



Night (casuarina) and mirror 2005
Oil and palladium leaf on linen
Diptych, 100 x 160cm & 100 x 70cm (100 x 230cm overall)
Courtesy the artist and Sutton Gallery

QUIETNESS AND MEANING

Doug Hall

The depth of Australia's artistic encounters with Japan can be traced through the work of three Japanese and three Australian artists.

The depth of Australia's artistic encounters with Japan can be traced through the work of three Japanese and three Australian artists. Four of the artists are living, one died in 1837. The three Australian artists—Rosslynd Piggott, Peter Tyndall and Peter Upward—each matured with an endless curiosity about Japan. Their work resonates with that of the three Japanese artists—Lee Ufan, Chiharu Shiota and Gibon Sengai. None of them fit into the well-worn routine in art of identifying an influence and flirting with borrowed stylistic inflections. There is an interconnectedness here which is not immediately apparent.

Rosslynd Piggott is not only a painter, but also works in glass and fabric. Her art is subtle

and withheld. She seemingly whispers her paintings into existence. Her interest in Japan is deep. In Japan she finds a place where objects, places and materials give expression to a ritualised life whose meaning transcends appearances. Her paintings become poetic apparitions and an aesthetic material trace of places and experience. They allude to a world of vulnerability and evanescence.

Shiota Chiharu came to the Canberra School of Art in 1994 and, since then, has lived in Berlin for two decades. She and Rosslynd Piggott are quite different but there is much that they share. Both speak of human sensibilities in which the artist's meditative inquiry takes us beyond 'looking' and into feeling.





The Key in the Hand 2015
Two boats, yarn and keys
Japan Pavilion at the 56th Venice Biennale.
Courtesy of the artist

In 2015 Shiota was selected for the Japanese Pavilion at the Venice Biennale. Her work, *The Key in the Hand*, was comprised of 180,000 keys and 400 kilometres of red yarn collected from around the globe. It is a dark, beautiful work and, unlike a lot of Biennale projects, it has no overt political undertones.

Lee Ufan was twenty when he arrived in Japan from South Korea, and he never left. He first came to prominence as part of a loosely organised movement called *Mono-ha* [The School of Things]. The idea that the artist might transcend materials and their application was anathema to *Mono-ha*.

Things—rocks, stones, glass, metal, burnt timber—were exhibited in their found state. They were arranged in an attempt to show the interdependent relationship between these ‘things’. Lee encapsulated the thinking of the group: ‘the highest level of expression is not to create something from nothing, but rather to nudge something which already exists so that the world shows up more vividly.’¹

He later returned to painting, where the artist’s hand is in complete control. His *With Wind* paintings began as a single gesture, occurring without forethought or planning: all action, no meditation. His later



Correspondence 2001
Oil on canvas
182 x 227cm
Collection, Queensland Art Gallery,
GOMA. Courtesy of the artist.



Correspondence paintings are more sober and meditative. Lee employs a large brush and makes a single gesture on un-primed canvas. He views all his paintings as a modulation towards infinity, and describes their increasing use of empty space as moving from ‘a silence holding its breath’ to ‘a space of potentials.’²

Peter Upward is widely recognised for his large and exuberant gestural paintings of black on a white surface. One of these, *June Celebration, 1960* is usually on display at the National Gallery of Australia. Upward invariably gets the lazy ‘where the East

meets West’ treatment. In the early 1960s, he read D T Suzuki’s *Studies in Zen*. It gave clarity and a defining rationale for Upward’s natural artistic impulse and that influence fed into the fact that Upward’s work defines an important moment in Australian modernism (although this is seldom mentioned). He first appeared when the Antipodeans and myth painting were all the rage. Paradoxically, Upward’s evolving imagination and technique meant that his work looked less and less like its inspiration over time.

Gibon Sengai serves as an informative introduction to the work of Peter Tyndall.



With Winds 1990
Oil on canvas
227.5 x 182cm
Collection, Queensland Art Gallery,
GOMA, Courtesy of the artist.

