

# **Innocence: A Shrine To Melancholia**

**Alexander Hayes**

**'New Norcia Fieldwork Research'  
Printmaking Major, Curtin University  
Bentley Campus, Perth Western Australia**

**July, 1997**

**30°57'10.8"S 116°11'27.6"E**

**[ah@ah.iinet.net.au](mailto:ah@ah.iinet.net.au)**

**DOI: [10.6084/m9.figshare.16763779](https://doi.org/10.6084/m9.figshare.16763779)**

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>Abstract</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Keywords</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Creative Works</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Performances</b>	<b>7</b>
A Walk Through Town At Midnight	7
Making Sense Of Rhyme and Treason	9
<b>Exhibition</b>	<b>12</b>

## **Abstract**

Artists are often lambasted for indulgently examining, then expressing through a creative medium, moral issues and related social challenges. In the role of 'mirror' the interrogation of subject matter reveals concepts and topics all leading to emergent themes and understandings. As an undergraduate student I attended the second year Printmaking Major 'New Norcia Fieldwork Research' trip to what I consider to be one of the most violent examples of occupation and site for crimes against humanity in Western Australia, 132 kilometres north of Perth, on the banks of the Moore River. My experience listening to countless stories with Aboriginal people in surrounding communities caused me great sadness as they recounted horrific stories of child sexual abuse, deprivation of liberty and alleged child slavery, which is expressed in this creative installation of printmaking exhibited in July 1997 at Curtin University, School of Art, Bentley Campus in Perth, Western Australia.

## **Keywords**

innocence, artist, exhibition, research, religion, printmaking, pure, abuse, power, control

## Introduction

In early 1997 as an undergraduate student at Curtin University of Art in Perth, Western Australia I received our course outline containing notifications of the main printmaking unit objectives and commensurate outcomes with Harry Hummerston as course Coordinator. I was concerned to note that New Norcia, near Perth Western Australia had been chosen as the site for where our Printmaking major would situate its key subject matter.

I was informed, which spiked my intrigue that New Norcia had been set up as a 'mission' by the Benedictine order, led by two (2) Spanish Benedictine monks, Rosendo Salvado and Joseph Serra, consecrated on the 1st March 1846. At the time I was working extensively with Noongar Aboriginal families across the entirety of the urban and rural communities in proximity to Perth.

In my discussions with the Elders of these Noongar communities I soon learned of the horrific legacy this town site had left on the human and natural landscape since its inception. The Aboriginal peoples spoke of child abuse within the schooling environment which they were forced to attend, alledged domiciliary enslavement and alledged mandatory manual labour involving Aboriginal boys forced to dig wells deep into the grounds to water food crops to send and sell at the Perth markets. In my connections with contacts within the New Norcia community there were disparate accounts of what was considered as an 'appropriate' in due contextualisation of stories and I was encouraged to do my own research and pay attention to the many didactic panels around the town. In the ensuing years I also spoke with many people who had very positive experiences of the New Norcia art prize and the wonderment expressed by the faithful who monastically aligned themselves with the ethos of the monks and their helpers.

With great trepidation (mostly on my behalf) we departed together as a group of 'fresh faced' predominantly anglo-saxon artists and spent four days and three nights in New Norcia, staying in the haunted buildings of the Aboriginal boys school. In attendance were School of Art staff Ben Joel, Harry Hummerston, Doug Shearer and Annette Seamen. Over the time we were there we interacted with the town folk, conducted semi-structured interviews with the gallery staff, and undertook trips into the field to conduct 'digs' of filled- in water wells close to the town centre.

It is true as I am alive today writing this story that with great revulsion we unearthed a tobacco tin containing a child's tooth and human hair in a small glass vial. It is also true that on one of the evenings we decided as a group to go for a town walk

at midnight on the full moon, which at the time seemed to be a good idea. As we approached the deserted town centre, with high stone gutters and looming church spires and walls, we heard a loud and approaching rumbling sound which we mistook firstly to be thunder from a distant storm front. On sharper attention we were shocked to see approaching the township a pack of 'Coffin Cheater' bikers, around sixty (60) bikes in total all riding as a swarm with no headlights on.

