



TOMORROW IS

HISTORY

CLIVE BARSTOW

Turner Galleries
Perth Australia
28 July - 26 August 2017

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The title of this exhibition "Tomorrow is History" is a play on the construct of time and place, a continuation of the central themes of cultural and historical representation following on from my exhibition entitled "Giving Yesterday a Tomorrow" at the Hu Jiang Gallery in Shanghai in late 2015.

I was born in 1956 in Britain, the year in which John Osbourne published "Look Back in Anger," which not only established the Kitchen Sink movement in Britain, but perhaps more importantly shifted our gaze away from the American family ideal toward the stark realities of social division in post war Britain. In the same year, Richard Hamilton and Eduardo Paolozzi marked the beginnings of the British pop art movement

with their exhibition entitled "This is Tomorrow" at the Whitechapel Art Gallery London. A coincidence of titles and events that sixty years on takes on a new poignancy in the current context of social unrest, cultural division and mass migration as a result of the conflicts of a rapidly globalising world.

Looking back and looking forward as a way of positioning oneself in time assumes an established system of history telling that is firmly rooted in formative linguistics. This predominantly western chronological structure perhaps no longer represents the complexities of our shifting and dynamic hybrid communities. Zygmunt Bauman's (2000) thesis on liquid individuals describes how "reality should

be emancipated from the dead hand of its own history" suggesting that the need to re-examine our histories might demand a different language, a more liquid language of poetics and imagination, through which history, past present and future could be reframed. This exhibition proposes just such an Altermodernist position that suggests a dystopian future within a more metaphysical concept of time. Within this concept, history is re-invented as a way of positioning oneself within time and place, and ultimately as a more embodied thinking process.

The disruption of time and space make reference to what Frank White (1987) termed the overview effect, where astronauts experience a cognitive shift in their sense of space while viewing the earth from a distance. From this position in space, national boundaries disappear and the conflicts that divide people and nations become less significant. While

we cannot all be astronauts, the exhibition shares a view of culture that is more grounded, and one that attempts to avoid the centrality of othering, in what might be more appropriately termed the otherview effect. To express this multi-dimensional position, the works in this exhibition offer a visualisation of what Henry Lefebvre terms cumulative trialectics, a plural and decentralised theoretical model of space in line with Bauman's ideas on liquid individuals. Trialectics establishes a range of three-dimensional relationships in order to extend beyond Homi Bhabha's (1994) third space of conflict in which the polarities of othering become predominant. Cumulative trialectics is interpretive and can include social, cultural, methodological and practical relationships that involve the embodied self as a legitimate and essential part of the triangle, in effect creating a new dialogic space that exposes "emotions and experi-

ences that we all attempt to proscribe and are unwilling to acknowledge, but which nevertheless occur" (Vork, 2013).

Since the year 2000 I have worked closely with two distinct cultural groups, those of Aboriginal elders from the north western desert region of Australia and with artists from mainland China. Through various forms of collaboration with writers, interpreters and artists, my work has slowly formed a new British, Sino-Australian trialectic, an often-awkward alliance of disjuncture and misinterpretation where visual language through necessity has replaced spoken and written communication.

Within this working relationship, the spiritual aspects of both Aboriginal and Chinese cultures have emerged as a form of Daoism, a philosophy focused on man's harmonious connection to place, and one that is constantly changing and reforming to adapt to the situations in which it operates. In

this respect the works in this exhibition prompt a "reawakening" (Debord, 1958) through an alignment with Chinese Shan-Shui-Hua brush painting where traditional Chinese landscapes are constituted from different perspectives and from different times, offering a more abstract concept of time and place in which the artist presents what they think rather than what they see. The works in this exhibition, like Shan-Shui-Hua painting, reflects not the artist's eye, but the mind.

The reconstructed jigsaws serve as a metaphor for the misfits of social construction where the intersections between cultural groups are awkward and ill-fitting, reflecting what Homi Bhabha terms "incommensurable states" (1994). In Georges Perec's postmodern novel *Life a Users Manual* (1978) the main character Bartlebooth spends his later life obsessively making jigsaws of images from his travels around the world. While

completing his 439th and final jigsaw, Bartlebooth dies holding the one remaining piece in his hand. Ironically, the last hole in the jigsaw is the letter X while the piece he is holding is the letter W. Irony, futility and humour continually surface throughout the artworks presented in this exhibition as a way of making new meaning from the poetics of language, Reading between the lines serves as a reminder that reality is a product of what we chose to believe and what we subconsciously choose to retain.

Thematically the exhibition is purposely eclectic, flitting between the social and the religious, from the historical to the political, from presence to absence and searching in all the dark corners in-between. Technically, the crossovers between pictorial narratives, wall sculptures and animation are also hybrid in-between forms that offer fragments of a whole as a way of in-completing the picture.