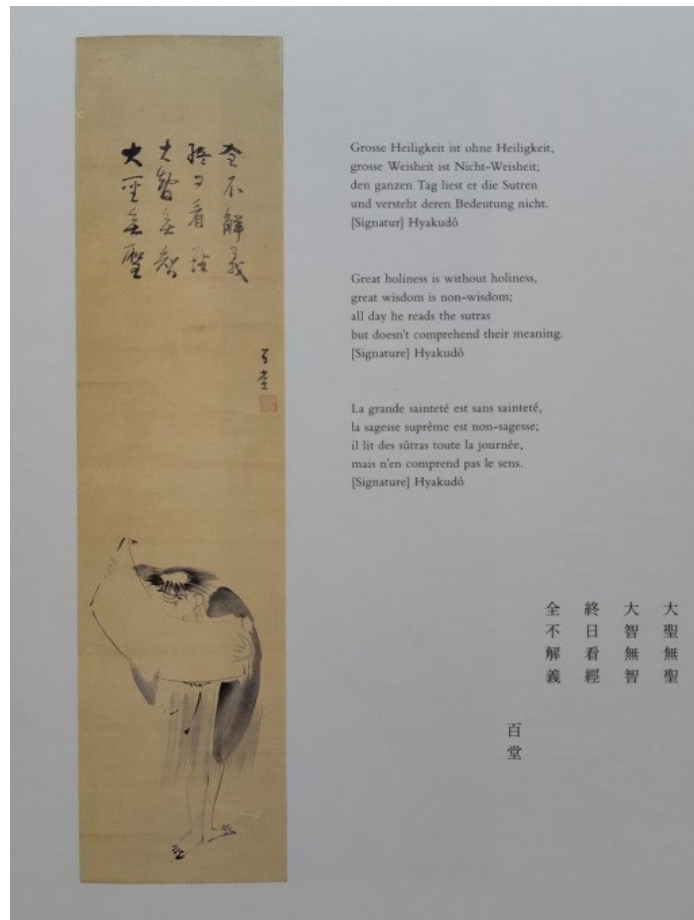


5 X 1971
acrylic on canvas
182.5 x 122cm
Collection, National Gallery of Victoria,
Courtesy of the artist's estate.

Sengai became a monk at age eleven and entered the Rinzai School of Buddhism. In 1812, aged sixty-two, he handed over his monastic responsibilities to a follower. His subject matter was vast—calligraphy, deities, snow, bamboo, orchids, animals—and his technique unique. The artless quality of his work rejects the constraints of controlled definition. Their fleeting moment in timelessness is not ‘about’ Zen. Rather, most scholars agree that they are Zen: all action and freedom. They are rich in paradoxes and puns that mock pretention. They are humorous, fun and sometimes purposefully

silly. These themes resonate in the work of Peter Tyndall.

Peter Tyndall is typically seen as an idiosyncratic artist working within a Western tradition. This is a common misreading. By the early 1980s Tyndall had developed his artistic proposition that the act of looking ‘would be the point of departure and return’. He was also already using his now familiar ideogram, formed from the suspended rectangle—a device that can be seen as infinite, able to be repeated and serialised. The ideogram is also a projection space—



Gibon Sengai 1750–1837

something the viewer projects upon. This is reflected in the title of his artworks, which has remained unchanged almost from the beginning. In this reoccurring title universal reason and truth, Logos, is adjoined by absurdity—laughter.

