

# Richard Crichton

## About

Awarded a Harkness fellowship in 1967 he moved his young family to New York and lived for the first year at the Chelsea Hotel, with artist Brett Whiteley and his family as their immediate neighbours. Whiteley had also been awarded a Harkness fellowship that same year. Albert and Barbara Tucker stayed for some weeks at the Chelsea also, and Sydney Nolan paid a number of visits to the Crichtons during their time there. The second year saw the family renting a house and studio in Bridgehampton, Long Island, and 'swapping' premises occasionally with the Whiteleys, who stayed on at the Chelsea. Crichton's Bridgehampton studio had just been vacated by painter Ellsworth Kelly, who then became a frequent visitor. Crichton met with other artists who lived locally such as Roy Lichtenstein, Theos Stamos and Esteban Vicente.

During this 21 month period (1967-69) he painted his New York series, some 30-plus large paintings and associated drawings. This work followed his observation of the eventful city life, which included noisy demonstrations and street parades with the people being divided for and against the Vietnam war. He was witness to the shock and sorrow of New Yorkers when both Martin Luther King and Robert Kennedy were assassinated, these feelings working their way into his paintings such as 'Finale' and 'Requiem'. Crichton, co-incidentally, was also present in Chicago during the student riots. It was a time of much political ferment as well as strident patriotism, - conflicting views typifying New York and much of the US at that time. His paintings and drawings of marching girls, musical instruments and the machine-like 'Parade' are symbols of the social and political unrest of that time. He participated in the 'Young Painters from Around the World' exhibition held in New York at the Union Carbide Gallery in 1969.

Due to the Vietnam war there were strong anti-American feelings evident on his return to Australia, which led to a reluctance by galleries to show the work done in the US. However, he proceeded to translate it into a 3-dimensional 'Parade', heading his Parade with a 'Veteran' (see article and cover of Art Australia Mag Cover and Article 1980, Vol.17, No.3). Only a minority of the 'Parade' series has ever been exhibited.

Crichton's series of cow paintings and prints emerged after his return to Australia in 1970. Lecturing at RMIT during the 1970's and 80's he showed to students his studio work which included Kangaroos, landscape and camouflaged cow themes. He has previously written, *"On returning from the US in 1970 I worked on a pastoral series of cows which developed into the more complex 'cutout' or camouflaged cow-in-landscape images and 'stacked' cow forms. These were in black and white, with little colour and with cloud and shadow patterning. The images were largely based on my impression of the actual constructed animal forms used to camouflage airfields in WW2 described to me by artist/sculptor Victor Greenhalgh, a mentor and Head of Art School at RMIT (1955-65), formerly Deputy Director of Camouflage, Victoria for the army during the war."* Some of the Cow works were exhibited in Melbourne and Sydney in the 1970's.

During the 1970's Crichton traveled extensively throughout Australia, firstly in Tasmania learning about the tragic "black line" of early colonial days, followed, both in 1977 and 1978 by extended journeys into central and northern remote regions of Australia, staying within Aboriginal communities. He travelled with and formed a friendship with linguist/anthropologist Prof. Ted Strehlow who gave Crichton a personal insight into Aboriginal art and culture. These experiences helped shape the series of Kangaroo drawings, paintings and 3D forms that followed ('Farewell Ballet') which were included in Crichton's 'Profile' exhibition at Melbourne University Gallery in 1978. He returned to northern Arnhemland in 1994, renewing links. Paintings and drawings resulted, some done on-site. Some of these watercolours are now within the National Gallery of Australia collection.

In 1981-82 Crichton lived and worked in Atlanta, USA, as Georgia State University's first International Visiting artist. During the 1982 Spring Arts Festival he was Artist-in-residence at the University of South Carolina. Two solo exhibitions were held in Atlanta in 1982, followed by another in 1986, when Richard also stayed briefly as visiting artist at Maryland Art Institute in Baltimore.

Exhibiting in Melbourne in 1986, Crichton showed his 'Summer Diary' series of paintings and pastels, of which some were acquired by the National Gallery of Australia. The sea and the beach have been recurring themes during his many years of making artworks. He has held solo shows both in Sydney and Melbourne during the 80's and early 90's which included these themes.

During a 10 year period 1992-2002, Crichton continued to paint and draw, but did not exhibit until his exhibition 'The Far Shores' at Lauraine Diggins Gallery, Melbourne in 2002. Crichton's ancestry is Celtic, mainly Irish. His work has relevancy to his family, concerning the Irish exodus of the 1840's and the coming to Australia of the migrants, and famine victims.

Four solo exhibitions were held at Eastgate Gallery, Melbourne between 2009 and 2016. A major exhibition (Profile - Selected Works) was held at



Richard Crichton 1992. Photo © William Alford



Richard Crichton 2016

natural world from environmental degradation, forced migration, hazards of global warming.

A selection of these works can be viewed here under the subheadings 'PASSAGE' and 'WELLSPRING'.

As artist and critic Ronald Millar wrote in 2002 " *The journeys have been the triggers for a grand search for origins...but Crichton's journeys are not intended as social commentary...he makes paintings, not art-political statements about race relations or reconciliation. He deals not with cultural appropriations but with the abstract bones of picture making; expressive coloured shapes and spaces, inventive and emotionally loaded areas...*"

## Awards & Appointments

- 1956-66 Lecturer in Fine Art , RMIT
- 1965 Commendation Award Georges Art Prize
- 1967-69 Harkness Fellowship of the
- Commonwealth Fund
- 1970 Commendation Award Alice Springs Art Prize
- 1970-80 Lecturer in Fine Art RMIT
- 1981 Appointed artist-in-residence, University of South Carolina USA
- 1981-94 Senior Lecturer RMIT
- 1981-82 Appointed International Visiting Artist, Georgia State University Atlanta USA
- 1987 Gold Coast Art Award

## Publications Links

- Farewell Ballet review 'The Australian' 1978
- Art Australia Mag Cover and Article 1980
- Long Summer review Ronald Millar 1986
- Totemic Entities review Jenny Zimmer 2009
- Ronald Millar 2012 Castlemaine Catalogue Extract.
- Richard Crichton 'Farewell Ballet' at Macquarie galleries, Sydney 1980. Extract from
- Animals and Animism by Jenny Zimmer.

## Previous Exhibition

'Campfires, Journeys and other things' Eastgate Gallery, Oct 8th - Nov 5th, 2016.



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