

Several significant events have occurred since the last newsletter about this time last year. On the professional front, the book on which Fi and I had been working for the previous 18 months, in tandem with Robbie Burton of Potton and Burton Publishers, finally made it onto the shelves of bookshops around New Zealand in October 2014.

Robbie was determined that this comprehensive survey of more than forty years of my painting life would be a beautiful and substantial volume, and so it is: slip-cased in the standard edition form, elegantly designed and superbly printed, containing over 200 images and two substantial essays, *"Grahame Sydney, Paintings 1974-2014"* was received with enthusiasm and praise by the reviewers and market alike, and its first print run sold out within five weeks. It was immediately reprinted in time for Christmas, and that print run is now almost sold out too – a very pleasing result for us all. The slightly posher packaged version, linen-boxed and limited to 300 copies, sold out within 10 days of release. We are also thrilled to just learn it has been shortlisted for the 'Best Illustrated Book' category in the Publishers Association of New Zealand Book Design Awards.

Related to the book's release several journalists penned lengthy appraisals in *North & South* (Mike White), *The Press* (Mike Crean), *The Listener* (Sally Blundell) and *The Sunday Star Times* (Hamish Keith), and I am grateful to them all for their generosity, as I am to TV3's *Sunday* programme.



"Evening at Kane's Pond." Oil on Linen. 845mm x 1220mm. 2014.

Book-related also, I was invited to appear at three Readers and Writers' Festivals – Auckland, Dunedin and Nelson - and in each case the 'in conversation' events with either Robbie Burton or Zara Stanhope were enjoyable occasions with excellent audiences. I do find the hour allotted to be frustratingly brief though, and suspect the punters often feel the same. I'm either just too happy to talk, or a very poor judge of audiences.

On the personal front, two major milestones: Fi and I married on 6th December at Matakauri Lodge near Queenstown, with just a small family group as witnesses. A lovely, memorable occasion in a stunning setting. And on 24th March my daughter Melissa and her husband Dale welcomed their second daughter, Ashleigh Elizabeth, into our family. These two grand daughters give us immense joy, and I am inordinately proud of them all.



"Motor Camp, Tauranga Bay." Watercolour and Gouache. 560 mm x 740 mm. 2014.

In February I was privileged to speak at the opening of my old friend Jeffrey Harris's exhibition at the Eastern Southland Gallery in Gore. Jeffrey is a valued friend to me, and I have admired his painterly obsessions and remarkably singular talent since we first met in Dunedin in the late 1960s, when he was brought south to begin his life as a full-time artist by mentors Ralph Hotere and Michael Smither. Thus began a magnificent and often inspirational career. A new show of his recent small, gem-like works is set for the Dunedin Public Art Gallery in late November 2015.

Paintings

This year past I have completed three major-scale oils, "Evening at Kane's Pond," "Hawk" and "Wither Hills" and amongst other things I returned to watercolour after an absence of many years.

Watercolour is where I began as a kid, and it has charms which are alluring if you get it right, which is no easy matter. I completed three watercolours, one of which, "Motor Camp, Tauranga Bay," went into a small show called 'Our People, Our Land' at Jonathan Grant Galleries in Auckland. I do feel sufficiently encouraged to contemplate more. Watch this space.

Working on the big oils has absorbed much of the year, and has meant that I've not had much work to offer to those who so patiently await something for themselves. It's always a worry for me, as I do appreciate their support and loyalty. It has been interesting to watch the occasional sale on the secondary market, with the most notable being Webb's sale of my 1994 oil "Sunset Near Omarama".

We are settled in for winter now, the massive pile of firewood all split and neatly stacked thanks to Fi's herculean labours, and the house and studio have been recently double glazed, a big improvement in the cosiness at home and work. The veg garden has gone into its winter perma-frost mode, and the grass no longer grows, so the ride-on mower is in hibernation. Its film-time for us most nights, with many outstanding examples of the craft out there amongst the pervading dross. Some recommendations from recent watchings are: *The Ground We Won*; *Salinger*; *Hot Coffee*; *Twenty Feet from Stardom*; *Citizenfour*; *Birdman*; *The Salt of the Earth*; *The Queen of Versailles*; *Ida*; *Boyhood*; *Liv and Ingmar*; *Still Life* and *Foxcatcher*.

Another massive pile is the tower of books beside my bed: I've loved diving into the extraordinary life and work of John Singer Sargent recently; also the brilliant and exuberant Spanish painter



"Hawk." Oil on Linen. 1010 x 915 mm. 2015.

Joachim Sorolla, and his polar opposite, the most restrained and almost monochromatic, silent Dane, Wilhelm Hammershoi.

My interests in the murky machinations of Wall Street led me to "Flash Boys" by Michael Lewis and "After The Music Stopped" by Alan Binder. I also loved Roger Ebert's "Life Itself" (and the documentary film of the same name) and "The Boys in the Boat" by Daniel Brown about the 1936 Berlin Olympics. Boris Johnson's "The Churchill Factor" is a great read as is Richard Flanagan's deserved prizewinner, "The Narrow Road to the Deep North". All of these I recommend to you. Most urgently, though, I nudge you towards two books by the brilliant Australian cartoonist Michael Leunig: his collected columns from *The Melbourne Age*, "The Lot" is quite wonderful, as is the compendium of his unmistakable cartoons, "The Essential Leunig." He's as good a writer as he is artist, and that's saying plenty. A genuine national treasure, as pertinent here as in Australia.

So that's us, hunkering down for long nights and snow at the door. In August we are escaping for some northern hemisphere warmth for a period of foreign language bewilderment and deep immersion in galleries there. It's been a while! Milo is being house-minded, so all's well.

GCS



"Wither Hills." Oil on linen. 760 x 1530 mm. 2015