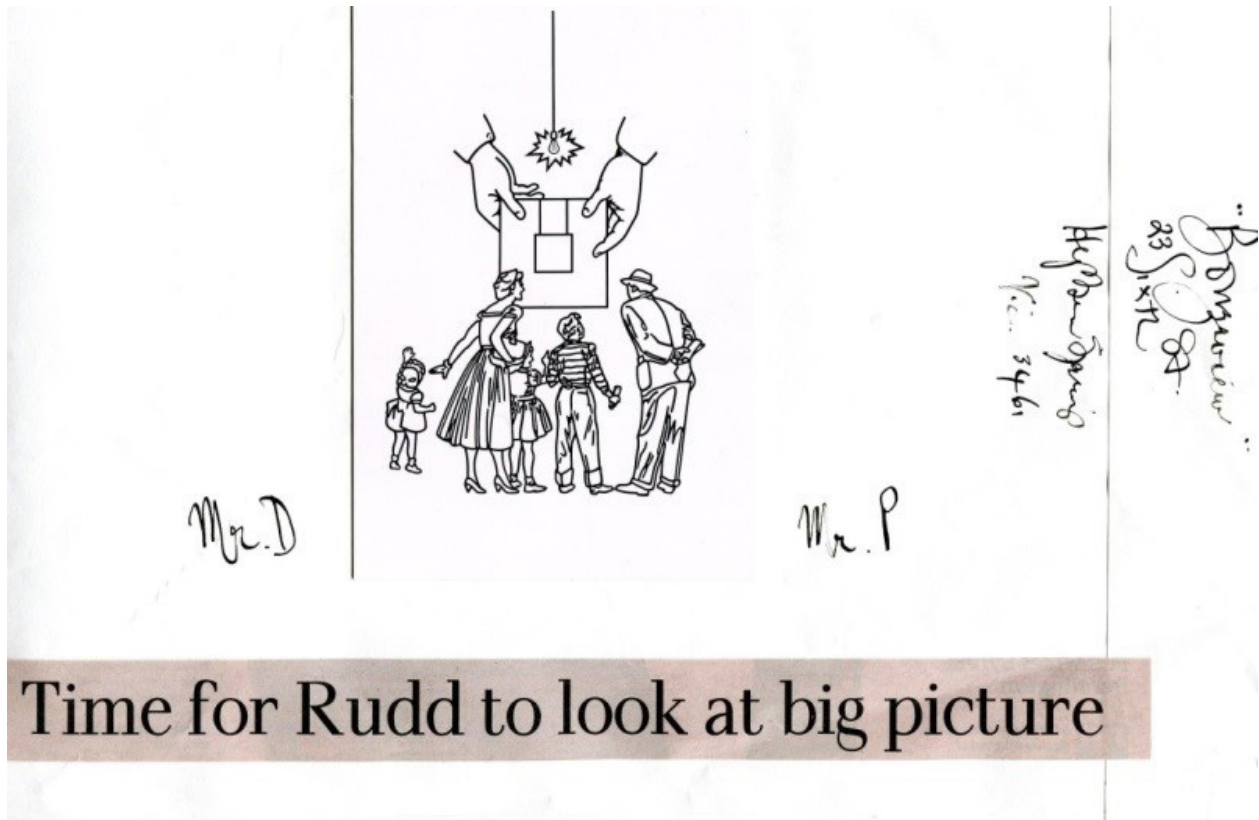
detail

*A Person Looks At A Work Of Art/
someone looks at something...*

LOGOS/HA HA

Tyndall’s art can be seen as a pictorial *haiku*, where images or ideas are compressed into considered and prefigured arrangements. Nothing can be taken as a literal given. They can be as inspired as they are thoughtfully ridiculous. I suspect Sengai would enjoy Tyndall’s pictorial musings and heckling.





Peter Tyndall b. 1951

Title detail

A Person Looks At A Work Of Art

Someone looks at something...

LOGOS / HA HA

Medium Person Looks At A Work Of Art/

Someone looks at something...