Within this counterpoint of harmony and discord, I take the position of the Semionaut, as one who organises new meaning from the remixing of language, symbols and the disparate elements that once had meaning but are now perhaps meaning-less.

As a predominately studio based artist, making art is an isolated experience for me. The production of works in this exhibition however has relied heavily on the interaction and contribution of many people, all of whom have shared this creative journey with great passion and commitment. This is an exhibition of many voices, made up of often opposing ideas and philosophies but where a community of the otherview has emerged. To everyone who has contributed to this exhibition I thank you from the bottom of my heart.

Clive Barstow
11th May 2017

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Chinese Takeaway (2017)
Jigsaws
22 x 35 cm



Every Road Has Two Paths (2015) in collaboration with Glen Philips
Jigsaws, pen and ink
58 x 48cm



Birdsong (2015)
Jigsaws
62 x 55cm



Innocence Lost (2015)
Jigsaws, acrylic paint
62x 54cm



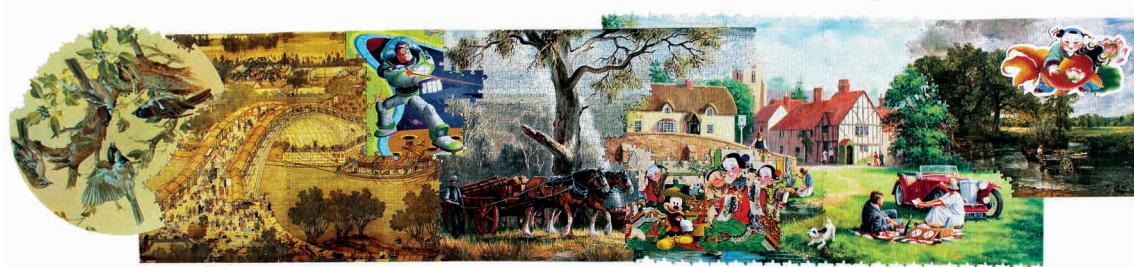
Gone Fishin' (2014)
Jigsaws
62 x 54cm



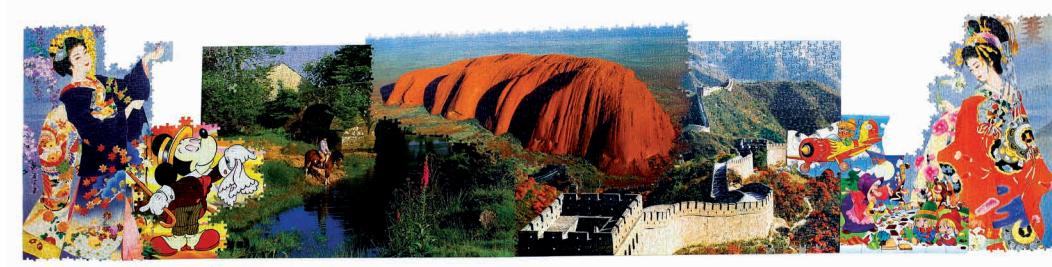
War (2015)
Jigsaws
58 x 48cm



Piece (2015)
Jigsaws
62 x 54cm



Otherview (2017)
Jigsaws
230 x 50cm



Entering Anarcadia (2015)
Jigsaws
230 x 50cm



Uncool Britannia (2015)
Jigsaws, acrylic
62 x 54cm



Collaborative Performance with Xu Shanxun
Hu Jiang Gallery Shanghai China October 2015



Bartlebooth's Double Cross (2017)
Wood, Plaster, Glass, Sand,
Resin, Flowers
233 x 144cm



Bartlebooth's Double Cross: Detail (2017)





We Will Decide: Detail (2017)

THIS IS AS IT SHOULD BE

Exhibitions plant seeds. Projects such as *Tomorrow is History* have an immediate effect and long-term effects. They sink in. They seep into our cultural awareness, muddying the neat categories and pigeonholes of a story we think we already know. How do we read this story? What are the seeds sown and how might they be taken up by another generation of artists (Obrist 2014)?

The dialogue/s set up by the stories told in this exhibition breach cultural boundaries, entering a space that is neither here nor there whilst bridging both. We read the exotic, the nostalgic, and the historic however unlike a jigsaw the pieces don't quite fit, instead they move us forward into a narrative that plays with culture/s, time and space.

