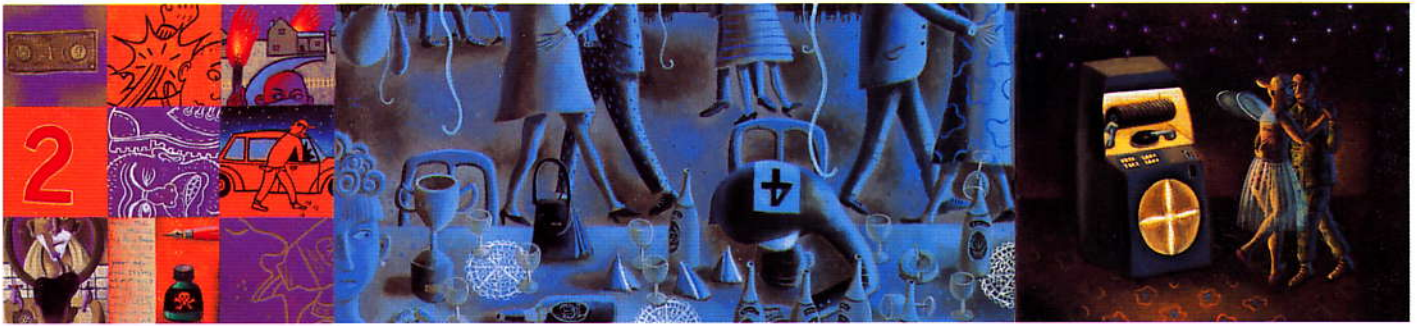


RODNEY FORBES



MORE SONGS ABOUT DANCING AND HORSES
MELBOURNE — MARCH 2001

AUSTRALIAN GALLERIES



Dancing made a man out of me 2000 oil, acrylic and alkyd on two canvas panels 25.5 x 106.3 cm



Tellers and listeners 2001 oil and alkyd on linen 85 x 167 cm



4000 holes 2001 mixed media and holes on paper on board 81.5 x 132 cm



Rodney Forbes, 2000
Photographed by Julie Adams

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

Born in Melbourne in 1951, Rodney Forbes began his working life as an electronics technician at Williamstown Naval Dockyard where he worked on guided missile systems and where he developed an interest in the sea and travel. He then travelled widely in Asia and worked for a year in England before undertaking formal studies in painting. He now lives and works in Gippsland where he lectures in visual arts at Monash University.

SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 1987 Latrobe Regional Gallery
- 1989 Australian Galleries, Melbourne
- 1991 Australian Galleries, Melbourne
- 1992 Australian Galleries, Melbourne
- 1994 'Rodney Forbes 1983–1993',
Latrobe Regional Gallery,
touring exhibition
- 1995 Australian Galleries, Melbourne
- 1998 Australian Galleries, Melbourne
- 2001 Australian Galleries, Melbourne

MORE SONGS ABOUT DANCING AND HORSES

CAROLINE DURRÉ

The quest begins, as it must, with the sound of an *Alarm* — Get up, get out of bed. It is the threshold of the new day. Can this be our hero in the bud? *David's story* might be an allegory of the body in bits and pieces, of the child constrained and powerless, yet well able to imagine the freedom of the road. The infant is already half aware that to tell stories is to symbolically control the world. Desire drives him on: to rev the engine, to explore, to know. But how can the journey get underway? Our ship, a powerful vessel, is penned in and sweltering in a *Hot dry dock*. Yet a brutal industrial landscape is made intimate, humanised; doorways, bridges, zones of light and dark create an invitation to explore, and this exploration is already the expedition foreshadowed.

Perhaps a magical instrument is needed to free us from everyday restrictions, and enable our *Departure*. Here is one — a binnacle which glows with innate power. It is a perfect piece of equipment for a voyage, a little miracle of function. So, do we now dare to launch our vessel? With *4000 holes* it may founder; the presence of tragic poetry reminds us that water, so soothing, so expansive, can be a dangerous element. Perhaps there is a wise guide in this booth, master of the necessary information, in disguise as a simpleton. Miniature machines — a crystal set, calculator, alarm clock — are the uncanny talismans for this step on our search. And we are never far from the pleasures

of language in many forms — music, verse, news, headlines. With language at our command we can manipulate the story, not be a victim.

