



'The Slaughterhouse at Hamilton's'. Oil on Linen 610 x 1070mm. 2021. Private Collection.

It's the last day of August, and I'm sitting on our terrace in warm Springtime sun writing these Locked Down notes. Winter is apparently over already. It has been a disappointingly mild winter for me: I prefer my seasons extreme – what Central Otago does best – but this past one has seen far too little snow, too few ripper frosts and nowhere near enough icicles forming along the edge of Cambrian valley stream or frozen dams and puddles. The snowdrops have been out for weeks up at Bob's reserve, and the first daffodils are already fluttering and dancing, as someone else once remarked.

It's a year since my previous Newsletter. What a year! Covid still amongst us, albeit in a nasty new strain, with uncertainty and disruption to the norms of daily life an inescapable reality for us all. Here at home we continue to be almost wholly unaffected by the lockdowns, except that we still cannot see the family in Melbourne, and like so many we miss the ability to travel to Europe or the warm Pacific. I work away as usual, enjoying the uninterrupted times, and Fi has more to do than available hours permit. Teddy Sydney, now almost 2 years old, gets three major walks every day without fail and he has great mates in the valley, all of them lamp black like him, so he's a tirelessly cheerful little companion.



'Onslow Country'. Oil on Linen 555 x 1470mm. 2021. Private Collection.

PAINTINGS

Oil landscapes have continued to dominate my output since the last newsletter in Spring 2020 although I did also complete two egg temperas and three watercolours. I've been promising myself a return to the egg tempera medium for years, and I still hold out for a period of total immersion in it in the months ahead – they'll be figure studies mainly, a long-planned series, but I also have a few snow images I think would work beautifully in tempera too. The many challenges the human figure presents the painter are stimulating and inspiring, very important to me these days. Watch this space, and my Instagram site. Once again paintings have been dispersed widely around the planet, with valued supporters in London, Melbourne, South Korea and here at home in New Zealand.



'Victoria'. Egg Tempera 710 x 510mm. 2020. Private Collection.

YOUNG ARTISTS

One of the most satisfying aspects of this profession is the opportunity to mentor younger aspiring painters. This past year I've greatly enjoyed time spent with promising and committed painters less than half my age...including Sasha Alba, Tom Simpson and Zach Rowe. Time spent with them is as stimulating for me as I hope it is for them. I received similar help from several different, more experienced hands when I was a hopeful young artist, and I see it as only right to carry on the tradition with others now. With sharp intelligence, enthusiasm and ambition – and an admirable work ethic – they'll all do well, and I'll watch their progress with genuine interest.



'Crossroads'. Oil on Linen 760 x 1220mm. 2020. Private Collection.

LANDMARKS

At last newsletter time the new 'Landmarks' book, in collaboration with Owen Marshall and Brian Turner, was about to be released. It duly appeared, was reprinted within two weeks, and has sold out that reprint edition. Very successful from every viewpoint, and extremely well reviewed. We three have done several guest appearances at Writers' Festivals around the country, and they've not finished yet thanks to Covid delays. It's always very enjoyable meeting people at accompanying book-signing sessions, hearing their stories of connection and pleasure in the Central Otago region.



'Riverbend, Styx'. Oil on Linen 605 x 910mm. 2020. Private Collection.

HENDERSON HOUSE

Fi and I are both Advisory Trustees of the Henderson Arts Trust and Residency in Alexandra – an invitation only residency for senior creative NZers who we feel have made long and valuable contributions to our cultural scene. Having farewelled writer Kate Degoldi and photographer Bruce Foster, our current Resident is painter Michael Shepherd, from Thames. Michael was awarded the MNZM for Services to the Arts, and his focus has been on producing intricate, delicate works which engage history and memory, linking present and past. He is relishing his days in the south, happily settled into the studio at Henderson House, and working happily on a new series.



'Fog on Muddy Creek Road'. Oil on Linen 660 x 1015mm. 2020. Private Collection.

On that subject we were deeply saddened to recently lose our old and much-loved friend Eion Edgar, one of the great patrons of the Arts in the south and all New Zealand, and a valuable colleague with us at Henderson Arts Trust. R.I.P old mate. We miss you.

RECENT READING

I'm loving Hilary Spurling's 2 volume biography of Henri Matisse, so informative and beautifully written. Timothy Brook's 'Vermeer's Hat' was fascinating, putting the paintings in an engaging, revealing context of the Netherlands' Golden Age. I highly recommend works by my friends Vincent O'Sullivan (the Okham NZ Book Awards winning biography of Ralph Hotere), Greg O'Brien ('Always Song in the Water') and Philip Temple's two volumes on the memorable life of Maurice Shadbolt. Great writers, these boys. Read Kyle Mewburn's 'Faking It' for an honest account of his trans-gender experience. Rick Gekoski is another email-pal whose writing I enjoy immensely – 'Tolkien's Gown', his 'Darke' novels, and lately 'Guarded by Dragons'. Rick is a rare book seller and tells wonderful tales about his years in the world of words and writers. A modest little classic from the 1930s is J L Carr's 'A Month in the Country', recommended to me and I do the same to you.



'Winter Feed, Ida Valley'. Oil on Linen 610 x 1070mm. 2021. Private Collection.

ON SCREEN

Perhaps the best we've watched this last year is 'Occupied' on Netflix. Too close for comfort, that one. You don't need to love car racing to be completely absorbed by the 'Formula One' series on Netflix, nor a football nutter to enjoy 'Sunderland 'Til I Die', nor indeed a basketball fan to enjoy the Michael Jordan story 'Last Dance' also on Netflix. And a final recommendation: 'The 7.39' a BBC drama available on TVNZ on Demand. Terrific.

GONGS

Lastly, I have to mention the unexpected Queen's Birthday Honour which came my way on June 6th. I must take this opportunity to thank all those who, unknown to me, supported the effort lead by Dick Hubbard. While I am grateful and somewhat embarrassed to be singled out, I do feel the Knighthood was as much for me and my work as a recognition of how much the landscapes of Central Otago mean to so many New Zealanders. I've been aware of that for most of my 47 year career, and feel fortunate indeed that in doing what I want to do for myself alone, I happen to be giving a visible and permanent form to that affection so widely held for the distinctive qualities of this special region.

Very best wishes, as always from me, Fi and Teddy here in Cambrian Valley

GCS, Spring 2021

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