

Richard Birmingham

- 1954 Born Melbourne, Australia.
- 1978 Diploma of Fine Art (Painting), Victorian College of the Arts.
- 1979 Founded Green Street Studio Prahran. Worked there with Anthony Mighell, David Larwill, Peter Ferguson, Wayne Eager and Mark Howsen.
Awarded Peter Brown Memorial Scholarship and Place at the New York Studio School.
- 1982 Exhibited in the Opening Show Roar Studios.
Roar Group Show –Dec.
- 1983 Began Working in studio at Roar.
- 1984 Roar Group Show –July.
- 1985 In-house solo exhibition- Canning Street.
- 1986 Established gallery space top floor, 184 Brunswick Street for “Spoleto” Fringe Festival.
- 1987 Initiated Group Exhibition, 184 Brunswick St. “Salon de King Fitz”. Spoleto Fringe.
- 1988 Travelled India and Europe.
- 1989 Roar Founders Group Show-Robb Street Gallery, Bairnsdale.
- 1990 “New Paintings”, solo exhibition-Gretz Gallery.
- 1992 “Roar 82-92 Now”- 10 Year Anniversary Exhibition.
- 1993 “A Celebration”5th Birthday exhibition-Robb Street Gallery Bairnsdale (showing Roar artists)
Group Show – Tolarnos St Kilda.
- 1994 “Artworkz 6”-Gallery 101 Collins Street.
- 1997 “Sezoni” Collaboration with Mara & the Martenitsa Choir, culminating in an exhibition of paintings & drawings at the Elizabeth Gallery Newtown and the ABC Foyer Ultimo-Sydney. This exhibition formed part of the “sezoni” CD launch. Much of the artwork shown was used both on the CD cover and booklet and expressed the musical themes of “sezoni”.
- 1998 Founded Melbourne Studio School of Drawing and Painting, Fitzroy. Began teaching there.
Solo exhibition Chiara Goya Gallery Fitzroy.
- 1999 Christmas Group Show -Chiara Goya Gallery-Latrobe Street
Christmas Group Show- Roar.
- 2000 Art Auction at Sotheby’s-“The Art of Saving Lives”. -Feb.
“The Watchers” New Paintings and Drawings, Chiara Goya Gallery-July.
- 2001 New York Studio School Drawing and Painting Marathon. Adelaide Central School of Art. (Jan-Feb)
- 2002 Conducted Drawing Master Class at Goya Southbank “ Seeing is Perceiving “ Jan 2002.
Solo paintings Goya Latrobe. Nov 2002
- 2003 Conducted “Perceptual V imaginative” Drawing and Painting Master Melbourne Studio School Fitzroy. Jan 2003
- 2004 Conducted “Lyrical Abstraction” Drawing and Painting Master Class at Melbourne Studio School Fitzroy. Jan 2004
Travelled New York (December)
- 2006 June “Pathways and Colour” Three day painting master class, Melbourne Studio School
- 2007 July “Paint Speak” Exhibition of work by Richards students at Manningham Gallery
October Roar Group Show Chicago U.S.A
- 2008 Travelled Egypt and Middle East.
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Richard Birmingham

Reviews

The Age	Memory Holloway, December 1982.
Art and Text	"Roar or Whimper?" by Janina Green, 1984.
The Age	Gary Catalano, September, 1986
The Melbourne Times	Joanna Murray-Smith, 1986.
Arts View, ABC Radio	Joanna Ransome, 1986.
In Tempo, ABC Radio	Joanna Ransome, 1987
Traudi Allen	<u>Roar in quieter moments: work from a group of Melbourne painters.</u> Sydney: Craftsman House, 1994.
Sydney Morning Herald, Metro	"Alive and Kieking"- Kelly Burke, December 97.
The Australian	"Artistic Collaboration" November 97.
ABC Television-Snapshot	"Richard Birmingham, Painter". -Profile.
Cumberland Press	Time Out "World Music CD launch live to air". December 97.
Sun Herald	"Critics Choice" By Jeffrey Makin. Christmas Show 99. "Critics Choice" –Jeffrey Makin July 21. 2000."Watchers"
The Age	Good Life "Watchers" Tuesday 1 st August 2000.
Traudi Allen	Cross-Currents in Contemporary Australian Art. 2001

Collections

Private Collections Australia, Paris.
Applied Chemical Holdings Melbourne.

About the Artist

Richard Birmingham, a founding member of Roar Studios, has worked and exhibited in Melbourne over a period of thirty years. His awareness of the changing face of contemporary art over that time has seen him neither tempted nor seduced by the fashionable, or the Kitsch in Art.

