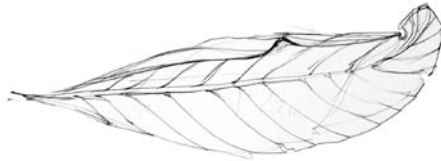




PLAYING WITH
ULYSSES

MARGIE HOOPER



Playing with Ulysses exhibited at The South Coast Regional Arts Centre
Goolwa, South Australia
5 August - 28 August 2011

foreword

Alexandrina Council and the South Coast Regional Arts Centre are proud to present Margie Hooper's exhibition, *Playing with Ulysses*, in conjunction with the 2011 South Australian Living Artists Festival. The exhibition, inspired by James Joyce's novel, is a highlight on the 2011 visual arts calendar of the South Coast Regional Arts Centre and leads in to the 2012 Regional Centre of Culture program.

Following decades of study and work in the tertiary education system Margie now works from her studio in Victor Harbor to focus on her visual arts practice. Margie involves herself in community projects and maintains her passion for art education wherever possible. Her participation in SCRAC's annual drawing marathon, part of the SALA Festival, is an

example of Margie's inclusive attitude toward 'bringing in' people to the creative experience and removing barriers between arts and non-arts sectors in the community.

Margie Hooper's technical ability as a painter combined with her intellectual capacity to interpret and abstract, has yielded a potent body of work that speaks to us of the personal and universal.

Leah Grace

Arts and Cultural Development Officer
Alexandrina Council

August 2011

playing, or doing it ‘properly’?

Ulysses must be one of the most partly read books in history. Along with *Moby Dick* and *A Short History of Time*, it adorns the shelves of many would-be intellectuals, its spine barely broken, a bookmark - dusty and bent - lodged about 60 pages in.

I read *Ulysses* on a dare. My friend said I'd never make it, so I had to. Let me be honest: I understood almost none of it. But then, I didn't read it properly.

To read *Ulysses* properly you start by reading *The Odyssey*. Then you bone up on some Irish history, learn a little about the Catholic Church. You review Stuart Gilbert's diagram, which explains the references in each chapter. You read like a detective - you understand the import of every word.

Art can be approached this way too, and travel. A responsible traveller learns the history of a place, finds out what must be seen, gets a good handle on the culture, and travels with an itinerary that ensures no moment is

wasted and every experience carries its proper contextual weight. The art appreciator, too, can gain so much more by understanding the artist's references, their techniques, to whom they're tipping their artistic hat, the social and political issues they're commenting on.

There is a world of meaning in Margie Hooper's art. Each of the pieces in this exhibition carries layers of references - symbols and stories and hidden underbellies from *Ulysses* itself, Margie's journey in her own life and through her own art. It is said of the Beatles' *White Album* that each song laid down a template for a whole musical genre to come; *Playing with Ulysses* is also Margie's *White Album*, a tribute to the techniques of others but a re-engineering of each, and exploration of what each could become in the future. Like Joyce's *Ulysses*, this is an assault on style.

Take, for example, the painting '*History...is a nightmare from which I am trying to awake.*' Joyce's Stephen is caught in his employer's

office, listening to a diatribe on the crimes of the Jews, when he speaks these words. Margie's protagonist is escaping history as the monocular photo-realism of Renaissance perspective and Modernism, carried on the pun of a nightmare - also Gilbert's symbol for this chapter, a horse.

While the rider plunges away from the history of art, it is unclear what he or she is riding towards. Where does art - and Margie's practice - go from here?

In *Broken Heart*, Margie refers to chapter 6 of *Ulysses*, to Gilbert's interpretation of this chapter which cites Hades, the graveyard, the heart and demons. Bloom, walking through a graveyard, thinks of the dead: 'Let them sleep in their maggoty beds. They are not going to get me this innings', and Margie shows the sleep of refugees in their own hell, a monster eating their hearts, or perhaps our own.

Understanding these references certainly adds to the richness of the viewer's experience, gives

them a learned, literary way of viewing each work. But for some of us, that kind of viewing isn't possible.

