



"Behind Stan's" 1977, Grahame Sydney, Collection: Mr and Mrs R. C. Batchelor, Mt Somers.

Grahame Sydney Drawing into Painting

Robert McDougall Art Gallery March 13 — May 2 1982

The term "realist", Grahame Sydney points out, is often misunderstood. "The realist's delight" he says "is in creating the illusion of realism". This statement contains more than a hint of pride in his ability as a prestidigitator of paint but Sydney is aware that many are too dazzled by his technique to see the ideas that inform his work, the processes of selection, editing, composition that contribute to their visual impact.

The paradox of Sydney's image is that while their actuality is overwhelmingly convincing, they seldom exist as shown. A great part of his mastery lies in his ability to subtly alter scale, viewpoint, transpose the relative position of a mountain, object or building, emphasise a shape, angle or surface to create the singular mood that speaks of Sydney's love for and attachment to Central Otago.

It is the pungent sense of place that is the commanding characteristic of these paintings. No one familiar with Sydney's landscapes can travel through the Maniototo without seeing it through his eyes, recognising its unpeopled stillness, its vast flatness where an upright pole with a sagging windsock becomes a lonely signal of human activity and the distant hills lie low on the horizon as they do in no other part of New Zealand.

The poignant evocation of the human presence is an attribute that removes Sydney's works from the generality of other tempera realists. There are often allusions to unseen personalities in the empty chairs, abandoned cars, washing hung outside starkly simple dwellings and rooms that seem to reverberate gently with the aura of absent inhabitants. In these paintings, the

severe Central Otago landscape is not shown as hostile territory resisting man's intrusion, but as a more reasonable, if tough, presence accepting and concealing those who choose to live within it.

Behind the coolly precise tempera technique conjuring up a heightened reality, lies a rigorous process of observation and analysis. Intuition certainly is part of the alchemy by which Grahame Sydney converts his visual experience into compelling imagery, probably most present in the initial stages of his conceptualising. The rest is carefully reasoned method as he subjects his developing image to the severe requirements of a highly developed aesthetic sensibility.

In this exhibition we have sought to reveal something of this process by presenting alongside many of the works, the drawings leading to their completed state. Through them it is possible to follow the artist's decisions as he refined and intensified the substance of his imagery.

Together the drawings and paintings reveal a superbly educated eye in the service of a mind at once rational, analytic and poetic. What may strike the viewer first is Sydney's formidable technique, secondly and less quickly disclosed, is the hidden geometry underpinning his compositions, giving them a sense of completeness. Many painters possess these accomplishments. The special ingredient that combines to raise his paintings from the merely clever to the memorable is the sympathetic visual imagination through which Grahame Sydney filters his perceptions of landscapes, objects and people, well-loved, well understood and well seen.

John Coley

Catalogue

Paintings

All measurements given in millimetres, height before width. Paintings all Egg Tempera on Gesso unless otherwise stated.

