



ROBERT CLINCH

Life On Earth

1 December 2022 – 24 February 2023

LAURINE · DIGGINS · FINE · ART



Lot's Wife 1992
gouache, watercolour and
drybrush on paper
117 x 198 cm

Over nearly four decades of professional practice, Robert Clinch has created a large and consistent body of work in a broad range of media; painting in egg tempera, watercolour, gouache and dry brush, drawing, printmaking, sculpture, installation, and an 'art-car'.

His images, although apparently real, are capriccios; realistic fictions. His reference is drawn from real-life (not photographs) and the complexity of design and invention, along with an exacting technique in a demanding medium, egg tempera, means he is not prolific. A number of the major works have, on their

own, consumed between one and two years of his practice.

Born and growing up in country New South Wales, it would not be surprising for Robert Clinch to have found the natural landscape central to his creative inclinations. However, the art-books in his childhood home, inspired him towards the human figure; the Dutch Golden-Age; Rembrandt and Vermeer, and his Australian heroes; Dobell and Drysdale.

At the age of twelve his family moved to Melbourne. By the time he finished school

he had decided not to pursue a tertiary art-education, but immediately joined the workforce in the first of numerous unskilled jobs. Life furnished him, as he had hoped, with an endless stream of subject matter. His vision gradually moved away from portraiture and the depiction of individuals, to an interest in humanity en masse, and the human condition.

Whether seduced by the city, or inevitably following the DNA of his engineering father and two grandfathers, he became fascinated by the constructed world; using it as a vehicle to tell the human story.

Early dissatisfaction with oils, and a distrust of acrylics had him painting in a mixture of gouache, watercolour and dry-brush. By the time he was painting his monumental and darkly foreboding biblical statement on humanity's questionable future, *Lot's Wife* (1992), he was already beginning to investigate the possibilities of a beautiful but sadly neglected medium, egg tempera.

A Martin Bequest Scholarship in 1993 enabled him to complete research into his dream medium. By the time he paid his tribute to Aaron Copland's famous composition, *Fanfare for the Common man* (2003) he had well and



Life on Earth 2020
egg tempera on panel
59 x 216 cm

truly mastered this painstaking medium. Its companion piece, in scale, composition and proletariat subject matter, *Spartacus* (2013) was completed a decade later. The warm red bricks in both share a palette aptly suited to this luxurious medium, lending them a glow to which no other medium can compare. Both also see a return to Robert's early persuasions; they include portraits of his two sons, Allan and Stephen.

In his 2013 book on Robert's work, Robert Clinch: *Fanfare for the common man*, author David Thomas says:

"In his paintings and lithographs, Robert Clinch creates a fictional world more real than reality itself. The minutiae of his realism give his work great conviction, yet, it is in fact imagination wrapped in a sense of reality. His icons of the urban world bear witness to the potency of the visual image, powerful magical, and moving. His company is international, of the Americans Andrew Wyeth and Richard Estes, of the Australian born Jeffrey Smart and William Delafield Cook. Allied in their spellbinding realism, they are not the same, for they use their tools of verisimilitude to create with infinite difference. Clinch is the master of the urban capriccio."⁽¹⁾

The book was written to coincide with his retrospective at Ballarat Art Gallery, an exhibition of over a hundred artworks, from collections throughout Australia and from overseas. A handful of these paintings had been commissioned by Linfox in the early

Although based on reality, Clinch's realistic fictions of urban settings are used as a metaphoric vehicle.

1990's. Following the exhibition, Linfox Chairman Peter Fox, invited Robert to consider painting a couple of major works in northern Western Australia.

Robert had grown-up amidst a landscape of sculptural boulders and straw-coloured dry-grasses. During an expansive reconnaissance trip he encountered an area on the Great Northern Highway known locally as 'Moon-Rocks'. Here was a chance to pay homage to this formative imagery! During an intense month of painstaking plein-air drawing, across a seemingly barren vista, he gradually discovered endless, subtle signs of life.

The resulting heroic panorama, *Life on Earth* (2020), is not the first natural landscape in Robert's oeuvre, nor will it be the last, but it has a title that, in all its permutations, could be aptly applied to all his work.

– *With thanks to the artist for his assistance*

FOOTNOTES:

1. David Thomas, Julia Collett, Robert Clinch: *Fanfare for the common man*, Art Gallery of Ballarat, 2013, p.72



Seagulls 2000
egg tempera on panel
38 x 77 cm

SELECTED COLLECTIONS:

- National Gallery of Australia
- National Gallery of Victoria
- Art Gallery of New South Wales
- National Library of Australia
- State Library of Victoria
- State Library of Queensland

- Joseph Brown Collection, NGV and numerous regional and university collections
- Corporate and private collections, including Linfox and the Stokes collection
- International collections
- Featured in the documentary film *D'Art*, 2019



Fanfare for the Common Man 2003
egg tempera on panel
107 x 105 cm

COVER

Spartacus 2013
egg tempera on panel
107 x 105 cm

Catalogue design: Anton Banulski
Catalogue photography: Mark Ashkanasay
and supplied.

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Gallery & Exhibition Hours:
Tues – Friday 10 am – 6 pm
other hours by appointment