We care about art; art is important. And yet it is said that the average time most people spend looking at any picture in a gallery is eight seconds. We wander about, stop in front of something, stare at it for a moment, start thinking about what we might have for lunch, realise we're not really trying hard enough and move on to the next work to try again. We don't want to admit we find it all a bit hard. We know there is a proper way to look at art, and we worry that we don't have the skills or the seriousness to do it.

Art isn't always serious. *Ulysses* is almost never serious. Joyce set out to play with words, with language and what it can do. Margie is playing with *Ulysses*, playing with style. As readers and viewers, we can take that playful attitude too. Rather than reading *Ulysses* the proper way, I took another friend's advice: don't stress, just

let it all wash over you. I missed a lot of what makes *Ulysses* 'the greatest novel' (according to Anthony Burgess), I'm sure of it. And yet there were so many delights.

Being tumbled about by the waves of words, often not sure which way was up, I would every now and again strike on a piece of writing so pure, so gorgeous, so hilarious, so filthy, so gobsmackingly profound, that I would want to leap out of my seat on my morning train commute and force everyone around me to read it too.

A person can travel this way as well. Can arrive in a place knowing almost nothing, wander lost around the streets, pass oblivious by the most important churches, museums, monuments and find themselves by a gleaming slate river at dusk, gazing rapt at a flock of seagulls twisting and swerving against black clouds, the last of the light bleaching their wings bright white.

And a person can also look at art this way. Can be enraptured by the muscles in a horse's

flank, absorbed in its rider's flickering, lambent halo. Can be heartbroken by a terrifying monster and the faces of tortured sleepers, clinging onto their children. Because while we might not have the literary or artistic context to understand a work one way, we all have the context of our lives, and our lived experience, and from that any of us can find something meaningful in art.

Once we stop worrying so much about what we are meant to get from a piece of art, from a work of literature, we can focus on what it really does say to us. We can feel free to play, to experiment, as Margie has done, and from that to learn about ourselves and get a glimpse of our future.

Jane Rawson

freelance writer/editor

allusions

At the completion of a PhD thesis¹ in 2008, I felt equipped to read some of the more difficult novels in the Western canon. Beginning at the end of 2009, I went on a year-long pilgrimage through James Joyce's *Ulysses*² - interspersed with lighter research such as Homer's *Odyssey* on which Joyce based his *Ulysses*. Along the way, I played with visual ideas and visual means to create puns, parodies and allusions similar to the way Joyce played with written language.

Every human goes on a journey: Odysseus went on his heroic adventures in *The Odyssey*, and in contrast, with less than heroic themes, Joyce examines the more ordinary life of Leopold Bloom. Although there is a serious attack on the futility of war, Joyce's observations of the frailties of being human are often very funny.

But it is the writer's crusade to find and use language, words that fit life, people and their experiences, that I found most interesting.

Joyce composed *Ulysses* in disparate literary genres and from the eighteen chapters of his narrative I have constructed 18 works for this exhibition. These eclectic pieces evolved in styles that reflect, for example, medieval art, romanticism, expressionism, modernism and post-modernism, etc. The particular style of a piece is dependent on the idea I wanted to explore and how that might relate to Joyce's choice of writing style in the corresponding chapter. The pieces are not illustrations or portrayals of *Ulysses*' characters or place; they are a series of reactions to the ideas proposed in the novel: religion, culture, art movements,

other artists and their styles; and ordinary people, places and things. My responses didn't always occur in sync with what I was reading as some images happened spontaneously while others were harder to grasp.

The surreptitious exploration through diversity and dissimilarity was an important post-doctoral journey. By analysing, selecting and reorganising historical painting styles, I found ways through this exhibition to re-invent an ideas-based studio practice and at the same time reflect on my small corner of the world.

Margie Hooper

¹ Hooper, Margaret J. *From head to hand and beyond: thought-image drawings in sketchbooks*. Doctoral thesis, University of South Australia 2008.