Yet the journey is not safe. There are certainly risks. On our *Mission* we must first reach into the abyss. Jolly and monstrous, our vehicle is hell-bent on its adventure. It plunges, perhaps to the rescue, perhaps out of control, a death-car in a diseased cityscape. Now we come to a crux on our travels, a moment of intense, yet comic discomfort, where the hero is as *Happy as a sailor on a horse*.

Smug nag and awkward rider are locked in enigmatic interdependence in the naked prickly desert. And of course there are enemies on every quest. Our way may be blocked by forces unknown, a *Conspiracy theory* whose sinister presence frustrates our passage, yet which may be necessary to challenge the complacency of our too easy, too self-indulgent progress.

And who shall bear witness to the hero's enterprise? Every story needs both *Tellers and listeners*. Does some news of his deeds come in faint signals to our shores? Dangers lurk in the deep. A submarine is handy for plumbing the depths of the watery psyche, even though it is a fragile vessel beset by mines, and weird beasts inhabit the dark water. But angels are present to guard and to guide, and the tree of pilgrimage is already in sight.

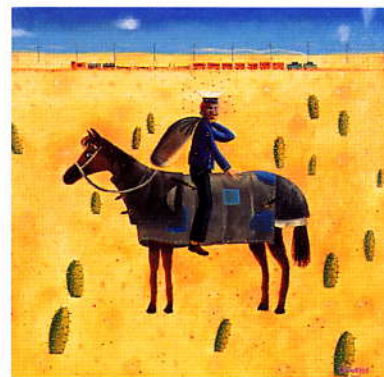
Grace and subtlety are called for, not brute force. *Dancing made a man out of me*, the hero declares with brash confidence, well aware of sensuous delights and cruel pains to which the body of a man is vulnerable. To prepare for the dance and its promise of bliss, the initiate must risk being knocked down, having his face stepped on, and his name being slandered all over the place. At the dance itself there are plenty of opportunities for embarrassment, from which a drunken stupor might offer some sort of release. Yet desire and hope drive him on. The fairy princess — the sought-after one, the ideal goal of the quest — is at last in his embrace. He has braved violence and humiliation, but there is a reward in this moment of perfection and transcendence.

Is this then the land of joy? These bosomy hills, generous and fertile? *Things like that* peaceable kingdom where sheep may safely graze and dogs may safely snooze? The promised land is a place of visual felicity, of clear joy in all the means of representation: drawing, pattern, colour, text, collage. This playground of symbols reminds us of learning to read when the world was young. We linked sign to sign with a sense of pure delight in our own power of discovery. To make meaning in the face of disorder is the greatest human challenge.

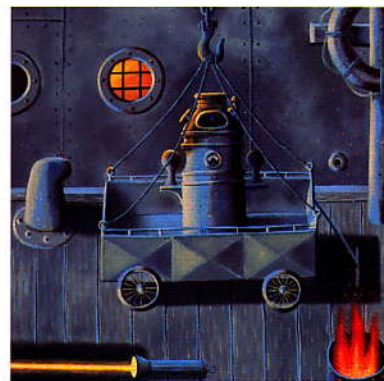
Having traversed a zone of perplexity, of risk, of trial, we return to home and security with a renewed sense of wonder. Things are not always what they seem; mundane objects have magical power. The path of the journey was always this space of visual pleasure, inventiveness and delight, the world that Rodney Forbes constantly invites us to share.

February 2001

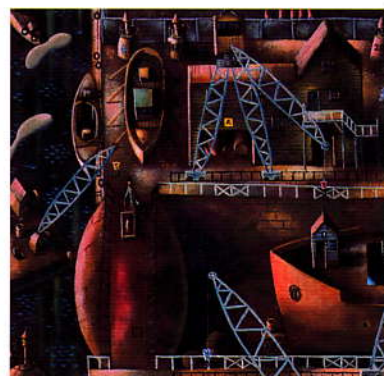
Caroline Durré is a Melbourne artist and lecturer in the Faculty of Art and Design, Monash University