His work is expressionist in approach and demonstrates an ongoing commitment to Drawing and Painting as a primary force in contemporary arts practice.

Richard has set up a teaching and mentor program through the Melbourne Studio School where students attend workshops, have contact with professional Artists, and gain support in their artistic endeavours within a community atmosphere.

Richard's influence on early Roar

" An early example of the treatment of the figure by the Roar artists appears in a charcoal design by Richard Birmingham. Birmingham has generally been excluded from the group's history but his influence as a trigger in interpretations of the figure, as evident in *Figures in a Landscape*, 1981/1982, appears to have been instrumental in the development of most members of the group and continues to be shown more than a decade later." From Roar and quieter moments – Traudie Allen, Craftsman House.

Artists Statement

Painting is at its best when there's a willingness to take risks, and the goal of selling work at all costs takes a back seat.

Outcome goals do not work in painting.

Engaging process first and foremost always makes for more interesting work.

Painting for me is about finding a metaphor, Cézannes "plastic equivalent". This is the only reality that counts and it must be found and carried within the language itself.

Richard Birmingham

Touch and feeling together with colour and surface are all part of the "Image" and must be developed simultaneously. Formula and tastefulness play no part in this process, where space, form, and colour are the more honest building blocks.

If we explore the unexpected with confidence, then with luck we may arrive at the extraordinary.

Its only through a spirit of enquiry we can create the best chance for something special, something transformative to take place in our work.

There is no other reason to continue painting.

R. B. 2002.

Richard Birmingham 2007

Richard`s prime driver is the search to find a metaphoric language embracing both landscape and figurative themes.

This is achieved by the subjugation of the literal.

A constant re-working ensures a balance is struck between the image and the formal elements of picture making.

The image is sought and found *only* at the end of an exacting process of construction and destruction.

Richard's work shows a respect for the visual world but is never constrained by it.

His work is composed and crafted to achieve his own poetic reality.

More from Richard on his work

By way of a brief history, I started painting seriously in the early 1970`s, in 1976 I began my studies at the Victorian college of the arts under Bill Kelly and graduated from there in 1978.

After art school I founded a studio in green St Prahran and worked there with Tony Mighell, David Larwill, Peter Ferguson, Wayne Egger, and Mark Howson.

This studio was to become a springboard leading to the Foundation of Roar studios in July of 1982 when we had the first show in the Fitzroy premises.

It was a formative and challenging time to live through and its now recognized by art historians and writers as an important period in the development of Australian painting. I've had regular exhibitions since that time and I'm now working in a beautiful blue stone studio at home in Balwyn where I also teach drawing and painting.

The question I get asked most often is what does my painting mean.

This is a difficult question to answer because a good painting never really means just one thing.

It should mean lots of things on different levels. Painting is speaking but without words. It's already saying something.

It's meaning is best received through the sensors.

So you see and feel what a painting means.

Australian painting has had a long-standing preoccupation with the landscape and figures in that landscape. Think of the Heidelberg school, then more recently Sydney Nolan and his Ned Kelly paintings and also the emotionally charged figures of Joy Hester.

Richard Birmingham

I share that preoccupation and use it as a starting point in much of the work I do. In a general sense then my work is about an imagined Australian landscape and how people occupy that space both in a physical and metaphorical way, but it seems to me you can't talk about what a work of art means without talking about how it was made.

My work is expressionist in approach and I develop the images out of gestural mark making.

The figures are poetic more than descriptive, often surprising. They are shifting presences, co-opted from earlier paint layers, embodied in the substance of the paint, a metaphor for the language itself.

Human touch and trace together with colour and surface are all part of the "Image" and intrinsic to the paintings meaning.

The process itself throws up countless possibilities way beyond what you could ever think of before hand in a working drawing. The best work always comes if you are attuned to this process.

Picasso referred to this when he said, "I begin with an idea and then it becomes something else."

So painting and drawing for me is really about search and discovery, and quite often search and destroy. Its constant re-invention, you may not always know what you want but you know what you don't want.

Without a search there is no discovery and with out discovery there is really no incentive to work. I want to find something new every time I paint.

I would like to conclude but reading this quote by Jackson Pollock. It has often helped me get going again after a dry period in the studio.

"Pollock"

When I am in a painting, I'm not aware of what I'm doing. It is only after a sort of 'get acquainted' period that I see what I have been about. I have no fears about making changes, destroying the image, etc, because the painting has a life of its own. I try to let it come through. It is only when I lose contact with the painting that the result is a mess. Otherwise there is pure harmony, an easy give and take, and the painting comes out well."

R.B.2007

Richard Birmingham