They roared into town, snarling pipes, exhaust, leather and tattoos, streaming past us with a deafening roar in great spectacle. My adrenaline was so peaked I shed a few tears at the magnificence of the juxtaposition - this pious (my prejudice), fear driven religious construct juxtaposed with the magnificence of recalcitrance of those 1% defying all manner of law. This experience coupled with the stifling puritanical prose from the brethren gave rise to an extensive artist statement and a body of printmaking works, later exhibited as part of the unit exhibition at the School of Art, Curtin University.

This collection of printmaking takes form on a number of differing substrates and in some instances a mixture of techniques and mediums. The works were also later used in digital projections within events held in the Curtin School of Art AV room as part of my Honours programme with the School of Art.

## Creative Works

Title	Medium	No.	Description
'Prose'	Printmaking	3	A triptych printed 'flow' poem created from an expression, printed and assembled as a collage
'Key Concepts'	Printmaking	3	A triptych panel, ink jet printed composite
'Key Theme'	Printmaking	1	Panel print on vinyl polymer plate Dimensions: 210mm x 295mm
'Signifier'	Printmaking	1	Intaglio etching/digital scan reprinted on vinyl acetate Dimensions: 210mm (w) x 160mm (h)
'Dual'	Printmaking	1	Intaglio etchings, digital scan/printed on vinyl acetate Dimensions: 210mm x 295mm
'Self Portraits'	Printmaking	2	Intaglio etchings, digital scan/printed on vinyl acetate Dimensions: 210mm x 295mm
'Construction'	Printmaking	1	Newspaper clipping digital altered and printed Dimensions: 200(mm) x 245(mm)
'Landscape'	Printmaking	1	Monoprint on 180 GSM paper Dimensions: 296mm x 210mm

## Performances

*Note: These written and visual works are scripts for spoken word performances and sketches in the field to accompany theatrical multimedia installations, in effect embodied expressions by the Artist in response to immersion in fieldwork research. Creative filters are provided to guide customisations & interpretation*

### ***A Walk Through Town At Midnight***

“... It was a commanding sight to see the hordes of bikers roar into town. They swept in like a black, thunderous plague, as if to plunder. Their roaring bikes are symbols of evil, like a David Lynch movie with a monster standing at a shack fire burning backwards into the dark”. *[ projected flicker fire light ]*

“... Somewhere in the back of my mind I heard chanting, deep toning, a consistent hum, yet it felt like an ooze of evil. Nothing seems transparent in this place except for the clock tower, its glowing red eyes with some demon element to it all. Below it is a furnace, where they claim they only ever baked bread yet I’m certain a test of its coals and the wells in which they dumped the ashes might well reveal genetic material not found in plants”. *[ deep tone chanting & intensity of flickering fire light ]*

“... Three figures mill around busily, thrice, floating in gilded vestry, tending to the flames, prodding warm round buns, steam rising. A satellite sits out far in the universal sky, silent, watching, a control in outer space, black, transferring information it s duty. Shadows cast themselves deeper in the east side of town, as the sun rises, twisting shadows into lurid forms, contorting. Fear palpable causes me to dry retch”. *[ twinkling lights, dark cast shadows ]*

“... The town mill stands silent. I think of how heavy that grinding stone must be. I see it as an altar on which stains of blood seep. A theatre stage, around it a cast of evil. Standing up I realise I am looking out from the crypt, eyeline to the road, a slit through which to peer out into the night”. *[ child peers through slit in a fence ]*

