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Robert Clinch

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EGG TEMPERA IS a surprising choice of medium for someone who never went to art school. I previously painted in a variety of other media, but dissatisfaction with oils, distrust of acrylics and doubts about the longevity of gouache, watercolour and drybrush precipitated a quest for painting's holy grail. It was then that I stumbled upon a sadly neglected, beautiful, opalescent medium: egg tempera.

That choice has come at a cost. I have always been painstakingly meticulous in my methods. I do not work from photographs, preferring to draw selectively from life; enjoying results imbued with the experience, not just the facts. Furthermore, my paintings begin in my imagination, and I piece them together from drawings of similar elements found in reality, and tailor these to my compositions. So, grinding pigments, preparing fresh medium and a new regime of studio hygiene has increased my paintings' already slow gestation. However, when you see these glowing capriccios in the flesh, the reasons for my choice of medium become evident.

My latest completed work, *Spartacus*, 2013, is the third and final in a series of three major pendant paintings, heralding the rights of every one of us to believe in and pursue our dreams. In each painting, one of my three children is the protagonist in a scene where endeavours close to their hearts are the theme. In each, they are a small but

significant figure in the composition, as maybe we all are in the scheme of things.

In *The Grand Reading Room*, 1998 (commissioned by Potter Museum/The University of Melbourne), my daughter Jean is the 13-year-old on the stairs from childhood to adolescence; transported to another world by the book in her hands. She is engrossed with the magic of the words she reads and seemingly unaware of the world dome of the Latrobe Reading Room of the State Library of Victoria, looming above her.

In *Fanfare for the Common Man*, 2003 (the title of which is also the title for my mid-career retrospective with Art Gallery of Ballarat and Wollongong City Gallery), my then 17-year-old son, Allan, is the trombone player. Rising high above the viewer's low vantage point, he blows his mighty message from the derelict but appropriate brewery tower in industrial inner-city Melbourne.

The young man about to kick the football in *Spartacus* is my 23-year-old son, Stephen. He stands at the far end of the typical Melbourne bluestone laneway that may have begun the career of many a star, with the towering coliseum (the Melbourne Cricket Ground) dominating the distant sky.

These are three major egg tempera paintings of identical dimensions; three different ages in my three children's growing awareness of

their hopes and aspirations; and three different aspects of the culture that embraces them.

Twenty years earlier the same sitter for *Spartacus* played a very different role in a painting titled *Gateway*. He was the small child standing with his back to the viewer, holding a bright yellow, toy tip-truck. He stood between two ominous gatehouses. One huge iron gate was ajar. He stared across a vast, desolate wasteland to a distant metropolis under an eerie sky.

I was wondering how we equip our children for the world into which we send them. In *Spartacus*, *Fanfare for the Common Man* and *The Grand Reading Room* I offer my responses. ■

EXHIBITION

Robert Clinch: *Fanfare for the Common Man*
Wollongong City Gallery
20 September to 17 November

www.wollongongcitygallery.com

01 *Gateway*, 1994, watercolour, conte and chalk, 50 x 91cm
02 *Spartacus*, 2013, egg tempera on panel, 107 x 105cm
Courtesy the artist