

It has been more than two years since my last newsletter, an unintentionally long absence which I find hard to believe thanks to the days and years dashing by with worrying, uncontrollable speed. I feel like I'm on a fast racing bike, careening down a steep highway slope, hunched low over the handlebars in my wraparound sunglasses and aero helmet, exhilarated by the pace but hoping like hell I don't get a puncture. Such is ageing...

Fi and I continue to live and work happily in Cambrian Valley with our beloved, now-sightless dog Milo; we feel privileged to be here in this quiet, rather secret corner of Central Otago. Thanks to Fi's brilliant management of every other aspect of life I am left free to focus on work and puncture avoidance. The internet continues to amaze me with prospective client enquiries regularly coming in from both here and all round the world. As a result the major works from the last two years have been placed with collectors both in New Zealand and also far from these shores, including London, San Francisco and Melbourne.

This year, mindful of the need to keep at least a small public presence (given we are lucky enough to have a strong client waiting list and don't usually work through dealers) we have enjoyed working with Marcia and James of Page Blackie Gallery in Wellington, and Jonathan Gooderham of Jonathan Grant/Artis Gallery in Parnell, Auckland to release a small number of watercolours to the public. For much of 2017 I have been exploring the possibilities of watercolour and gouache, returning to the medium of my teenage years and occasionally revisited in the decades since. These works have qualities all their own – hard won, I must say, but stimulating and satisfying when they do succeed.



"Dusk at Shearer's Kitchen". Oil on Linen. 610 x 1010mm. 2016.



"Top Nosh" Oil on Linen. 760 x 1010mm. 2016.

Fi has meantime completed the huge task of compiling a comprehensive database of all my works, five decades of it now, and the beautifully-produced book, "Grahame Sydney, Paintings 1974 – 2014" (Potton & Burton Publishing) has almost sold out of its second print run.

We have recently enjoyed excursions to Europe and Australia, the opportunity to re-familiarise myself with old mates in galleries in Paris, London, Madrid, Florence, Rome, and London: always exciting and humbling at once. The key galleries are well known to everyone, but you may not know of a couple of wonderful, lesser-known collections which we were delighted to discover, and all of them quiet: the Musee Marmottan, Musee Jacquemart, and Musee de Monmartre in Paris are memorable, the Marmottan especially with its collection of over 300 Impressionist and Post-Impressionist paintings with seldom more than two or three other people in every room – a significant advantage in this age of mass tourism and distressingly crowded galleries. Our experience of the Vatican Gallery in Rome was memorable too, for all the wrong reasons: a two-hour wait for entry (even with special access tickets!) then an endless wall-to-wall, unstoppable torrent of humanity pushing and jostling in every room, most of them holding selfie phones aloft. It's not about the art, as there's no chance to stop and study: it's all about the Being There, and Being Seen to be There. A dreadful escapade. Never again!

In Madrid we loved yet again the beauty and gracious charm of the magnificent Thyssen Bornemisza Gallery (is it the best gallery in the world? We think so.) and the intimacy of the Joaquin Sorolla house and its collection of



"Norwester over Mt St Bathans." Oil on Linen. 1020 x 1370 mm. 2016.

the great Spaniard's paintings. In the nearby Museo Reina Sofia the comprehensive show called 'Picasso's Path to Guernica', proved yet again how important an understanding of context is to the further appreciation of any artwork.

London's Galleries are pilgrimage destinations, and I beat a well-worn track around old favourites like Tate Britain Millbank, the National Gallery, Kenwood House, the Wallace Collection, Apsley House where the Duke of Wellington lived surrounded by paintings by the heavyweights, and of course the National Portrait Gallery where I'm thrilled to say my friend and outstanding Dunedin based painter Simon Richardson had a work exhibited last year, a finalist chosen from thousands of entries in the prestigious BP Portrait Award.

Back home I've read some marvellous art books, amongst which I recommend the following:

"Van Gogh: A Life" by Naifeh and White Smith (who also wrote a brilliant biography of Jackson Pollock); "Edvard Munch": by Sue Prideaux; "Augustus John" by Michael Holroyd; Anything by Ross King including "The Judgment of Paris," and "Defiant Spirits" (about the Canadian Group of Seven) and "Mad Enchantment"



"Hawk Onslow Road" Oil on linen. 710 x 1370 mm. 2015.

amongst others. Alan Bennett's recent "Keeping On Keeping On" is another treasure, unsurprisingly, and Tim Winton's two most recent, "Island Home" and "Boy Behind the Curtain" are simply wonderful. Three other writers deserve more than Honourable Mention here: Rick Gekowski, Peter Ustinov and the always glorious A A Gill - in particular his memoir "Pour Me."

I've been honoured to speak at the openings of exhibitions by Dunedin based Jeffrey Harris and Australian based Euan McLeod, have enjoyed meetings with hero artists Australians Rick Amor and Michael Leunig, and more recently The Guardian's genius cartoonist Steve Bell, and have delivered eulogies at more funerals than I'd wish for, including, very sadly, that of my only sister Carolyn in May this year, but also my remarkable mate, Roy Colbert. It's not easy, farewelling such friends.

On a brighter note, however, my grand-daughters in Melbourne, Sophia and Ashleigh, continue to delight and entertain us, and their new sister Ella has just arrived.

A major pleasure since the last newsletter has been my working on a new theme of figure studies for which my beautiful wife has been modelling: two finished paintings to date, and a group of egg temperas planned. We'll keep these ones for ourselves.



"Fifi." 650 x 750mm. Oil on Linen 2016.

So that's a glimpse of life here. Spring is turning Central briefly green - not my favourite time of year...and I have planned out the new oils which will keep me busy for the next year or so, interspersed with the occasional watercolour perhaps. The snow still sits deep on the surrounding ranges, so nightly open fires are the routine in this house, and outside the daffodils are fluttering and dancing in the breeze, as someone once said.

We're always happy to hear from anyone wanting to stay in touch, so don't hesitate to write to me at grahamesydney@gmail.com

Warm wishes to you all,
from Fi, Milo and GCS