Anthony Mannix, an exhibition of work by Australia’s most celebrated Outsider artist, will open at the Callan Park Gallery on Thursday 3 December, 6 to 8pm. The opening will feature a rare collaborative performance by Anthony Mannix, with a live reading of recent writings called ‘The Being of Art’, accompanied by a tape loop soundscape by The Loop Orchestra.

Anthony Mannix, co-curated by the artist and Professor Colin Rhodes, will be on display until Saturday 19 December.

Callan Park Gallery
Sydney College of the Arts
The Visual Arts Faculty of the University of Sydney
Balmain Road Rozelle NSW 2039 Australia (enter opposite Cecily St)
Further information: www.usyd.edu.au/sca Email: callanparkgallery@usyd.edu.au
Gallery hours: Saturday, 11am to 4pm. By appointment on other days.
Free admission and parking.

Cricos Provider Code 00026A
Images: (front cover) Untitled, nd, Etching, 20 x 24.8cm (image); (back cover) A Little Circus of Dark Performers, nd, Ink pen, texta and tea on paper, 28.5 x 30.2cm.
Anthony Mannix: A Network of Technique

The Art Brutists: Those making Art Brut are an extremely strange particle of the world. They belong to it and yet they don’t. They are speaking from the deserts, the voids and the vortexes to give You messages but the messages are so disturbing so extreme that they are done away with in institutions. Anthony Mannix has spent many years ‘done away with in institutions’ one of which was Rozelle Hospital, so he comes full circle with this latest exhibition: his artworks displaying the full force of what he has called ‘his schizophrenic cosmology’, in a place that previously always attempted to erode these psychotic landscapes.

Anthony Mannix is one of Australia’s leading Outsider artists and has, in a career that spans over 30 years, exhibited domestically, in Europe and the United States of America. His work has recently been shown in ‘Australian Outsiders’ at the Orange Regional Gallery; Hazelhurst Regional Gallery and Halle Saint Pierre, Paris, France (2005-07). In 2008 Mannix was included in ‘Handle with Care’ the Adelaide Biennale of Australian Art, Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide. Recent solo exhibitions include: ‘A Cerebral Odyssey: Anthony Mannix’ at Orange Regional Gallery (2008) and Anthony Mannix ‘The beast of the unconscious and other well-known entities’ at Penrith Regional Gallery & The Lewers Bequest (2009). Mannix was the 2009 winner of the Contemporary section of the Fisher’s Ghost Art Award.

As is evidenced by this latest exhibition Anthony’s practice is diverse, encompassing artist’s books (housing images and an eclectic range of writings), drawings, paintings, and found sculptural constructions. An emphasis on materiality is ever present: glass, wood, wire, resin, tea, solder, acrylics, ink, canvas, leather, gouache, metal, and persepex, to name but a few substances that give shape, colour and texture to his art. Concurrent with this visual practice is his exploration of sound. In such sound works (often accompanied by long time collaborators The Loop Orchestra) Anthony reads from his voluminous writings; by turns philosophical, humorous, poetic, surreal, emotional and psychological. Anthony’s creative practice, in all its manifestations, is a process of anthropologically documenting journeys through his unconscious; journeys facilitated by psychotic experience. Anthony characterises his own work as follows:

“My artistic output over the last twenty-five years has had one point and that has been to document the landscape of psychosis and the unconscious. It involves an intuitive invention of cultural anthropophy to make some order of the plethora of hallucinations, visions, spirits, ghosts, apparitions, and creatures, which populate this, altered perspective. I have learned my trade myself: patterns, designs and artefacts I have observed in all worlds go to form a network of technique. (‘Outsider Art Statement’, p.1)

Ultimately art-making becomes for Anthony a method by which a concrete reality, his unconscious landscape, is actually constructed; creative expression simultaneously creates and documents his ‘schizophrenic cosmology’. This radical mode of creation, which Anthony calls ‘the art of schizophrenia’, animates alternate realities. He writes of this process:

the art of schizophrenia might be seen as a constant make-shift construction of a mental sculpture, the thing is welded to reality but not part of it, this sculpture of thought and personal history is a very mobile thing and is being added to constantly throughout a schizophrenic experience becoming more and more complex, becoming more and more unmanageable and in need of alteration and repair it is not exposed to the ravages of climate and vandals as such but to the destructive contact of reality and the real in it is the incomprehensible. Within this inverse of the concept and method of anarchism, for a separate reality is being brought into being, (Erotic Journal of a Madman, p.23)

In this realm, which constitutes a mental art-making experience, fixed concepts are replaced by fluidity: an unstable evolving reality forever at the point of collapse, forever at the point of reinvention. Anthony conceives of art-making not only as a way of constructing and maintaining such realities but also a way of navigating through the landscapes themselves. He writes: “My style of art is a dance to maintain control, to establish a compass with which to navigate the schizophrenic experience” (Erotic Journal of a Madman, p. 27).

In using art-making as a compass to navigate through madness, Anthony’s practice can be situated within the field of Art Brut and Outsider art, artistic tendencies with which he also self-identifies. He suggests that works of this nature move beyond contrived representations, into a realm presented with in institutions live, vital entities: “It is not so much that Art Brut represents something, it’s that Art Brut is more the actual thing: if it’s the entity it is the entity; if it’s the raging chasm within you it is that and not just a representation” (“Art Brut” Radio Eye, May 2000).

So if you see from the corner of your eye one of the many heads that populate Anthony’s work turn to watch you, or the soldier in his sculptural constructions liquidly and drip on to your suddenly burning skin, or the pages of his books fall open at an illustration of yourself, know that there are entities at work within these schizophrenic cosmologies; entities imbued with the energy of their creation; the ‘altered’ energy of their creator who writes: “That which make art brut and outsider art look to the ‘altered’ states, the ‘altered’ space and see no reason why it should be ‘altered’, see no reason why it should not be part of what is life” (Journal of a Madman 1994-95, p. 161).

Here then at the Callan Park Gallery Anthony again makes his internal vision ‘part of what life is’ and his doing opens a dialogue between madness and sanity showing, once more, that the vortexes of the Brutists have many emotive messages to offer us. Asylum walls that once incarcerated and silenced Anthony now reverberate with his ‘schizophrenic cosmology’, a realm at once idiosyncratic and familiar: An audience’s ability to connect with Anthony’s entities, his raging chasms, ultimately demonstrates that each of us live in an ‘altered’ state of our very own; that we are all, in fact, extremely strange particles of the world.

Dr Gareth Jenkins

December 2009

Select bibliography


More information regarding the work, practice and exhibitions of Anthony Mannix can be found at his web site: http://www.anthonymannix.com/

Dr Gareth Jenkins completed a PhD on the artist’s books of Anthony Mannix in 2008. His thesis is available as a free download at: http://ro.uow.edu.au/theses/89/