“... The word ‘Salvado’ shrieks itself out of the dark, a towering cassock wearing figure, knuckled stick, needle sharp bread knife and rough hewn leather belt. Buckle beaten to a pulp I sense a monster, angel by day, devil by night, a control freak, sadist with a devil for a reflection. A refrigerated truck pulls up, coffins roll out and a headless figure cracks a whip”. *[ truck brakes, doors opening, refrigerated air-conditioning sounds ]*



Figure 1: Sketch - *'The Boys School'*



Figure 2: Sketch - *'Coffins'*



## Making Sense Of Rhyme and Treason

“... The low chanting, the stomping and stench of dark olive carcass permeates the air, hitting my nose like a pungent song. The shoulder hugging couple stop for a moment to acknowledge my presence, then resume their stomping”. *[ sloshing sounds and fan pumping lavender oil into the audience space ]*

“... Shrugging my shoulders I shake off thoughts of my past religious indoctrination. The form, the function and the relentless penance paid as a fearful sinner. The oppression wells up in me. My anus contracts to a pin head as I bite my lip, screaming inside my head so no one will be disturbed by my fear”. *[ child form on screen wandering painfully across and disappears ]*

“... Pain, fear, dominance of past proximity to such deeply rooted rituals, fetishes, amidst these stripped gilded lilies. My fragile sensibility sends me into a spin, swirling, faint headed the symbology overwhelms me, engulfs, as I look up a towering menacing figure, a celibate, male, rapist stands over me. Everything I’m experiencing defies any rational form of thinking”. *[ towering bearded monster looking down at the audience sub-lit ]*

“... My mind erupts into a cacophony of visions. A child's clothing gets drawn from the town pond. Women wail and weep. A scrawny limp and dead form is dragged out on the end of a stick. I realise the dead child is me. The tooth in the tin ... mine, my silver lock cut off as a trophy. A death wagon draws up”. *[ clacking of horse hooves, women crying and wailing ]*

“A fear as gaunt as Auschwitz peers out between the boards of the wooden cart. Iron foundry noises ring out. Smoke swirls and the acrid fumes of a bellowing fire hide the skulking dogs from beneath its axles and towering wheels. A monument to God strikes twelve. Solid pitch perfect tones tombstones to time, flashing forms of fire folks dance around cackling”. *[ more fire flickering, subsiding ]*

“... blackness is the colour you look into when your eyes are dead closed”  
they shriek.

“... The capacity to recognise symbols beyond any form of reason drives me to keep investigating”.

“... he is a sinner” they yell.



Figure 3: Sketch: '*Looming Figure*'



Figure 4: Sketch - '*A Monument To Evil*'

“... oh look at the fie folk sitting in the air,  
The bright boroughs, the circle citadels there,  
Dawn in dim woods the diamond delves, the elves eyes,  
The grey lawns cold where gold, where quickgold lies,  
Wind beat whitebeam, airy abelies set on a flare.”

*Starlight Night by Gerard Manley Hopkins.*

“... As blackness equates to the colour one looks at when your eyes are dead closed, so fear equates to the transference of pain from past experience. The sane, the lucid, the appearance of ‘normal’ always only ever occurring as within our own frame of reference”. *[ audience intensely flood-lit, stage dark ]*

“...Change the context and significant events have the potential to form a sensational reaction. The subliminal plot jolts me back to my senses. In my altered state of consciousness I realised I had forgotten to breathe and my past had overwhelmed the present. I turn on my heel and return to the relative safety of the group. The tower strikes two and we return to drink wine and break bread”. *[ Single solitary intense spotlight shines down on a plinth, glasses of wine, carafe and bread with knife on cutting board ]*



Figure 5: Sketch - ‘Clock Tower’

