# 26 JULY - 25 AI /MARK STEPHEN A.J. PEARSON

Mar de la Carta de la

Text by JUSTIN PATON



## ACETATES from 'CAT NO 18' 1996

### WAR STORIES

lhe piece of battle-pocked terrain on which Mark Braunias stakes his claim is that of the Figurative Painting Tradition, site of numerous recent skirmishes and takeovers. His art crosses the wires on lliat mode's already scrambled circuits. In the hectic, eye-dizzying visual frieze that is the heart of his current exhibit, Rraunias pins up image alter Al image in an unruly, ink-black sprawl. Uncoiled in ink and twink and shellac on double exposures of slippery acetate, each drawing crackles and sparks with graphic energy: like the Contwmido comics to which they pay gritty homage, these scenes are actionpacked. Probing, playful, al home on the A4 page, Braunias takes a line for a walk (make that a sprint), hut the places it goes and stories it unscrolls can seldom be predicted. His lines flies without a map. His doodles are wired Dealing low blows to high

culture, Braunias injects the grid longrevered by high modernism with a Shot of low cultural juice. Here are scenes hooked by Braunias's magpie eye from this century's cutting-room floor: the precision graphics of **science** manuals; the smeared **and grainy blur** of tabloid newsprint; TV's blue flicker; the goofy, lumpen curves of depression-era comics.

Each image, you sec, is a short

story, a one-frame fractured narrative. To read your way sideways through this vast grid of panels is like shuffling randomly through an archive of eccentric human dues, a losl-andfound depot of strange encounters that lure you even if - especially if • their sidewise plots won't unscramble: When will the mad, babbling egghead crack the secret code? Should he share **it with the human guinea pig strapped** to a slab in the panel above? And whose voice utters that paranoid text?

A weird scientist himself. Braunias cross-breeds these one-sheet stones to spawn the mutant mechanics that loom out starkly from his Oddball Abstracts. Tangled with conduits, cams and cogs, bristling with mutant clusters of barrels, scopes, eyes and lenses, they arc end-of-lhe-century updates of the war scenes that this artist unleashed half a 'decade ago. Sinister shutterbugs and beady eyed circuitries, born of a post human world of surveillance. chiller and clank their way around the pjimlmgs bituuuiKiixs ink-iiuis. Here Braunias's trademark images of sight all those gas masks and range-finders hefted by his young Ailzacs - have sprouted into weird and edgy new electronic lives, and the air is thick with techno-fear. Stand in the midst of these manic optics and you're crisscrossed by sightlines, loomed nt by lenses. No escape.

#### ENDS OF THE EARTH

Aftrr»ic.th offer\* Ari al a liigh emotional pitch. The sound Stephen Clarke's sculpture utters is an addled, silent scream, and Brauruas's machine dreams whir and hum with menace. The soundtrack tv A.J.Pcaisaii's

paintings is an other-worldly hush Of this trio of artist lie's least likely to summon apocalyptK readings. Silence prevails in the 1'earsan landscape. yielding no dues to locale. Who can tay with certainly which domain time scenes unveil? it might be 2000z\D or 2000BC. might be a landscape

undocked in earthly years, might even be some psychic inscape. II this is the landscape ol attermaih. a world razed by the battles that Braunias depicts, it exhales unexpected serenity. Finally, the pointings possess a precise enigma too cosily smeared by eager interpreters.

Whatever their exact nuances these huge, soulful paintings form still pools of reflection in a show that otherwise assaults the eve and jolts the nervous system- Oil-pointed summons to contemplation, Pearson's primal vistas enforce a slowing-down of Hit"eye's rapid scanning Al their heart is an klea of time (perhaps even lune; Pearson's unitized by Big Themes. Iwppy to brave cornmess), a notion nut ini-rvly iUuslrated but embodied in their process: the tender « CONTINUUM 2 1996



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deliberation with which his brush stipples and scumble the painted surface, the way Pearson's paint seems to percolate from land into sky into land again ui an endless tidal round, a continuum of evaporation and release - sandy runnels pour over a mossgreen ground, sombre blues rise into smouldering grevs that cleave finally overcast whites. Whether they chart beginnings or end of tune, landscapes or inscapes, these vistas deal m elemental\*: land, sky, cloud, sea In Pearson's skies clouds hover benignly, and their soft, smoky oblongs an. cclioed on the lu-adlaitds that lie masslly below in die forms «il git-ji seething ponds. Real primal-swamp country.

