

Tim Johnson

The Luminescent Ground

4 December 2013 – 9 February 2014

Ikon presents *The Luminescent Ground*, the first European survey of work by Tim Johnson (b. 1947, Sydney). It exemplifies an aesthetic proposition, evolved since Johnson arrived on the Australian scene in the 1970s, that makes him one of the most remarkable artists of our time. His curiosity and unpretentiousness are rare, and so too his smart knowingness with respect to artistic mannerisms.

Early works in this exhibition include ‘installation’ photography and text pieces made during a trip to England, France, Germany and the Netherlands during 1970-1, photo documentation of performances, and paintings and video inspired by Australian punk band Radio Birdman. The paintings with which Johnson came to prominence during the 1980s, arising out of collaboration with aboriginal artists such as Clifford Possum Tjapaltjarri, are key to our understanding of his practice overall, and the spirit they embody continues to inform his new and recent work.

Now Johnson’s paintings are an extraordinary combination of influences and references. They are populated by Buddhist deities, Bodhisattvas, Native Americans as well as aboriginal figures, Tibetan monks, Vietnamese farmers, extra-terrestrials and Christians angels, floating in a pictorial space articulated by Papunya dots and circles, and fragments of landscape – often oriental hills and cloudy skies – that betray a world view that is at once conceptual and visionary.

Concerning the eclecticism of his work, Johnson explains, “Like a poem, every part doesn’t have to be logical or located in the same time-space continuum. A painting can create a fragmented reality that is interpreted by the viewer.”

Johnson’s work can quite easily be contextualised within a postmodern narrative, whereby the appropriation of motifs from a diversity of cultural sources demonstrate a release from aesthetic purism, but at the same time there is a sincere aspiration to a condition of enlightenment. This is signified by the shimmering surfaces of his paintings, often golden, as much as by the early sculptural pieces and performances that literally involve light.

Many recent paintings are clearly two-handed, as Johnson invites others to join him in the creation of an artistic gesture. For example, Buddhist images come courtesy of Nava Chapman, a self-styled “artist, teacher, dreamer, seeker. Slave to Love and Beauty”. Meanwhile, the the ongoing UFO series orbits around space craft meticulously drawn by American artist Daniel Bogunovic, with Johnson providing

IKON

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cosmic backgrounds. Questions of artistic authorship, of art and exactly what it means are thus dwarfed by considerations of known unknowns, by illuminating leaps of faith. In short, we couldn't be further from the irony and academicism that is a caricature of postmodernism. We are on luminescent ground.

An exhibition catalogue, fully illustrated with an essay by Australian art historian Roger Benjamin, is available.

Exhibition supported by the Australian Government through the Australia Council, its arts funding and advisory body

Ends.

Note to Editors:

1. Ikon is open Tuesday – Sunday and Bank Holiday Mondays, 11am - 6pm. Admission is free.
2. A selection of images is shown below.
3. Ikon Gallery is a registered charity and is funded using public funds from Arts Council England and Birmingham City Council.
4. For more information, high-res images and to arrange an interview with the curator please contact Helen Stallard on 0774 033 9604 or email h.stallard@ikon-gallery.co.uk

Sample images



Tim Johnson

Clifford Possum (2002)

Acrylic on linen

Courtesy the artist

Copyright the artist



Tim Johnson in collaboration with
Daniel Bogunovic

Kali (2012)

Oil on canvas

Courtesy the artist

Copyright the artist

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Tim Johnson in collaboration with
Nava Chapman

Lakshma (2012)

Acrylic on linen

Courtesy Dominik Mersch Gallery,
Sydney

Copyright the artist



Tim Johnson in collaboration with
Daniel Bogunovic

Shakyamuni 2 (2012)

Oil on canvas

Courtesy the artist

Courtesy the artist



Tim Johnson

Where we meet (2010)

Acrylic on canvas

Courtesy the artist

Copyright the artist

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Tim Johnson in collaboration with
Daniel Bogunovic

UFOs per se (2013)

Acrylic on canvas

Courtesy Tolarno Galleries,
Melbourne

Copyright the artist