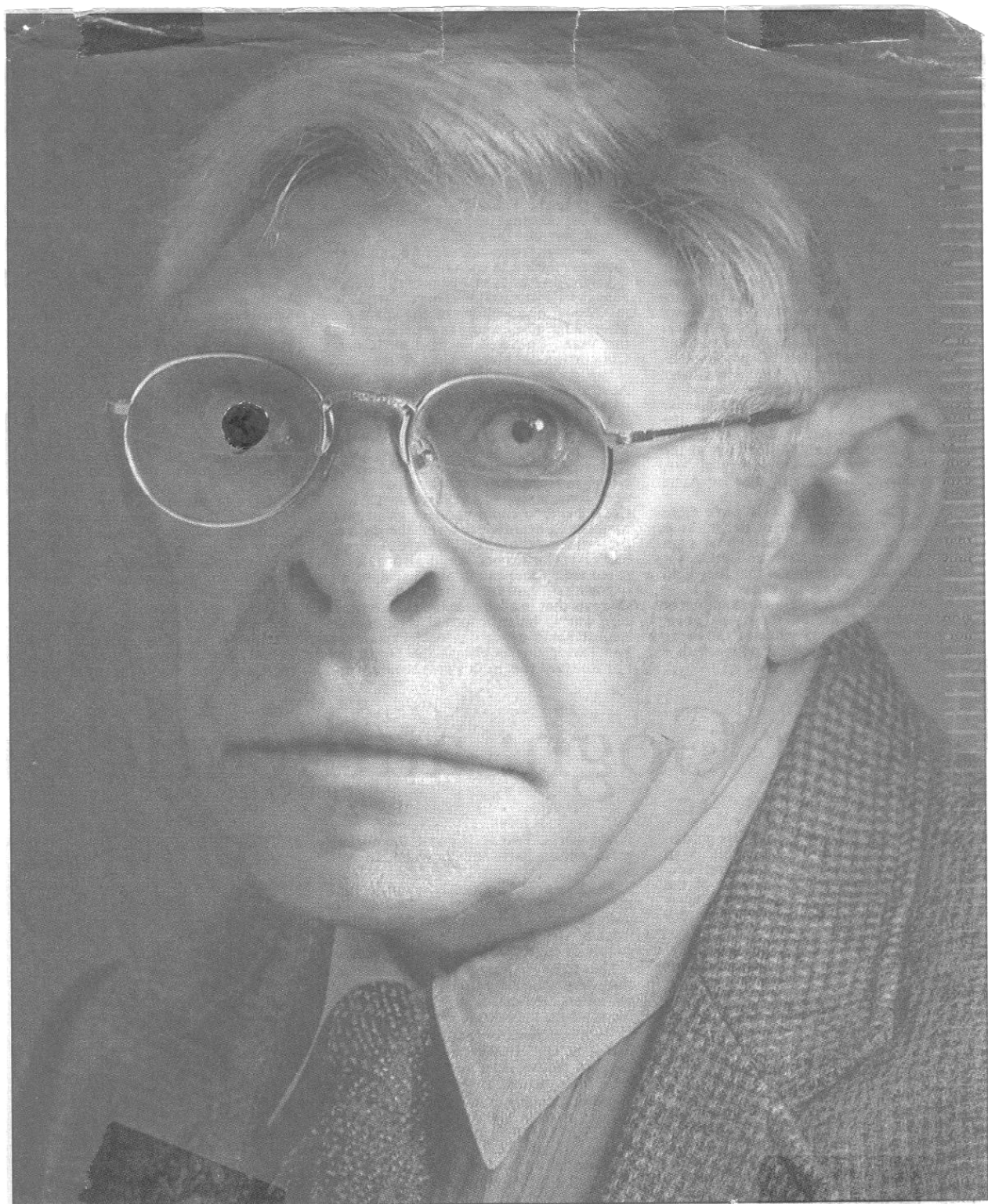
## Exhibition

The following artworks were exhibited in July 1997 at the School of Art, Curtin University AV room performance space as part of the final review for the Printmaking Major unit review.