² Joyce, James, *Ulysses*. London: Penguin Books (Penguin twentieth-century classics) 1992. This edition first published in Great Britain by Bodley Head in 1960 and in America by Random House in 1961. Reset and published in Penguin Books in 1968, reissued with introduction by Declan Kiberd in 1992. *Ulysses* was first published by Shakespeare and Co. Paris in 1922.

one

'And what makes us who we are'
(p.24 *Ulysses*)

after Andrea del Sarto
Oil on canvas.
77.5cm x 67.5cm



two

*'History...is a nightmare from which
I am trying to awake'*

(p.42 *Ulysses*)

Oil on canvas, multiple works.

Main image: 130cm x 130cm

Satellites: (left to right) 18cm x 12.5cm,

30cm x 25cm, 40cm x 30cm



three

(No. 3) The Strand - philology - Proteus (changes shape)
science of (structure) development
of language,



'Human shells'

(p.50 *Ulysses*)

or

'Ineluctable modality of the visible.'

(p.45 *Ulysses*)

Oil on linen, diptych.

122cm x 122cm

four

(left to right)

Still life with kidney: sketch

Charcoal on acid free paper.

40cm x 58cm

Still life with kidney: painting

Oil on canvas.

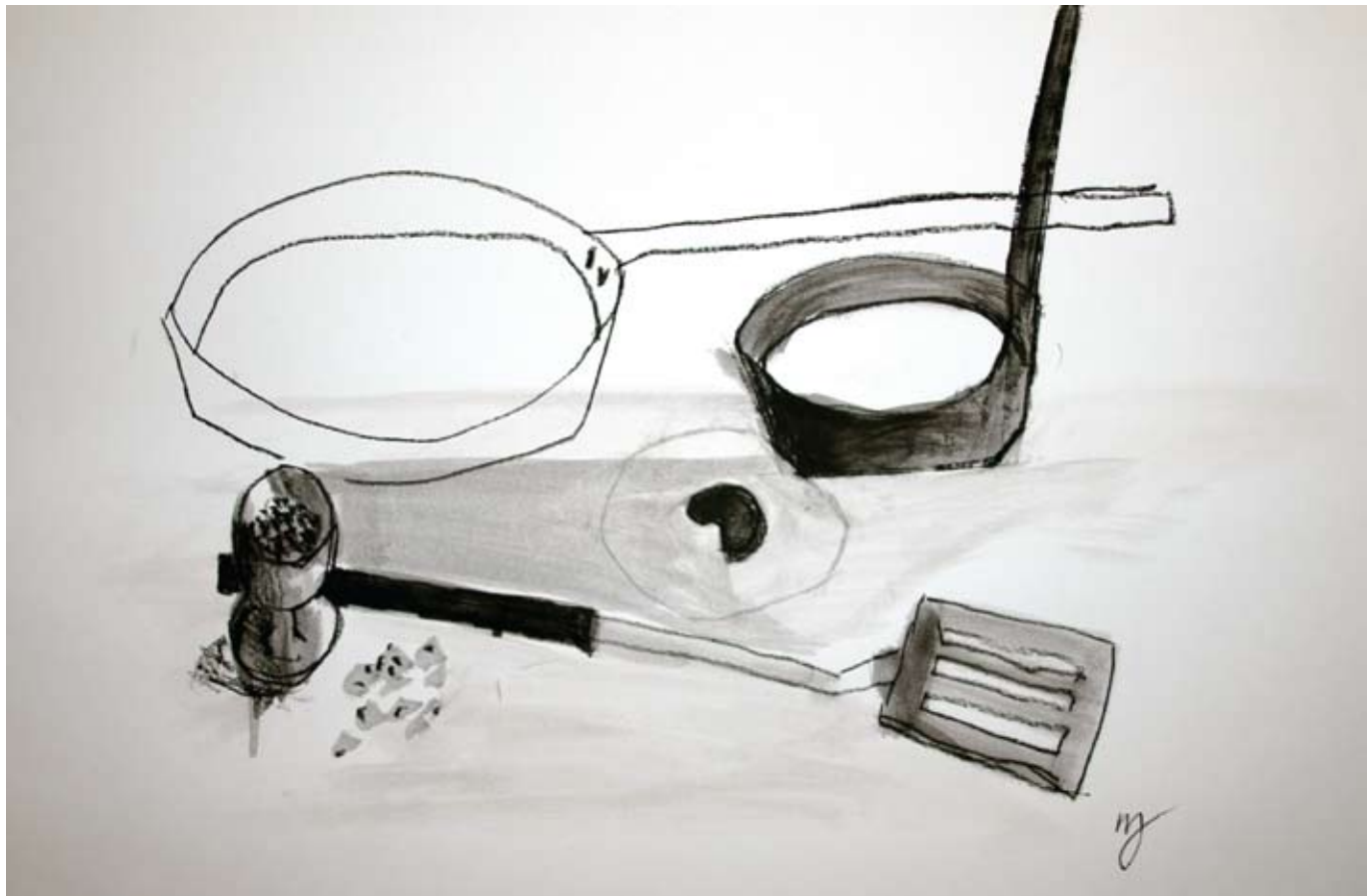
60cm x 90cm

Still life with kidney: drawing

Charcoal on acid free paper.

33cm x 48cm





five

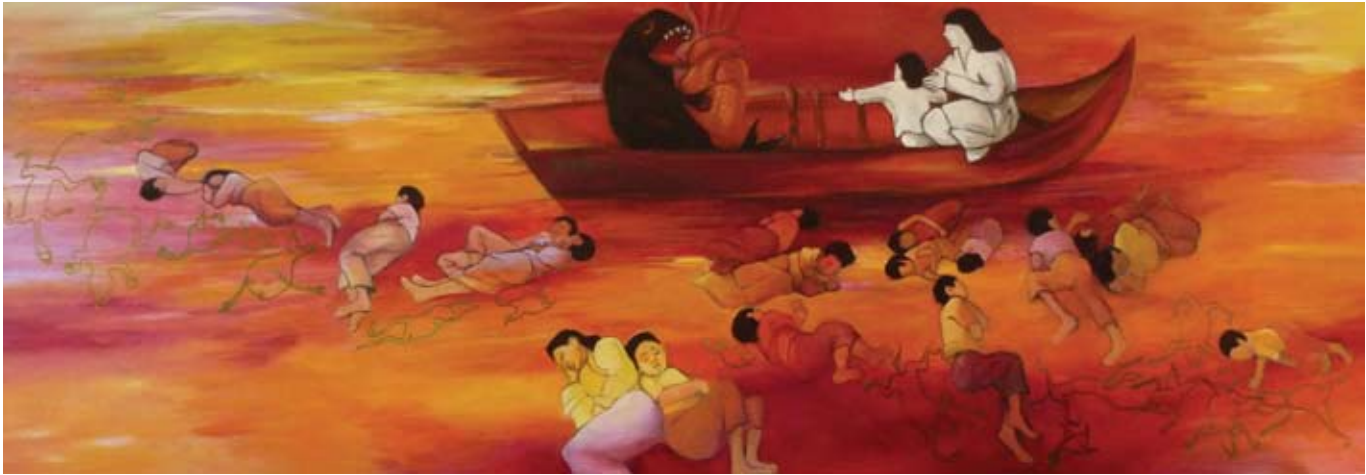
*'This is my body...
a languid floating flower'
(p.107 Ulysses)*

Lotus-eater hallucinating
loosely after Lucien Freud

Oil on canvas, diptych.
Main image: 100cm x 100cm
Satellite: 25.5cm x 20.5cm



six & seven



'Broken heart'
(p.133 *Ulysses*)

Oil on canvas
76cm x 213cm



Hot air

Oil on canvas
76cm x 213cm

eight

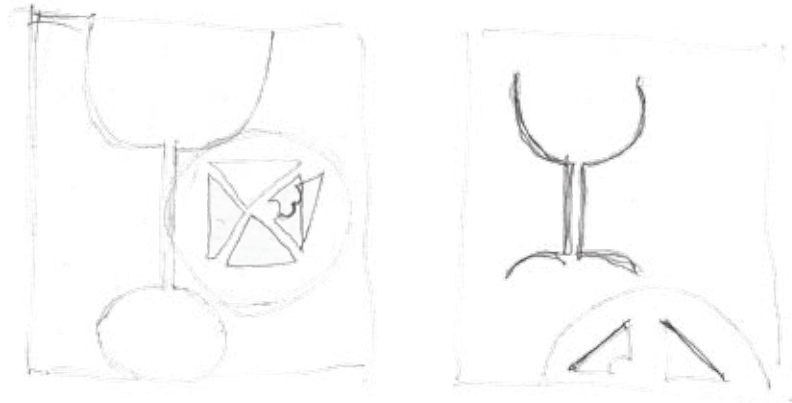


Fig 8. Oesophagus, glass x sandwich (plate)
Architectural.

