VIEW FROM THE EDGE

LUKE CORNISH (ELK)
ADAM CULLEN
THE CONNOR BROTHERS
ANTHONY LISTER

AUGUST, 2018
LUKE CORNISH (ELK)

_Benevolent Dicktator_

2014
Stencil, Spray on board \(40 \times 40\)cm each artwork
individual works shown below

Provenance: Private Collection, Brisbane
LUKE CORNISH (ELK)

_Benevolent Dicktator 1_

2014
Stencil, Spray on board \ 40 x 40cm

_Provenance:_ Private Collection, Brisbane
LUKE CORNISH (ELK)

_Benevolent Dicktator 2_

2014
Stencil, Spray on board \ 40 x 40cm

_Provenance:_ Private Collection, Brisbane
LUKE CORNISH (ELK)

Benevolent Dicktator 3

2014
Stencil, Spray on board \ 40 x 40cm

Provenance: Private Collection, Brisbane
LUKE CORNISH (ELK)
Benevolent Dicktator 4
2014
Stencil, Spray on board \ 40 x 40cm

Provenance: Private Collection, Brisbane
LUKE CORNISH (ELK)
Benevolent Dictator 5
2014
Stencil, Spray on board \ 40 x 40cm

Provenance: Private Collection, Brisbane
LUKE CORNISH (ELK)
*Benevolent Dicktator 6*

2014
Stencil, Spray on board \ 40 x 40cm

**Provenance:** Private Collection, Brisbane
LUKE CORNISH (ELK)

_Benevolent Dicktator 7_

2014
Stencil, Spray on board \ 40 x 40cm

**Provenance:** Private Collection, Brisbane
LUKE CORNISH (ELK)

_Benevolent Dicktator 8_

2014
Stencil, Spray on board \ 40 x 40cm

Provenance: Private Collection, Brisbane
LUKE CORNISH (ELK)
Benevolent Dicktator 9

2014
Stencil, Spray on board \ 40 x 40cm

Provenance: Private Collection, Brisbane
ADAM CULLEN (1965 - 2012)

Kelly

2009

Collagraph \ 183 x 183cm
Available Editions 25/30 and 26/30

Additional Info: This work relates to the Adam Cullen Ned Kelly series. Please find below the catalogue essay written by Ralph Hobbs for Cullen’s 2010 London Exhibition titled Adam Cullen’s Iron Mask: The Ned Kelly Series
ADAM CULLEN (1965 - 2012)

Kelly Hunter

2009
Collagraph \ 70 x 70cm
Available Editions 25/30

Additional Info: This work relates to the Adam Cullen Ned Kelly series. Please find below the catalogue essay written by Ralph Hobbs for Cullen's 2010 London Exhibition titled Adam Cullen's Iron Mask: The Ned Kelly Series
ADAM CULLEN (1965 - 2012)

The Derby

2007
Collagraph \ 77 x 67cm
Available Edition 41/50

Additional Info: This work relates to the Adam Cullen Ned Kelly series. Please find below the catalogue essay written by Ralph Hobbs for Cullen’s 2010 London Exhibition titled Adam Cullen’s Iron Mask: The Ned Kelly Series
CATALOGUE COVER: Adam Cullen - Iron Mask - The Ned Kelly Series
London, 2010
(Catalogue essay: following pages)
Australia is a nation young in years yet rich in stories. These stories have been woven into the fabric of our culture and indelibly link the way we, as Australians, view ourselves and place in this wide land. In Australian folklore there is no greater legend than that of Edward ‘Ned’ Kelly, the son of an Irish convict. Hero to many, villain to some, Ned Kelly is Australia’s famous outlaw, bushranger and a veritable Robin Hood. The legend of Ned Kelly is a well-worn tale in literature, visual arts, film and song. It is the holy grail of Australian infamy.

It is in the long shadow of the great Australian painter Sir Sidney Nolan, who in the 1950’s painted Kelly’s exploits with a modernist’s passion rarely seen in Australian art that other Australian artists have been challenged to tackle the subject with any meaningful expression since the 1950’s iconic imagery. That is until now.

Adam Cullen is the iconoclast of contemporary Australian painting. In this series, the artist dismembers the stories and weaves his own version of the personalities involved in the drama of 1878-80. Ultimately, Cullen asks us what has changed in 120 years of Antipodean criminal activity? His answer; “It’s still all about sex, drugs and guns”.

Cullen does not glorify the protagonists – at the end there was little to celebrate. The life of Ned Kelly ended when the hood was lowered and the hangman’s lever pulled. Ned Kelly’s final words are alleged to have been: “ah well, such is life”. A statement that continues to resonate through Australian popular culture today.