Faced with a genre everywhere dismissed os passe or parcelled off imide embarrassed quotation marks, IVorsun has sought some way to paint landscape without sneering al ilslov.tech limitations, condescending Io its rearguard past, or pinning it to a given place. These nowhere: resemble slow<sup>1</sup> motion, melancholy Monels painted in some Givemy that time forgot No figures inhabit Pearson's topographies, but their associations arc irrepressibly bodily. His real subject, after all is lire body of the land, and finally the body ol the viewer who stands, peering, blinking, and listens in on these paintings' sombre mood-music



# **TILES and DETAILS from 'FLASHPOINT**

#### FINAL ACT

In Western sculpture, traditionally seen, solidity is all. The body could be hewn or cast or carved, but always it was firm, fully fleshed, inviolate, Stephen Clarke puts together that tradition's shattered pieces. Literally, His sculptures are less figurative than skeletal: blasted anatomies, charred remnants, husks. Watch documentary footage of nuclear tests and you will witness a terrifying moment when the shock wave's savage gust tears away the cladding from buildings, leaving only rickety scaffolding, frail bone structures. Then imagine, if you can, what it might do to those flesh-draped scaffolds we call our bodies.

In his angst-drenched and unflinching art Clarke does just this to the whole and ideal body of Western sculpture: reduces it to a corroded, shell-shucked husk, a makeshift skeleton of resin and metal struts. The sun of optimism doesn't shine on these sculptures; they're bathed in a scarier, apocalyptic glow. Most sculpture would creak with the weight of such tragic themes. No matter. Clarke's up to the task.

Hovering high above you in a well of ominously silent space a cance moves on the face of the water, *en route* to catastrophe. What we witness, as if peering up at the disaster zone from the ocean floor, is that ferocious

moment when hull, pilot and sail are reduced by the blast to frail, charred spars of wood and blackened bone. Clarke has fashioned a 3-d freeze-frame of the explosion's incendiary instant: literally, a reconstruction of destruction. This transport has been obliterated, atomized, utterly gutted. End of journey.

The vessel's flayed silhouette, you see, has been digitally sealed into tiles of see-through plastic whose ripples evoke a boiling ocean (recall how an atomic blast sears the phantom shadows of obliterated objects into the stone on which they stand). The technique is unique, but the art it produces proves that Clarke's true medium is horror. You may turn away from Clarke's vision; but try arguing with it. Like a grenade in your hip pocket, if won't be explained away.

Though born of a brave and bighearted social engagement (that ocean, after all, could be the Pacific) Clarke's art is not cramped by that

commitment. In its block intensity, its psychic wallop, this death-raft speaks less of virtuous, prefab agendas than a pitch-black pessimism whose historical roots run deeper. Clarke's not preachy, just scary. We may nod wisely at the cautionary moral that this ship of fools unforgettably embodies, but there's a sting in Clarke's tale. Don't forget that those fools might be us. beneath.

RIB

DARK DAYS, DIRE WARNINGiji Ihsastrous predictions flourish as any tentun ends, and those prophesies have always found form, howevut fractured, in a closing epoch's art. This century's closing years have suffefrd no shortage of doomy foretellings, Nor has its art lacked for apocalyptic images. For so long the vehicle of high hopes and Utopian ideals, modern art in the later years of this < cntun look a hit m its ideological uncarriage, plummeting to earth in a well-publicized blaze of inntx'ent hopes In this burnout, the whole and ideal forms of earlier art the weightily hewn sculptural body. the fully fleshed figure painting, the confidently surveyed landscape - have been gutted of their old meanings Disconnection prevails; the centre of cultural gravity won't hold- Go< word in a dictionary. Dazed .inc unmoored by this quake in the imaginative landscape, some artists left those old forms lor dead For others the challenge has been to make a home >n the disaster zone. to take up edgy residence amidst the wreckage and piece together from the nibble' shapes, and scenes lhal tell some truth however bitter or makeshift, however hungover or cross-grained, however fraught with risk of melodrama about this doubt wracked and centrifugal moment Iheirs is a landscape of aftermath Here arc three inhabitants.



Catalogue Design: Stephen Clarke

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