'Eat or be eaten'

(p.216 *Ulysses*)

Oil on canvas, diptych.

Main image: 100cm x 100cm

Satellite: 25.5cm x 20.5cm



nine



'Behold, I tell you a mystery'

(The Messiah, Handel)

Behov...at tage briller til hjælp

(Danish for "you really need to put your glasses on to read it")

Oil on canvas.

134cm x 140cm



ten



$E = mc^2$

Oil on canvas
Overall size: 118cm x 26cm
12 x (18cm x 13cm)

eleven

(right)

Summary of seduction

Charcoal on Dessin acid-free paper.
50cm x 50cm

Seduction
or
Ppprrpffrrppff
(p.376 Ulysses)

Oil on canvas.
130cm x 130cm



eat ingest
spit vomit sip
gulp swallow
devour
ingest...



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twelve

(left) *Fishing in a stream of consciousness* (detail)

Oil, shellac, charcoal, texta, ink and acrylic on craft paper.

260cm x 114.5cm

'Because you see...for an advertisement you must have repetition.' (p.419 *Ulysses*)

thirteen

(right) *'Beautiful Agony'*

(Artscape, ABCTV Tuesday 14.2.11)

after Modigliani

Tapestry and beadwork.

35.5cm x 22.5cm



fourteen

Wall to wall painting

after various Australian artists

Oil on canvas boards.

2 x (25.4cm x 20.3cm)

7 x (20.3cm x 15.2cm)

'...what had in the past been
by the nation excellently
commenced might be in
the future not with similar
excellence accomplished...'
(p.500 Ulysses)



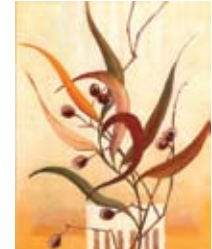
Wall Art I



McCracken
after William Barak



Hindmarsh Valley
after Clarice Beckett



Eucalypt
loosely after
Margaret Preston



Backyard 1
after Grace Crowley



Siblings Playing
after Barbara
Hanrahan



Backyard 2
after Janet Dawson



Delivery
after Wendy Sharpe



Wall Art II

fifteen



'Judge not the play before the play be done'
Sir John Davies (1569-1626)

(right) *Portrait of Bella Cohen*
after Toulouse Lautrec:
Oil on canvas.
40cm x 31cm

(left) *Hallucination*
Oil on canvas
183cm x 122cm

'...but in the convex mirror grin unstuck the bonham
eyes and fatchuck cheekchops of Jollypoldy the rixdix doldy'
(p.566 Ulysses)



sixteen

In their book, *A Thousand Plateaus*¹, French philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari outline different ways of thinking about history and social structures. Instead of seeing knowledge as fixed truth - like a tree that grows in the ground and only produces the kind of tree-truth embedded in its seed - they speak of a spreading kind of thinking that meanders and creatively plateaus between places and things. These plateaus are important terminals. But they don't emerge at the ends

or beginnings of journeys. They are always in the middle, inbetween-places that we come to and go from but never return to via the former pathway.

Knowledge, art and literature then, would always be *becoming* something, transforming into the next plateau, not as vertical, treelike logic that replicates itself or as multiples of the one, but rather multiplicities of nonhierachial assemblages, of and...and...and.

¹ Deleuze, Gilles, and Guattari, Felix. *A thousand plateaus: capitalism and schizophrenia*. Translated by Brian Massumi. University of Minnesota Press: 1987; London. The Athlone Press, 1999.