Do we read this work maintaining significance of context over text, read through the conditions set up by the complex of the social, historic,

climatic and physiological (Bakhtin 1981). What might unfold over time, given the notions visible throughout this exhibition: an array of semiotic activity pilfered across cultural boundaries, a history virtually impossible to restore, and therefore impossible to resolve? Meaning here is ruptured—at times I am uncomfortable, at other times amused, ironic doubling and an aesthetic importance of play are both found in this work. I see the cultural signifiers taken out of their context/s and reintroduced as playful tropes that tell a life story layered with political salience, playful irreverence, sharp intellect, biting sarcasm, a cross-cultural collaborative sensitivity, and generosity of spirit. The contradictions intrinsic to these works pitch us unnervingly close to the brink of meaning making and then we are distracted by another narrative equally as engaging, unset-

ting and humorous. Humour in this work “is both pleasure producing and rebellious” (Freud 1976, 168) inherently capable of the liberating capacity to attack the system from within (Bakhtin 1968).

The contexts of these works become a text that can be ‘read’ using a semiotic methodology that treats medium-bound terms such as spectatorship, storytelling, rhetoric, discursivity, and visibility as aspects rather than essences opening up larger questions of representation and interpretation that facilitate systematic interrogation of the ways arts emerge, circulate, and are intertwined within a culture (Bal 1991). Aspects versus essences suit the reading of this work given the cultural overlays apparent in the works and the irreverent tone of the overall exhibition.

I say irreverent however tradition is everywhere shot through in these artworks—Surrealism, Dada, William Burroughs’ cutup texts that make

reference to action painting, happenings, and aleatory music, paralleling avant-garde literary theory such as structuralism and deconstruction. All spliced together to tell a story of a life that thrives on the politics of difference, the richness of story telling—this exhibition is a cultural analysis of everyday life (Bal 2002/2012).

The sculptural installations bring us into a collusive relationship with the material utterances in this dialogue—repeated motifs linking across culturally specific icons irrespective of their original meaning. These however lack any cultural impropriety; instead a rollicking tale spins us around the exhibition chasing a specific story—one among many. Do we follow the birds this reading, trickster that steal jigsaw pieces while Disney characters ride a kangaroo.

The sculptural works link the jigsaw works—at once more raucous—almost as though elements of the jigsaws

have been liberated from their two dimensionality— set free to find Barteltooth’s last jigsaw pieces (Perec 1978). Amongst these works Crow-Ded perhaps most confronts our sense of the playful and critical simultaneously.

Probably...the larger part of the labour of an author in comprising his work is critical labour; the labour of shifting, combining, constructing, expunging, correcting, testing: this frightful toil is as much critical as creative. (T.S. Eliot as cited in Small 2013, 168).

Crow-Ded connects many of the images, objects and text located across the exhibition finding new meaning through juxtaposition of objects.

The artist is both the product and the instrument of change imbued with textuality and discourse (Alpers 1988) overlapping as these may be. These yield insight—the author of these texts take the stance as ‘native informant’ as problematic as that term

is given today’s global culture in that it is no longer possible to posit the idea of ‘native’. Plurality, change, and displacement make any fixed position hard to sustain (Bal 2002/2012). The viewer however may not know whether to chuckle or become indignant. This is however serious work—raising questions about the way forward in a politically correct climate in order to find a more commensurate way of existing between cultures proactively while not repeating the mistakes of the past.

I have watched this artwork unfold over time, in exhibition, and in the studio. While Barstow’s vision for tomorrow looks more inclusive...this work leaves me with more questions that answers—sowing seeds, questioning the cultural diversity that should be Australia. This is as it should be.

Dr. Lyndall Adams
14.3.2017

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Crow-Ded (2017)
Wood, Metal, Resin,
Glass, Plastic
247 x 169cm



We Will Decide (2017)
Plaster, Resin, Polystyrene,
Plastic, Steel, Sand
287 x 267cm



We Will Decide: Detail (2017)





We Will Decide: Detail (2017)



THE TRIALECTICAL MODEL OF THE TRICKSTER

Question: What do "God Save The Queen", "Et in Anarcadia Ego", "Uncool Britannia" and "Cabbage Crates Over The Briny" have in common? Answer: They are all titles of works in *Misfits: Beyond the Jigsaw* by artist Clive Barstow, and lay bare the importance of intertextuality for his creative praxis. Referencing Vivienne Westwood, the matriarch of punk, and the Sex Pistols rebelling against British politics, to an ironic anarchistic play on the utopian notion of a romanticised, bucolic, classical arcadia, directly referencing Nicolas Poussin's painting from 1637-1638, "Et in Arcadia Ego", to referencing Monty Python – a British surreal comedy group. Barstow plays the role of the trickster, and invites us, his audience, into a complex world of play, metaphor, irony and interrogation.

Barstow investigates the subjectiv-

ity of the self as framed within one's lifeworld and the systems that invariably pervade it. As sociologist Raewyn Connell attests, "The making of subjectivities does not occur in a personal realm walled off from the social.