With these works, Cullen acknowledges the Kelly gang’s moral failings but on balance, he is sympathetic to their cause. The artist also delves into the psyche of the other side. The Establishment, the Police the Judiciary are all in the frame. For good measure, there is more than a passing nod to old Irish tensions that existed as they do now. Catholic versus Protestant, gentry versus underclass, criminal versus law, all festering away in Cullen’s fluorescent picture plane.

Cullen knows much about the lives of the men and their families for he enjoys a proud Irish heritage himself. Indeed, Cullen’s relatives were known as Kelly sympathisers- living in the district and offering shelter and help as required by the gang.

In this exhibition, the artist moves the focus to the individual, rather than rehashing of a narrative of historical events. To do this effectively, Cullen strips away familiar landscapes.
He revels in painting difficult imagery – outlaws in drag, smoking guns and opium fuelled rampages by young outlaws dressed in the finest American clothing and Spanish riding boots, all purchased with their ill-gotten gains.

The Kellys were a product of their particular colonial cultural environment, but they were at their most adept in the Australian bush. Importantly, they were the finest of the larrikin horsemen, had all the skills and the traits of the gang, but Cullen pushes the boundaries of the legend and investigates their panache for cross-dressing.

Cullen views his canvases as landscapes. A minimalist backdrop allows his often deranged figures to bludgeon the viewer. There is no let-up in this exhibition. The starkness of the landscape heightened with an electric palette that owes more to Pop than Naturalism. Even so, one still gets an edgy feel for the harshness of the Australian environment.

Notably, Australia has also celebrated Adam Cullen. The Archibald winning artist has at times riled the critics, however he is one of the youngest artists to have a retrospective exhibition held at the Art Gallery of NSW, in 2007.

With Cullen’s paintings, there is no free ride. One cannot be a passive observer of the work for responses are provoked. You don’t just view his work, you wear it. Here, too, there are similarities to Edward Kelly. Kelly was not a man to rob and hide – he wanted people to see a bigger picture. Hold-ups of entire towns, and the penning of perhaps the most audacious document in Australia’s history. It is no wonder the iconic armour was made. Kelly never backed down from a stand-up fight and the final confrontation at Glenrowan made the armour his symbol.

The now famous ‘Jerilderie Letter’, the remarkable Kelly manifesto addressed to the Victorian Premier Graham Berry and his Government, was written in 1879 and originally meant for publication in the local Jerilderie newspaper. This was thwarted by the escape of the Editor before the two-day hold-up of the small Riverina town. Kelly's intent was for his proclamation to gain a broader distribution. It was his attempt to write history and, as all good sedition of the era, it was suppressed by the government of the day. His eloquence, passion and rebellious vision is demonstrated in his letter with the warning ‘I am a widow’s son outlawed and my orders must be obeyed. ‘Finally seeing the light of day, the 8,300 word declaration of an independent Irish state in central Victoria went to print in the 1948 edition of Australian Son by Max Brown more than 50 years after Kelly’s execution.

To challenge the more conventional historical accounts, as well as the accepted visual history, requires intensity and self belief. Although the siege at Glenrowan was well documented in the contemporary papers at the time of the trial, and subsequent execution of Ned Kelly,
there was little acknowledgement by the colonial populace as Australia headed towards nationhood. In reality, the cult of Ned Kelly is really a twentieth century phenomenon. The mythology is very much linked to Australian art and photography. The visual image cannot be underestimated in the development of heroes.

One of the more confronting images in the exhibition is that of Joe Byrne. It is based on one of only two extant photographs of Ned’s comrade and shows the handsome Joe Byrne’s lifeless body strung up on the door of the Benalla Police lock-up. Cullen appropriates the image in all its original grotesqueness, transforming Joe Byrne into a blaze of movement and colour. Initially, he appears as a dancing leprechaun – but Cullen is firm in his view that the Irishman Byrne, the devout Catholic, now dances in heaven.

The artist’s personal resonance with the identity of Byrne is palpable. Both demonstrating a sharp wit and intellect, and both suffering the trials of addiction. His opium addiction from an early association with Chinese miners on the Beechworth goldfields ultimately manifested as a full-blown addiction in the opium dens. As the contemporary slang went, partaking in the ‘escapism of the dragon’ was referred to as “being on the old O-you-know”.

Perhaps the most challenging aspect of the exhibition is the presentation of the Australian male psyche and the most ‘macho’ of outlaws as cross-dressing homosexuals. There is little doubt that the gang dressed the petite former jockey, Steve Hart, as a woman to case out potential hold-ups. But Cullen throws down the gauntlet: Just what were the boys up to in the wild bush of the ‘wombat’ Rangers when they were on the run?