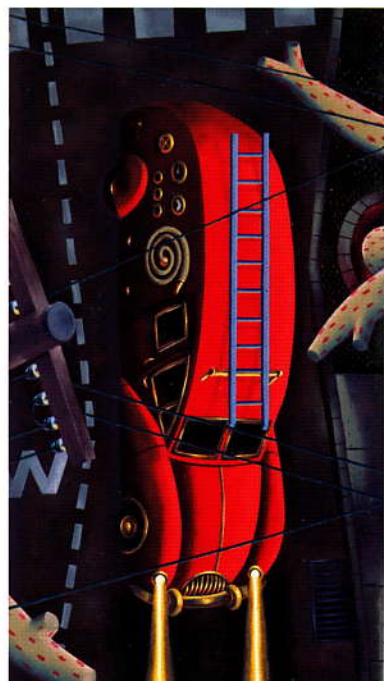
Happy as a sailor on a horse 2000
oil on canvas 30.6 x 30.6 cm



Departure 2001 oil on canvas 40.7 x 40.7 cm



Morning, Nelson Graving dock 2000
oil on canvas 49.5 x 50.2 cm



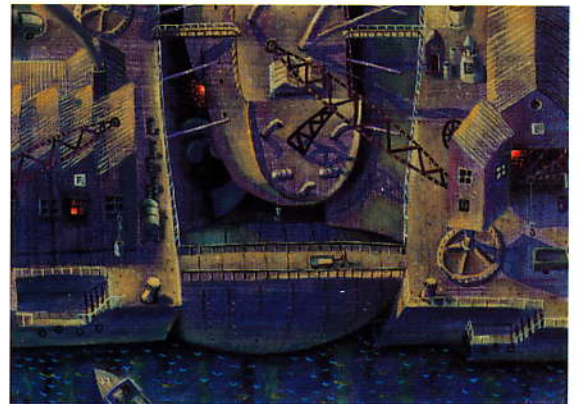
Mission 2001 oil and wax on canvas 112 x 60 cm



Hot dry dock no. 2 2001 oil on canvas 101.5 x 50.5 cm



Hot dry dock 2000 oil on board 63 x 35.5 cm



Cold dry dock 2000 oil on canvas board 30.5 x 40.6 cm



Conspiracy theory 2000 oil on board 20 x 62 cm



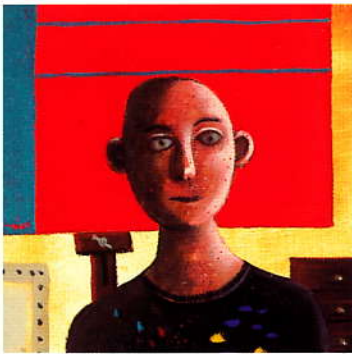
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MONASH This exhibition was assisted by the Faculty of Art and Design, Monash University

Front cover: *David's story* 2001 oil on canvas board 38.1 x 76.2 cm
 Above: *Things like that* 2001 mixed media on paper on board 81 x 50 cm

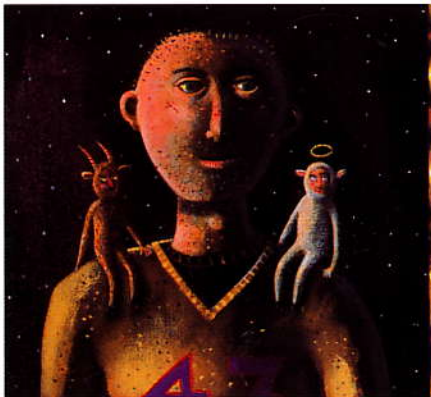
RODNEY FORBES



Alarm 2001 oil on canvas 15.5 x 16 cm



3 workers on canvas 2001 oil on three canvas panels 15 x 45 cm



Good, bad and indifferent 2001 oil and acrylic on canvas 24.6 x 85.5 cm



AUSTRALIAN GALLERIES

SYDNEY

Painting and Sculpture: 15 Royston Street (PO Box 282), Paddington, New South Wales 2021 Telephone 02 9360 5177 Facsimile 02 9360 2361
Works on Paper: 24 Glenmore Road (PO Box 282), Paddington, New South Wales 2021 Telephone 02 9380 8744 Facsimile 02 9380 8755

MELBOURNE

Painting and Sculpture: 35 Derby Street (PO Box 1183), Collingwood, Victoria 3066 Telephone 03 9417 4303 Facsimile 03 9419 7769
Works on Paper: 50 Smith Street (PO Box 1183), Collingwood, Victoria 3066 Telephone 03 9417 0800 Facsimile 03 9417 0699

Email: enquiries@australiangalleries.com.au