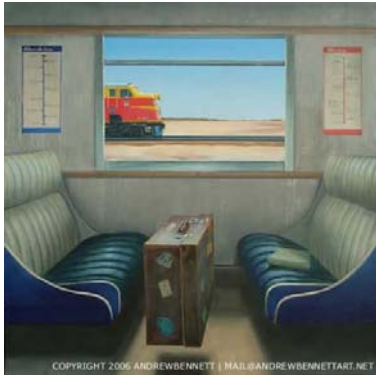


Journey is the Destination

Solo Exhibition, Harrison Galleries

May 2006



The Journey is the Destination is Andrew Bennett's tenth solo show and sees the artist producing some of his his finest work to date. There is an eloquence and economy in the construction of the compositions.

Earlier more picturesque landscapes make way for stark and barren expanses and the effect is both enigmatic and majestic. While the imagery of these large canvasses is striking, the palette is mostly subdued, subtle blues, browns and greys create a quiet more reflective mood.

The meticulously rendered landscapes and interiors operate as a stage for Bennett's artistic and philosophical expression. From his storehouse of imagery (boats, planes, windows) the suitcase re-emerges as the central prop. We see these suitcases travelling across the land, specifically along the West Coast of Australia.

Immediately one is struck by the tongue in cheek humour in these images. The absurdly placed fuel pump in a suitcase on a dry salt lake in *Last Stop for Fuel* and the humble pot plant aboard a pile of suitcases in *Beach Stack Holiday* resembles a holiday snapshot: a cheerful record of Grandpa on the beach, but it's not; it's a stack

of suitcases. The suitcases have, curiously, the definite quality of a portrait: they have personality and a psychological presence. We are compelled to unravel the mystery of the suitcases: what do they contain, if anything? Why do some defy gravity? Where are they going?

The theatrical positioning of the suitcases- piled in empty rooms, floating on water or hovering above the ground is a gesture against the mundane in many ways surreal.

But unlike the Surrealists, Bennett's paintings are not the outpourings of his subconscious nor are they memories of past dreams. Bennett strange tableau's exist in a very real space, the Australian landscape.

And the strange and sometimes incongruous juxtaposition of objects is a highly conscious device to communicate Bennett's ideas. So what is the meaning of the travelling suitcase?

If this series can be viewed sequentially beginning with the stacks of suitcases (at home) in *Life is Like A Suitcase*, a suitcase aboard a train in *The Journey Is The Destination*, then suitcases floating on the ocean in *Floating Away* and



Last Drift, we observe the once neatly stacked suitcases are prized open and randomly cast out to sea. This is not a depiction of reckless ransacking and abandonment.

For Bennett, the aged and tagged suitcases symbolise a life well lived and the multitude of experiences and memories contained within.

Therefore, one may speculate that the empty and cast off cases in the ocean represent the artist's own emancipation.

He was able to shed his 'emotional baggage' as it were and experienced a form of catharsis on his journey from Perth to Exmouth.

The evidence for this reading appears in the form of two panels on the cabin wall of the train in *The Journey is the Destination*. The first panel reads: "Start, Birth, First Steps, School, Marry, First Job, First Home, Mid-life Crisis, Later Life, Retirement, Illness, and End".

The second panel is titled Alternate Route and reads: "Start, Birth, First Steps, School, Travel, Experience, Learn, Understand, Variation, Later Life, End". Travel, it seems, is Bennett's salvation - a means of escape from the burdens of daily life, an opportunity for

learning, remembering and forgetting and perhaps most importantly, because it fuels his imagination.

Given this interpretation it is surprising that the mood in *Floating Away* is serene but rather sombre and detached. Herein lies the problem- as one travels to unfamiliar places our vulnerability, our memories and attachments are exposed.

The journey is a dual experience: while we gain new insights we also encounter inevitable frustrations (physical ones such as running out of fuel) or we may feel a sense of alienation or loneliness be.

The *Journey is the Destination* sets out to highlight the possibilities of reconnecting with the land or at least, to develop a relationship with and sensitivity toward the land. Bennett knows the rewards of taking an "Alternate Route" is worth taking; it can free us from the treadmill of daily existence.

Bennett does not look to his dreams or his subconscious for personal and creative enlightenment, he looks to the land, packs his bags and heads north, or west, or wherever the wind takes him.

More Information

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