

## DAVID WOODINGS

David born Auckland 1956

Accepted into Elam School of Fine Art in 1975 finding that the painting tutors there included Don Binney, Robert Ellis and Garth Tapper. He completed a BFA in 1979 and an MFA (Hons) in 1981. He was awarded the Elam Painting Prize in 1979

David Woodings connection to the Photo Realist painting style of the American East Coast artists had its genesis in seeing the exhibition American Photo Realism shown at the Barrington Gallery in Auckland in the early 1970's, although the influence of the work was not reproduced by him until 1978 during his last years at the Elam School of Fine Art.

The years at art school had enabled him to generate a vast portfolio of photographs as during this time he was rarely without his camera on excursions throughout the city of Auckland, and the reflective surfaces began to seduce him. David's first works in the photo-realist style were mostly of buildings and vehicles reflected in windows (see Bonaparte Restaurant and Barristers). From 1978 through to his first one person show Interiors in 1981 at the Denis Cohn Gallery in Auckland, David's work was associated with the fast-food industry with numerous works depicting the McDonalds franchise as in the late 1970's the introduction of the fast-food industry in some way accentuated the gloss and plastic so essential to the themes of the photo-realist painters Robert Bechtle, Ralph Goings and Tom Blackwell. Other works during this period acknowledge the franchising of New Zealand's business both in the fast-food industry and outside it with works (see Homestead Fried Chicken and Oasis) depicting recent additions to the New Zealand fast-food industry and in New Zealand Drycleaners a company that re-branded in a glossy American style to capture new clientele.

The Interiors exhibition in some way captured the cityscape of a fast-developing Auckland in the late '70's, and when the exhibition was toured to ten other venues in New Zealand thanks to the NZ Art Society touring arm, it was received with a level of indifference particularly outside the main city's galleries.

The imagery may have changed somewhat over the past 40 years but still has a strong reliance on arcade machines, coin operated rides and carousel rides. The painting style today remains fundamentally the same as in the 80s.

## GROTTESCHI

Grotteschi for the brethren of the common life 1

Grotteschi for the brethren of the common life 2

These works are really an accumulated narrative over many years and have their genesis in my continued interest in the Anthropocene. Much of the last decade's work has, I suspect, been influenced in more ways than I am probably prepared to admit, by the events of the Christchurch earthquakes, and that, overlapping my decades old interest in climate change. I have frequently used the term 'the species has amused itself to death' [a reference to Neil Postman's book *Amusing ourselves to death* and Roger Waters *Amused to death* album released in 1987] to reference images within my work, noting that I often feel as if I am myself doing the same, particularly as I get older. So, the images are to be seen as both amusing and anxious images of our time. So, a complex set of underlying narratives with which to 'read' the paintings. This is further amplified with the titles referencing two equally obscure terms; grotteschi, and brethren of the common life.

There are subtle references in these 'grotteschi' images to a couple of my favourite artists and their works, most notably Hieronymus Bosch for the concept around 'The garden of earthly delights' and the visual effects and dramatic use of chiaroscuro of the artist Caravaggio (often called tenebrism, a dominant stylistic element, transfixing subjects in bright shafts of light and darkening shadows), and though 'photorealistic' as my painting style continues to reflect (excuse the pun) the aggregates could also be considered within the 'all over abstraction' genre [Uniform treatment of all sections of the surface are the hallmark of all-over painting. All-over paintings lack a dominant point of interest].

Since at least the 18th century (in French and German as well as English), grotesque has come to be used as a general adjective for the strange, mysterious, magnificent, fantastic, hideous, ugly, incongruous, unpleasant, or disgusting, and thus is often used to describe weird shapes and distorted forms. In art, performance, and literature, however, grotesque may also refer to something that simultaneously invokes in an audience a feeling of uncomfortable bizarreness as well as sympathetic pity.

During the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries in Germany and the Netherlands, a rising tide of mystical lay piety grew up outside the official church. Under the leadership of Gerhard Groote\* (1340-84), an interest in the inner life of the soul and the necessity of imitating the life of Christ by loving one's neighbour as oneself had become popular in the low countries. The Brethren of the Common Life did not constitute regular religious orders, but they took informal vows and were entirely self-supporting. They pooled their money in a common fund from which each drew expenses, the surplus being used for charity.