*CULTURAL CONSUMPTION
PRODUCTION*

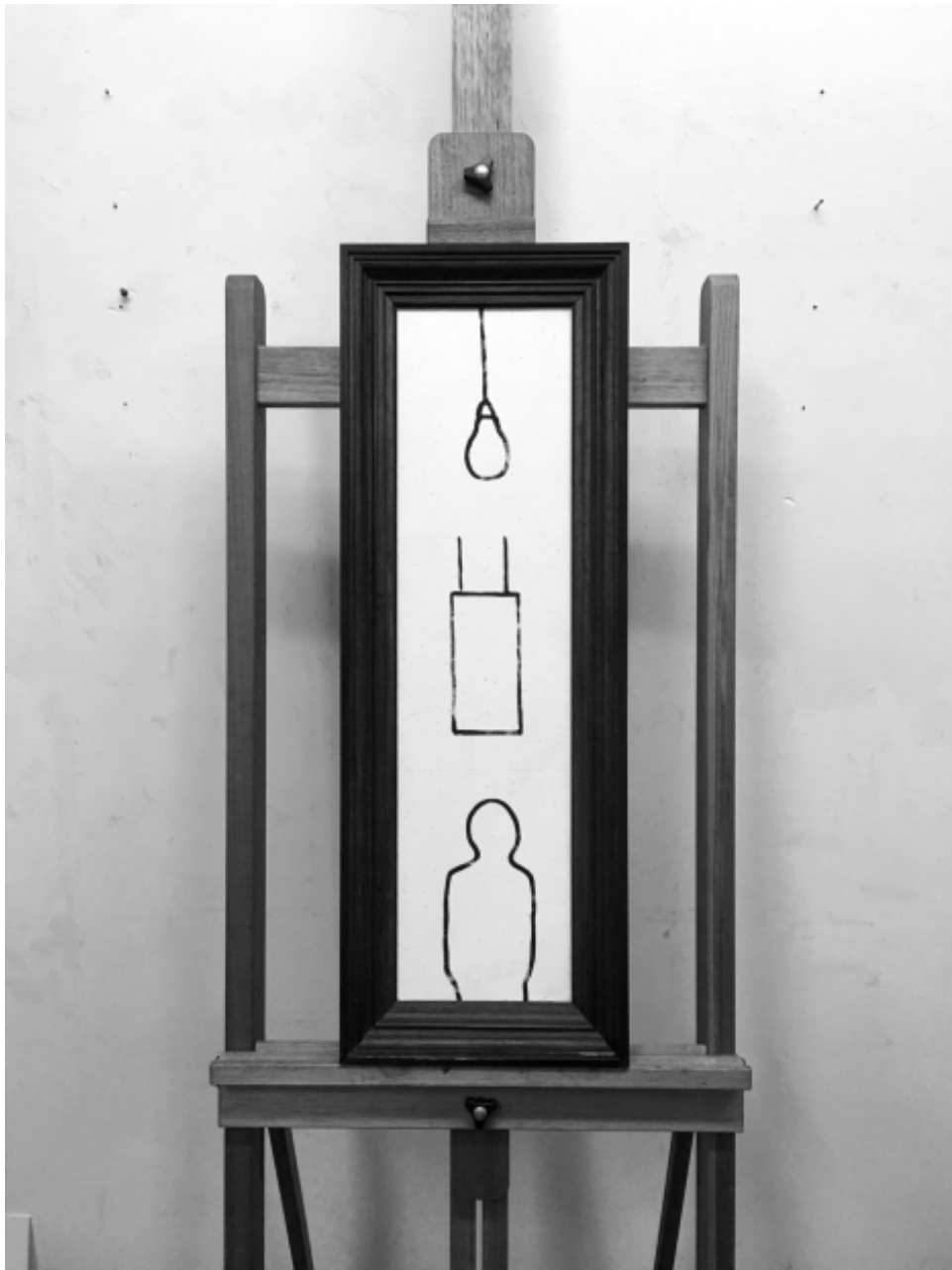
Date - 1976 -

Artist Peter Tyndall

Through the 'objects' created by these four artists we can see something of the flow of aesthetics, ideas and modes of expression that speak to the deep cultural connections between Japan and Australia.

1 Lee U-fan Correspondences: In The Asia Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art. Brisbane: Queensland Art Gallery, 2002, 62.

2 Lee U-fan: The Search for Encounter. Seoul: Ho-Am Art Gallery and Rodin Gallery, 2003, 163.



Peter Tyndall b. 1951



Doug Hall AM was the director, Queensland Art Gallery|GOMA from 1987 to 2007.

The first Asia-Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art was held there in 1993. He conceived the idea for the Gallery of Modern Art and oversaw its development and opening in December 2006. He was Commissioner for the Australian exhibitions at the Venice Biennales in 2009 and 2011. He returned to Melbourne in 2010 and was later appointed Associate Professor and Honorary Fellow, Faculty of Arts at the University of Melbourne. He was an inaugural member of the Asia Art Council, Guggenheim Museum (New York) and has served as a board of the AustraliaJapan Foundation. His book *Present Tense* will be published by Black Inc. in 2019.