In search of a plateau

Oil on canvas.
90cm x 90cm



seventeen



'Mirror of perfection'

St Francis

Metal birdcage on natural eucalypt stand.

various materials

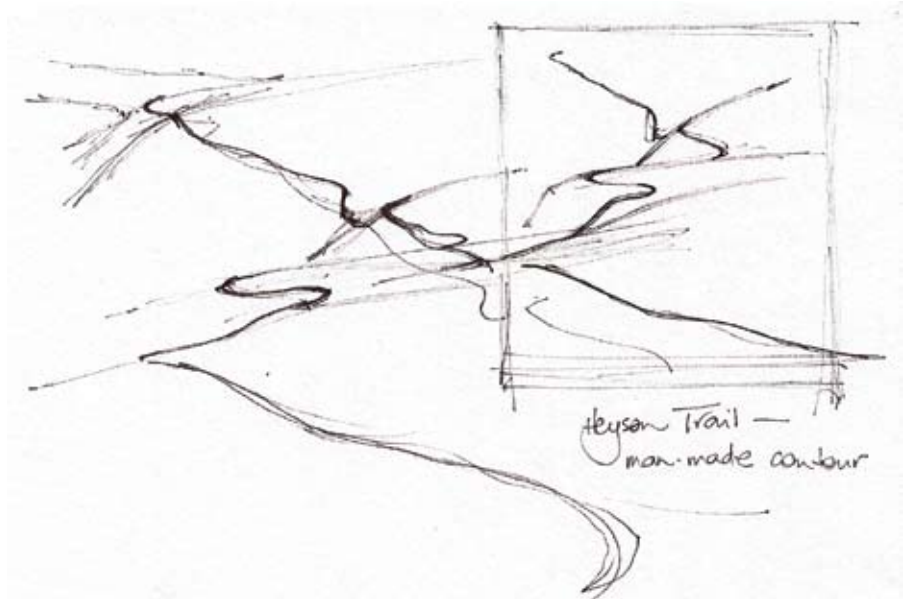
165cm x 80cm x 90cm



eighteen

(opposite page)
Gaia's Soliloquy

Charcoal on Dessin acid-free paper.
each drawing 70cm x 50cm





eighteen (cont'd)

Gaia: earth flesh fractals
or
*'yes so we are flowers all a womans
body yes'*
(p.932 *Ulysses*)

Oil on mdf board, triptych.
90cm x 180cm





biography

Born in Adelaide in 1942, Margie Hooper has worked as a visual artist, graphic designer, cartographer, and teacher, specialising in life drawing and painting.

Margie's teaching career began in 1983 with children's after-school classes at Mitcham Village Arts and Craft Centre and culminated in co-ordinating the Visual Communication Illustration degree and honours course at the University of South Australia.

As a practising artist, Margie participates frequently in group exhibitions developing themes around historical figures and her lived environment. Conceptual influences on Margie's art practice include time spent at Geosurveys with the late Dr Reg Sprigg, while Flinders University's Emeritus Professor Donald Brook fuelled philosophical interests.

Academic Background

- 2008 Awarded PhD: Art History and Theory - University of South Australia
 Thesis title: *'From Head to hand and beyond: 'thought-image' drawing in sketchbooks'*
- 1995 Master of Design - University of South Australia
- 1990 Graduate Diploma of Visual Arts – University of South Australia
- 1981 Bachelor of Fine Art (Painting major, Drawing minor) - Torrens CAE
- 1978 Art and Craft Certificate - TAFE

Solo Exhibitions

- 2011 South Coast Regional Arts Centre – Playing with Ulysses
- 1998 Festival Fringe, Tin Fish Gallery - Gen(i)us Loci
- 1994 Adelaide Central Gallery - Addendum and the Kitchen Sink
- 1987 Artzone - Fleeting Glances
- 1986 Picasso's Restaurant - Festival Exhibition
- 1983 Women's Art Movement Gallery - Recent work: Paintings and Drawings
- 1982 Contemporary Art Society (CAC) - Paintings and Drawings

Further information about the artist, including curriculum vitae, is available from her website:

margiehooper.com

acknowledgements

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