

P A U L Z I K A

**ITALIAN
WORKS**

30 MARCH - 29 APRIL 1990

**PLIMSOLL GALLERY
CENTRE FOR THE ARTS
VICTORIA DOCK • HOBART**

THE WORK IN THIS EXHIBITION WAS PRODUCED IN ITALY WHILE THE
ARTIST WAS ON STUDY LEAVE FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF TASMANIA.
THE ARTIST'S PROJECT WAS ASSISTED BY THE AUSTRALIA COUNCIL,
THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT'S ARTS ADVISORY BODY



In recent years Paul Zika's painting has been noted for its uncompromising commitment to a non-figurative manner of working. His oeuvre has been dominated by many relief paintings in which each colour has been used uniformly to describe and, effectively, to circumscribe each separate plane. While there has been obvious reference to an eccentric kind of 'impossible architecture' (the kind of architecture which might emerge from constructing fragmentary, non-rectilinear shapes into a three-dimensional object), on the wall these paintings have taken on such a resolute material presence that to call up what might be their figurative origins seems to serve little or no function: ostensibly the paintings weren't 'about' the forms from which they were derived in any literal sense.

Nevertheless, it remains the case that these works are manifestly to do with the built environment and have seemed, in the spaces that have housed them, to call attention to the considered and arbitrary order which human beings impose on the world. In this they are quite determinedly constructivist in manner and intent. Furthermore the apparent arbitrariness is compounded by the application of colour as a uniform description of plane (both in intensity of hue and evenness of surface). But, despite this, the forms can be said to be based upon empirical observation: a typical painting, for instance, may render the way in which we perceive a flat roof top as a lozenge, its gable as a thin band laid up tightly on one edge of the lozenge, while the wall beneath it,

although realistically a 'solid' plane, may well be served up as two or more contrasting planes by the presence of strong shadow. From a distance, the distinction between one built form and another may well be all-but imperceptible except that a band of colour or light might allow the eye to differentiate between the two.

Paul Zika's approach to how one renders this 'reality/illusion' has taken two forms in recent years although they are surprisingly similar in their outcome. In prints and drawings the planes have been translated literally onto the flat, two-dimensional surface and no attempt is made to alter the perspectival distortions which the eye perceives, to tidy up the picture into a neat three-dimensional illusion through the use of perspectival and tonal devices. On the other hand the relief paintings speak about a built environment not as a series of containers (buildings) but as surfaces which butt up against one another. It would be wrong to see these paintings as three dimensional objects, even though they have tectonic integrity, for this would imply that volume was an inherent concern in the work and if there is a consistent thread in all of this work of the last decade it would be that all deal with picture-making as a consideration of surface not volume.

During 1987 and 1988, Zika produced a series of relief paintings, *Entrances to Xanadu*, which were notable for a major shift in emphasis, namely the introduction of a much more painterly manner of working: instead of each plane being a pristine monochromatic surface, the

new pictures were to include passages of exuberant and descriptive multi-coloured painting where the artist's hand is allowed a much freer and more insistent rein. The result was particularly interesting since the new paintings began to suggest that a sense of *place* was becoming an increasing concern: not only could one imagine that these pictures were being produced with a specific site in mind but equally that the artist was providing a series of descriptive keys which might indicate the whereabouts of a visual source, something about which Zika had been decidedly non-committal in the past.

Entrances to Xanadu may provide a key, therefore, to this new body of work which has emerged from a five month stay which Paul Zika has just completed working in a studio in Castellina, a few kilometres away from the Tuscan city of Siena in Italy. What is striking about these five new paintings on paper is the dramatic increase in descriptive information available in each work. Each painting retains that central concern with *plane* so that in all we can speak of an assemblage of several different surfaces laid one over the other, but the artist has identified those surfaces in a much more descriptive way. So in #5 for instance, the facade of Leonbattista Alberti's *Santa Maria Novella*, one of the most beautiful churches of the Florentine renaissance, becomes one of the surfaces dealt with, along with fragments of the piazza in another, and a bird's-eye view of the cloistered garden attached to the church in another. In #1, the acroterium of another

classical building is laid off in one sheet against a decorative screen which might have been seen in Venice, and this against a particular brick panel of a wall or a pavement.