The more confronting elements of being on the run in colonial Australia were often swept aside when hardened convicts reminisced about their years of all-male company. The painting Ned Kelly In Nightgown About to Sodomise A Kangaroo certainly redefines the parameters of the famous song by Rolf Harris Tie Me Kangaroo Down, Sport.

Cullen punches straight to the issue of what it takes to be a male in Australia. He delivers work that at times is crude, at times hilarious. In one such work, Cullen uses the horse in drag as metaphor for his belief that Steve Hart was a rampant cross-dresser. It is an image that could satisfy the most flamboyant of drag queens.

To say Cullen is a ‘colourful’ character is something of an understatement. Indeed it appropriate that Cullen draws himself into the story. The gothic painting titled A Self-Portrait As Ned Kelly’s Death Mask has its macabre genesis in one of the more remarkable relics of colonial Victoria, the collection of plaster casts taken from executed criminals on display at the Old Melbourne Gaol. The practice of making the masks was primarily for pseudo-scientific purposes of the time.
I remember as a young boy visiting the gaol (now a museum) and viewing the collection with absolute fascination. The most prominent exhibit was the square-jawed, shaven head of Edward ‘Ned’ Kelly. Cullen, ever aware of his own mortality, paints his own self-portrait as a death mask. Is this prophetic? Or is it a metaphor for Cullen, the artist? Has he been executed on the scaffold of Australian cultural conservatism? My conclusion is that is a bit of both – along with a good measure of typical Cullen “f-ck you” attitude. This exhibition spares neither the Constabulary or the Judiciary. Ironic Antipodean humour is tinged with reckless insult.

Individual paintings draw on Cullen’s subversive nature. One feels that he is psychically channelling Kelly. Kelly Hunter has a lyrical almost comic quality – the mounted trooper on his steed, off for the hunt, except the game is wild colonial boy – not foxes.

There is little doubt about Cullen’s distain for Judge Redmond Barry. An Irish Protestant, Barry was the first judge to indite Kelly, sentencing him to three years hard labour whilst still a teenager. Years later, on delivering the death sentence, the judge’s final words to Kelly, ‘May God have mercy on you soul.’ Ned Kelly responded: ‘I will go a little further than that and say, I will see you there where I go.’ Judge Redmond Barry died 12 days after Kelly’s execution.

The drama played out during Kelly’s last stand at Glenrowan left the outlaw badly wounded. He never regained the use of his left arm. The steel helmet, bashed by a known bush blacksmith, became the symbol or resistance. It is a more precise construction of a helmet than Nolan’s square box with its menacing eyes, Cullen’s image has no eyes, just an inky darkness or in the case of Edward Kelly, a blast of white light. Why no eyes? It would be just too obvious, and avoids any obvious comparison with the earlier paintings. Cullen, of course, has his own view: ‘Well stupid… it was dark, they were flat-out seeing the figure, let alone his eyes!’

As John McDonald has pointed out, Nolan never painted Kelly unmasked. The mask formed an impersonal veil. However, Cullen gives us a feel for the subject’s humanity. Edward Kelly is a painting that sums up Kelly’s angst and that of the artist. This is Ned as the Viking raider, nine feet tall (as described by one of the police) with smoking gun in hand. Or is it a smoking opium pipe? In any case, the economy of line employed by the artist is masterful. With a few gesture strokes a masterpiece of Australian historical expressionist painting has been created. It is Warhol meets De Kooning, with 40,000 volts.

Cullen, the image maker, has stepped up to a new level in this exhibition. There is nowhere to hide. If the drama doesn’t get you, the humour will, of this there is no doubt.

This is not a post-colonial painting. This is historical painting. And our culture is stronger for it.
THE CONNOR BROTHERS

*How did I lose you?*

2014

Acrylic on canvas \ 181 x 110cm

**Provenance:** Private Collection, Brisbane
THE CONNOR BROTHERS

Hogarth’s Master, Load of fuss (red)

2013
Collage and acrylic on paper \ 40x48.5cm (framed)
THE CONNOR BROTHERS

Every saint has a past and every sinner has a future

2017

Giclee, screen print, acrylic and oil and hand applied varnish on paper \ 75 x 50cm

framed
ANTHONY LISTER

Ballerina 5

2017

Oil and spray on canvas \ 30 x 130cm
ANTHONY LISTER
Blondes whatever
2016
Acrylic, charcoal and spray paint on canvas \ 42 x 42cm
ANTHONY LISTER

Ballerina 1

2017

Oil and spray on canvas \ 150 x 150cm
ANTHONY LISTER

In the garden

2016

Acrylic, charcoal and spray paint on canvas \ 48 x 48cm