1. **Slow Sign** 560 x 610, May 1975. Collection: Mr R. Brebner, Auckland.
2. **Weathered Shoe** 305 x 450, May 1975. Collection: Mrs B. Huggett, Dunedin.
3. **In the Woolshed** 482 x 598, June 1975. Collection: Mr & Mrs R. D. Fraser, Cromwell.
4. **Fog at Stan Cotter's** 432 x 915, July 1975. Collection: Paul & Marie Aubin, Dunedin.
5. **Railway Red** 597 x 830, August 1975. Collection: Hocken Library, Dunedin.
6. **July on the Maniototo** 585 x 750, October 1975. Collection: Private
7. **Board and Batten, Nyhon's** 685 x 787, December 1975. Collection: Private
8. **Mantlepiece Study** 330 x 755, January 1976. Collection: Mr & Mrs R. D. Fraser, Cromwell.
9. **Summer Piece** 385 x 764, May 1976. Collection: Mr & Mrs A. E. Taylor, Christchurch.
10. **On the Dogtrials** 267 x 648, September 1976. Collection: Mrs C. McIntyre, Cromwell.
11. **Limp Sock** 600 x 510, January 1977. Collection: Mr & Mrs J. K. Skinner, Dunedin.
12. **Dogtrials Bar** 360 x 680, February 1977. Collection: Mrs T. Hotham, Upper Hutt.
13. **For Hire** (water colour), 455 x 480, April 1977. Collection: Private.
14. **Chevrolet** 300 x 570, May 1977. Collection: Mr & Mrs C. A. Muir, Dunedin.
15. **Charlie's Tank** 760 x 465, July 1977. Collection: Robert McDougall Art Gallery, Christchurch.
16. **Behind Stan's** 360 x 710, October 1977. Collection: Mr & Mrs R. C. Batchelor, Mt Somers.
17. **Private Bag** 380 x 255, December 1977. Collection: Mr & Mrs R. L. Hall, Dunedin.
18. **Shearer's Chair** (water colour) 300 x 310, March 1978. Collection: Mrs R. J. Sydney, Cromwell.
19. **Thin Fires** 540 x 680, April 1978. Collection: Mr & Mrs J. Brown, Christchurch.
20. **Grumman** (oil) 310 x 560, April 1978. Collection: Deborah Coddington, Martinborough.
21. **Rozzie at Pisa** 610 x 610, May 1978. Collection: Artist.
22. **Pisa Wool** (water colour) 380 x 440, January 1979. Collection: Mrs Paddy Smart Christchurch.
23. **Bannockburn** 535 x 895, March 1979. Collection: Private
24. **Usher's Stable** 332 x 545, April 1979. Collection: Private
25. **Short-Arse Shorty** 450 x 500, August 1979. Collection: Annie Whittle and Bruce Morrison, Auckland.

26. **Weatherboards at Cluden** 255 x 737, September 1979. Collection: Mr & Mrs J. Ritchie, Wanaka.

27. **Brown's Water** 370 x 600, October 1979. Collection: Private
28. **Auripo Road** 420 x 748, December 1979. Collection: Mr & Mrs C. M. Broad, Invercargill.
29. **Huntaway Hut** 395 x 495, April 1980. Collection: Mr & Mrs K. Wardell, Christchurch.
30. **Dogtrials Room** 500 x 830, July 1980. Collection: Mr & Mrs P. Rudkin, Christchurch.
31. **Skull** 380 x 366, August 1980. Collection: Mr & Mrs G. F. Jones, Cromwell.
32. **The Huntaway** 537 x 710, December 1980. Collection: Paul and Marie Aubin, Dunedin.
33. **Burned Willow** 682 x 694, November 1980. Collection Justice & Mrs J. P. Cook, Christchurch.

Drawings

All works pencil on paper and in the Artist's possession unless otherwise stated.

34. 3, Studies for **Slow Sign** May 1975. Collection: Dunedin Public Art Gallery
35. 4, Studies for **In the Woolshed** June 1975, 2 x Collection: Mr & Mrs R. D. Fraser, Cromwell.
36. 1, Study for **Railway Red** July 1975, Collection: Hocken Library.
37. 4, Studies for **July on the Maniototo** July 1975.
38. 2, Studies for **Summer Piece** February 1976, 1 x Collection: Mr & Mrs A. E. Taylor, Christchurch.
39. 2, Studies for **Charlie's Tank** March 1977.
40. 1, Study for **For Hire** April 1977.
41. 2, Studies for **Behind Stan's** October 1977.
42. 2, Studies for **Private Bag** October 1977, 1 x Collection: Mr & Mrs R. L. Hall, Dunedin.
43. 1, Study for **Weatherboards at Cluden** February 1978.
44. 2, Studies for **Grumman** March 1978.
45. 4, Studies for **Rozzie at Pisa** May 1978.
46. 2, Studies for **Bannockburn** September 1978.
47. 1, Study for **Usher's Stable** January 1979.
- 1, Study for **Auripo Road** August 1979. Collection: Dunedin Public Art Gallery