

Invites you to the opening

## GEOFFREY RICARDO

*History Repeats*

Tuesday 28 May 2019 6pm to 8pm

28 Derby Street Collingwood VIC 3066

Artist talk: 2pm Saturday 1 June 2019

Current until Sunday 16 June 2019

Open 7 days 10am to 6pm

T 03 9417 2422

melbourne@australiangalleries.com.au

australiangalleries.com.au



Front: *Betwixt and between* (detail) 2014  
intaglio print 50 x 50 cm edition 20

Top: *The Hollermen - variation* 2014  
intaglio print 50 x 50 cm edition 10

Middle: *A brief history 2* 2019  
intaglio print (colour) 50 x 50 cm edition 10

Right: *Thief* 2019  
intaglio print (colour) 50 x 50 cm edition 20

### Geoffrey Ricardo: *History Repeats*

The Spanish-born philosopher, Jorge Agustín Nicolás Ruiz de Santayana y Borrás, better known in English as George Santayana, is best remembered for such aphorisms as, "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it", and "Only the dead have seen the end of war".<sup>1</sup>

Geoffrey Ricardo, one of Australia's preeminent artist printmakers, produced his first major body of prints in 1989, when he had commenced a Graduate Diploma in Printmaking at Caulfield (which had become part of Monash University) and was also working as a printing assistant to his teacher, the printmaker and master printer Bill Young. These etchings of rather strange single figures appeared almost like playing cards, personified by their obsessions, whether it be houses, cars, footballs or television sets, that morphed into their heads. Now, three decades later, this stunning exhibition, *History Repeats*, examines the unfolding of Ricardo's vision in the form of a survey of his intaglio prints, supplemented by a few recent paintings and sculptures.

Ricardo belongs to a tradition of Melbourne figurative expressionists making socially relevant art that is frequently tinged with an apocalyptic note and possesses a certain black surrealist dimension. One can think of the great and distressing nightmare images by Arthur Boyd, like his Melbourne burning images of modern evil by Albert Tucker, the personalised nightmares of Peter Booth or the submerged cityscapes of Jon Cattapan. It is a vision born out of a personal neurosis, one which Ricardo transcends and develops into images of a general and universal significance.

A strong and instinctive draughtsman, Ricardo adapted from Goya a scraped aquatint method, or a *manier noir* technique, to work out the image in monochrome on the key plate with colour generally printed à la poupée from additional plates. Forms emerge out of darkness, almost struggling to establish their sense of existence, with drama and the absurd combining in powerful and memorable images.

Ricardo observes about his imagery and method of work, "I employ traditional methods of narrative story telling through traditional printmaking process to pursue and explore themes of a contemporary nature. It is this disjunction of tradition and contemporary that I find enjoyable ... It's almost impossible to predict how an image will look until it is printed and there is always a surprise waiting whether good or bad. Printing is the breaking down of an image into constituent parts, a deconstruction through the mechanical process, to be re-assembled into an image that clarifies or invites further exploration of an idea".<sup>2</sup>

Over the thirty years, in Ricardo's art there has been both a consistency in the artistic vision and in technique, but accompanied by a growing intensity in the imagery and technical sophistication. Earlier prints, including *Big foot* (1997), *Anno Domino* (1997) and the brilliant and elaborate image of a modern-day inferno in a shopping mall, *The urbane heart* (1999), grow in power and visual lucidity in *Elephant gingham* (2002), *Rapunzel* (2002) and *The publicans' boogie* (2003). Some of the more recent images, including *The Hollermen* (variation 2014) and the wonderful, distilled print *Betwixt and between* (2014), betray a heightened sense of eschatological drama. Recent small oil paintings such as *A brief history of nonsense* (2018) and *A daily double* (2018) continue these explorations.

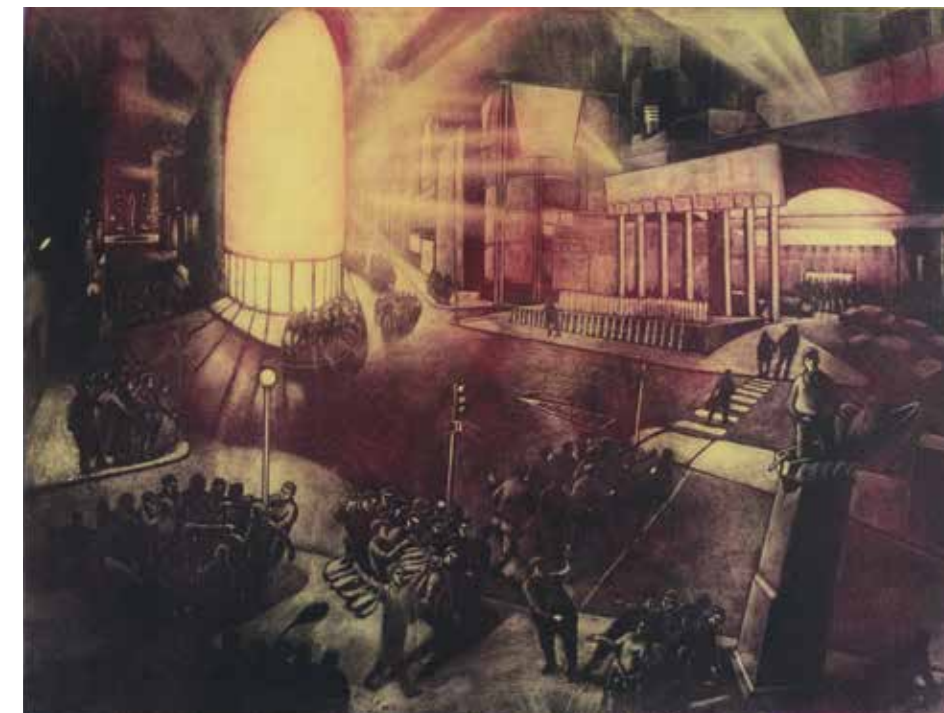
In Ricardo's worldview, there is something absurd and tragic in how society suffers from collective amnesia and history constantly repeats itself. As the inimitable Mark Twain recalls, "a favourite theory of mine [is] that no occurrence is sole and solitary, but is merely a repetition of a thing which has happened before, and perhaps often."

Sasha Grishin AM, FAHA  
Emeritus Professor, Australian National University

<sup>1</sup> George Santayana, *The Life of Reason: The Phases of Human Progress*, (1905) vol I, p.284 and George Santayana, *Soliloquies in England and Later Soliloquies*, (1922) number 25

<sup>2</sup> Geoffrey Ricardo, letter to the author, 8 November 1995

<sup>3</sup> Mark Twain, *The jumping frog* (1953), p.64



*Illuminated city* 1999 intaglio print (colour) 89 x 117.5 cm



*The urbane heart* 1999 intaglio print (colour) 90 x 120 cm