

NORMAN CATHERINE

An Interpretation* (abt. 1980)

At his beginning he wandered in a world of surrealistic fairy tales, spontaneously populated with apparently useless, mysterious objects or freak creatures unconcerned of being often cruelly maimed (De Sade comes to mind, with his characters submitted methodically to dreadful tortures but succumbing only after innumerable lethal amputations are cheerfully accepted).

Sex would emerge with suave irony, sometimes becoming a dominant threatening force. The atmosphere had soft, delightfully innocent colours, but then at closer examination these possessed corroding acidity. Sometimes men farting and defecating appear together with animals that escaped from monstrous diabolic experiments. The all-embracing quiet natural order of all this would make the shock-impact almost unbearable.

He went through a kind of deep hallucination for objects of everyday life, electric plugs or pencils which suddenly, like in a feverish spell, would become hairy or acquire animal qualities. He was painting them in series of three or more, each possessing different physical attributes.

Another time he made didactic charts, men and animals being shown in diagrams, the whole process suspended between irony and pseudoscientific makebelieve.

Sex was always the underlying theme, appearing in subtle hints which, when analysed, would reveal obscene attributions.

Lately the luminosity and purity of colour and the still, orderly compositions which reflected his personal experience within his dreamlike subconsciousness, lost this quality of introspective analysis: Norman started to be sensitive to the social implications of life.

Thus the idols of his earlier dreams became aware of the scorching realities of the country he lives in, full of the screams and material horrors of a systematically enforced injustice.

He was now recording his time, his society and by implication the structure and essence of our present world.

His colours were harsher, violent, his characters shouting their universal rage or everlasting suffering.

Looking at his three lithographs (NCAT 80/02, 80/03, 80/04)**, we encounter:

- Norman's selfportrait - 'He, the man in between, wounded symbolically (a new messiah ?), the angelic hair to the wind, chosen to pay for the sins of all the white men';
- the terrorist laughing his teeth faster than light against a background flooded with blood: he has accomplished his deed;
- and the political prisoner crying to the sky his dark-green/red-black anger.

There is anguish, fury, horror and diabolic exhilaration. The chromatism, the rebellious attitudes of the portrayed, the impending doom of the whole setting, contribute to a sense of fearful despair and to the expectation of the final hecatomb which has to be - surely and completely - consummated.

Technique

The preferred technique of Norman Catherine is the airbrush which he has perfected to an immaculate finish and enriched through continuous research and discovery of new possibilities.

The series of the three aforementioned lithographs makes use of the same technique, but in a totally new process:

- Each colour is airbrushed on a separate sheet of acetate and then transferred to an offset plate. The artist then corrects the results by working directly onto the aluminium plate, thus obtaining - sometimes through a painstaking process of deletion and addition - the exact colour-form result he expects.

Notes:

* Author of this Interpretation is not known.

**	NCAT 80/02	"Self Portrait", 1980	orig. colour litho (ed. 100)	55x 42 cm
	NCAT 80/03	"Unidentified", 1980	orig. colour litho (ed. 100)	55x 42 cm
	NCAT 80/04	"Walls without clouds", 1980	orig. colour litho (ed. 100)	55x 42 cm

Produced by the artist at the Bruce Attwood Studios, Johannesburg.
