola Bear intaglio print, 1997, 45 x 60 cm



The Long Snake intaglio print, 1997, 90 x 120 cm

Jo Moulton www.jomosteel.com
2015