

Derek Milkwood's inception dates back a mere twenty years but his origin may well predate Stockard's birth. In Stockard's art, Derek is a character outlined in reality but curiously fleshed out in her fertile imagination, equal parts phantom and real world actor, a character whose proliferation in Stockard's work is mysteriously confronting. Derek is a metaphysical manifestation of a man who actually existed; his depiction mirrors Stockard's experience, beliefs and observations about society, the individual and existence.

While living in Hereford Street, Glebe, as a young artist and student, Vanessa first heard the story of this man. Derek was spoken of in hushed tones and pejorative language in the neighbourhood, but his rumoured villainy seemed at odds with her sightings of a strange and lonely misanthrope. Yes, it was true he was naked and he did frequent the gully near the old stone house. However, his malevolent reputation starkly contrasted with the fact that he never bothered anyone and politely said, "Hi!" whenever he encountered passersby, concealing the majority of his frail form behind the long reeds and dense shrubbery of the luxuriant exotic vegetation of Glebe Gully.

Stockard has immortalised Derek in her works of art. He has become a symbol of a greater innocence; a child-like inability to feel shame in his natural state of nakedness. Nudity being a taboo only the most unencumbered of us won't break, it's literally a frontier, the point past which most of us will not venture, as we prefer to hold onto our notions of modesty and propriety. Derek's nudity is symbolic. He feels he has nothing to hide, thereby not fitting into our duplicitous society, not so much for his literal lack of clothing but his refusal to be dishonest. He doesn't fit in, nor does he seek to. He is truly emblematic of 'the other'.

Derek's perceived exhibitionism, and by extension, our voyeurism, represent a commentary on the Orwellian paradigm. The knowledge that one is being watched, by its very nature changes our behaviour. This fundamental exists even on the quantum level of subatomic structure, where the observation of a particle can change its value. Derek is a symbol of exclusion, of failure to conform, a figure of loneliness but not one only to be lamented but also celebrated. He represents a different way of thinking, one that comes with acute social anxiety but is perhaps more valid because of it. Stockard understands this, is sympathetic to it, and her compassion for Derek is evident. She has embraced and celebrated his detachment and alienation from normal society, exploring these challenges and what it represents, at the deeper level, for us all.

Although Derek's eventual fate remains a mystery and the faded memory of him continues to morph within the dark recess of the artist's brain, we are reminded there cannot be light without darkness. The daily recall of the unclothed weary traveller and his surreal adventures illuminates our own everyday, socially constricted lives. Stockard chooses to use colour predicated on the ever-shifting emotion of the

moment, even to the extent that a similar palette can define a painting's origin down to the day

With a unique use of shadow and light, this series seeks to work both visually as realism but also defy the rules of logic governing our universe. Unencumbered by a dogmatic perfunctory idiom, the artist is free to explore multiple ways of being. Infinite variations exist in this realm, a space that would make Schrodinger's cat proud.

There is no correct answer/dogmatic interpretation to be found in these works here. You're asked to hold back your preconceived notions of reality, or even your concepts of right and wrong. What you see is not necessarily what's there, the pluralism of this series is deliberate yet understated. The viewer is being asked to be brave and see how far down the rabbit hole goes...

by Hugh O'Brien