Rather, creativity and the social are interwoven ..." (Connell, p. 15). There are three central geographical spaces that map Barstow's lifeworld – Britain, Australia and China. He originates from Britain with its legacy of colonisation, empire and cultural transgression. Barstow's influences are many and cross these geographical spaces, it is however, the cultural, social and political specificity of each that he uses in the construction of his work. Some such examples from Britain are the early social realist, kitchen sink dramas of the late 1950s and 1960s, punk and its anarchistic tropes, and the

seemingly innocuous North American colonisation of British culture in the form of Disney.

Moving from Britain to cosmopolitan Australia at a time in which post-colonial attitudes were at the forefront of academic and cultural life, Barstow's work clearly deals with such issues of Aboriginal identity and the appalling legacy of terra nullius that still impact upon us today. It is however, the longevity of tradition of Aboriginal culture and of Chinese culture – the third geographical location that makes up Barstow's lifeworld – that influences him. Barstow's praxis agrees with sociologist and philosopher Zygmunt Bauman's assertion that, "A mixing of cultural inspirations is a source of enrichment and an engine of creativity" (2015, p. 31). These three diverse cultural contexts and their respective histories, ideologies and cultural tensions, are referenced in Barstow's work and seen most

clearly in his reconstructed jigsaws and readymades, where Duchamp, Gilbert and George and Rodchenko come to mind. His work resonates on a number of complex levels revealed sometimes overtly, sometimes quietly and covertly.

The many diverse cultural tropes he references – pop, punk, the readymade – are thrown on their head and reconfigured, to communicate the complexity of living within social and cultural conditions which Bauman calls Liquid Modernity. In Barstow's work imagery relating to all three geographical spaces intersect in what seems humorous at first before becoming increasingly problematical.

The trickster is at play again in Barstow's film "A Chinese Whisper", where straight away we are asked to consider our colloquial use of this term, and its etymology. The film reveals Australian flora and fauna in the form of a jigsaw – familiar imagery

for Barstow, kookaburras, kangaroos and kangaroo paws – represented with Chinese text, where systematically, piece-by-piece the picture is made known. This work, as is the case with all of Barstow's works, visually encapsulates cultural hybridity – and apprehends us, metaphorically stating, are we not all culturally hybrid? His film work is seductive, and sophisticatedly and deliberately develops an accumulative nature of experiences, building on what has gone previously, yet clearly and evocatively communicating the non-fixity of meaning and culture.

These ideas are further made manifest in the performative collaboration with Chinese artist Xu Shanxun, at Barstow's exhibition "Giving Yesterday a Tomorrow" in Shanghai. Xu Shanxun wrote symbolically onto Barstow's work "God's Country" his family's displacement through the Chinese Cultural Revolution – the physical act was direct and had a palpable agency.

The trialectical model here is made explicit: "God's Country" features representations of colonised Aboriginal lands layered with personal displacement within China, although through a different set of governing and ideological principles, and the end result is both synchronous and poetic.

The different media Barstow employs is sophisticated and purposeful – both familiar and unfamiliar. He metaphorically asks the viewer to play – however it is play that is at once political and inscribed by histories that one may not wish to be reminded of. Children's play is encouraged through jigsaws, and the playfulness of the sculptural works. Yet we are challenged and made to think of the overt politicisation of children through Disney, and the systemic colonisation of the individual. The work is very seductive by the way it is exquisitely made and the use of familiar cultural references. Barstow makes obvious

how disproportionate aspects of culture can be, and visually renders a collision of different styles, genres, imagery, yet beautifully crafted to appear unified. The process for the viewer is uncomfortable at times when you are demanded to make sense of a narrative that reveals the underbelly of culture – the racist and the insidious.

The materiality of Barstow's works, reveal the physicality of the readymade – the readymade as reverential – and the everyday transformed into the world of the fantastical. He renders the whimsical and the macabre within a lens of intercultural discourse in all its complexity with the playfulness of the absurd. Barstow mixes the reverential, child's play and anarchistic beauty within a trialectical model framed by three diverse yet interconnected countries, seen most poetically and challengingly in "Entering Anarcadia". In this work he expertly visually challenges the notion of the

binary, and reveals its limits, instead promoting a greater far-reaching and open trialectical model, where images of Uluru, The Great Wall of China, and Disney – to name only a few – are exquisitely crafted to provide a narrative that can be read as both vignettes and complete – both commensurate and incommensurate.

Barstow invites us, his audience, to immerse ourselves within his work, and to experientially posit our lifeworld – filled with our personal subjectivities, emotions and intimacies, within the socio-political landscape – into a jigsaw or a readymade. This agency ascribed to us may reveal missing, fragmented and incommensurable pieces – but overall make a whole picture of the individual within our liquid, physical and increasingly virtual lives.

Dr. Nicola Kaye
15.3.2017

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Black Sheep White Fella' (2017)
Plaster, Resin, Wood, Glass, Print
170 x 140cm



Black Sheep White Fella': Detail (2017)



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