Patterning and texture emerge as consistent concerns in the new works and are combined with colour repetition to evoke a sense of overall surface relationships. On the one hand it is possible to read these works as a 'journey through a built environment' where one's attention is drawn to fragments of buildings, to half-seen cloistered courtyards or interior gardens observed through the grid of a cast-iron gate, or to the unity of a piazza seen from the balcony of some public building or a hotel, and this sense of a journey is encouraged by Zika through the manner in which he develops 'pathways' of line, pattern and colour. On the other hand these paintings continue to be insistent in their adherence to the idea of picture-making as an art of the surface. Although stencils and sometimes quite heavily textured passages of painting are used, the effect is not to create a volumetric sense of three-dimensional illusion; rather these devices seem to reassert the two-dimensionality of the paintings - we read over these paintings, not into them.

In this, Zika proclaims his continued preoccupation with the conditions of picture-making as a specific kind of art practice, one which is quite different from, say, sculpture: this, despite the fact that these new works offer the possibility of further experimentation in relief.

JONATHAN HOLMES MARCH 1990

PAULZIKA

STUDIED

1968/71 Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology
1973/74 St Martin's School of Art, London

Individual Exhibitions / Site Work

1973 Chapman Powell Street Gallery, Melbourne
1977 Powell Street Gallery, Melbourne
1982 University Fine Arts Gallery, Hobart
1983 Christine Abrahams Gallery, Melbourne
1984 Chameleon Gallery, Hobart
1984/86 'Place of Contemplation', Mt Nelson, Hobart
1987 Chameleon Gallery, Hobart
Roz MacAllan Gallery, Brisbane
1989 Roz MacAllan Gallery, Brisbane

Selected Group Exhibitions

1970 'Eight Students from Victoria',
Rudy Komon Gallery, Sydney
1971/86 Print Council of Australia Travelling Exhibitions
1977 'George Crouch Jubilee Invitation Exhibition',
Ballarat Fine Arts Gallery, Victoria
1980 'Recent Tasmanian Sculpture and Three
Dimensional Art',
Fine Art Gallery, University of Tasmania, and
Tasmanian School of Art Gallery, Hobart
Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery,
Launceston
1982 'Australian Screenprints 1982'
1984 'Australian Contemporary Printmakers'
Canada and USA Touring Exhibition
'Four Contemporary Artists'
Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery, Hobart

1985 Anzart, Auckland NZ
1988 'Insites - Art in Public Places'
Centre for the Arts Gallery, Hobart
'The Gold Coast Invitation Prize'
Centre Gallery, Qld.
'Artists as Designers',
Roz MacAllan Gallery, Brisbane
1990 'Balance 1990', Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane

Commissions

1983 Print Council of Australia Member Print
1985/86 'Art in Public Places', Department of Construction
(Tasmanian Government)

Grants

1982 Visual Arts Board - Special Project Grant
1989 Visual Arts / Crafts Board - Overseas
Development, Project Grant

Public Collections

Artbank
Ballarat Fine Art Gallery
Geelong Art Gallery
Museum of Contemporary Art, Brisbane
Parliament House Construction Authority
Print Council of Australia
Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology
State College of Victoria - Hawthorn
Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery
University of Melbourne
University of Tasmania
Victorian Ministry for the Arts

C A T A L O G U E

1.	"1 - 89"	276	X	161 cm
2.	"2 - 89"	243	X	156 cm
3.	"3 - 89"	260	X	184 cm
4.	"4 - 89"	232	X	200 cm
5.	"5 - 89"	243	X	243 cm

ALL WORKS ACRYLIC ON PAPER COURTESY ROZ MACALLAN
GALLERY BRISBANE

A C K N O W L E D G E M E N T S

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Sandra Soccol

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Jonathan Holmes

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Sandra Soccol

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