Figure 6: 'Signifier'





*Jan 1997*

Figure 7: 'Monster'

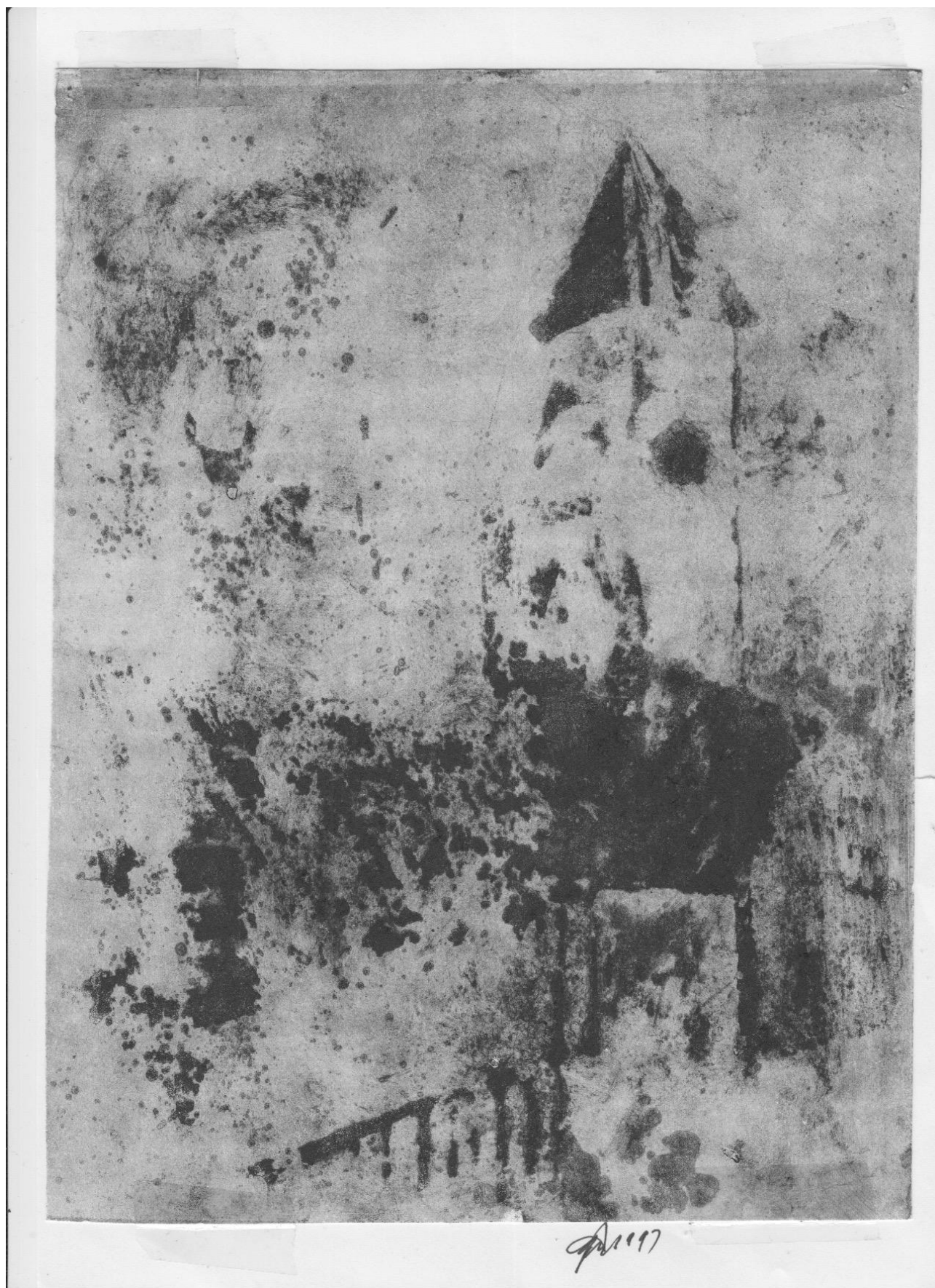


Figure 8: 'Landscape'

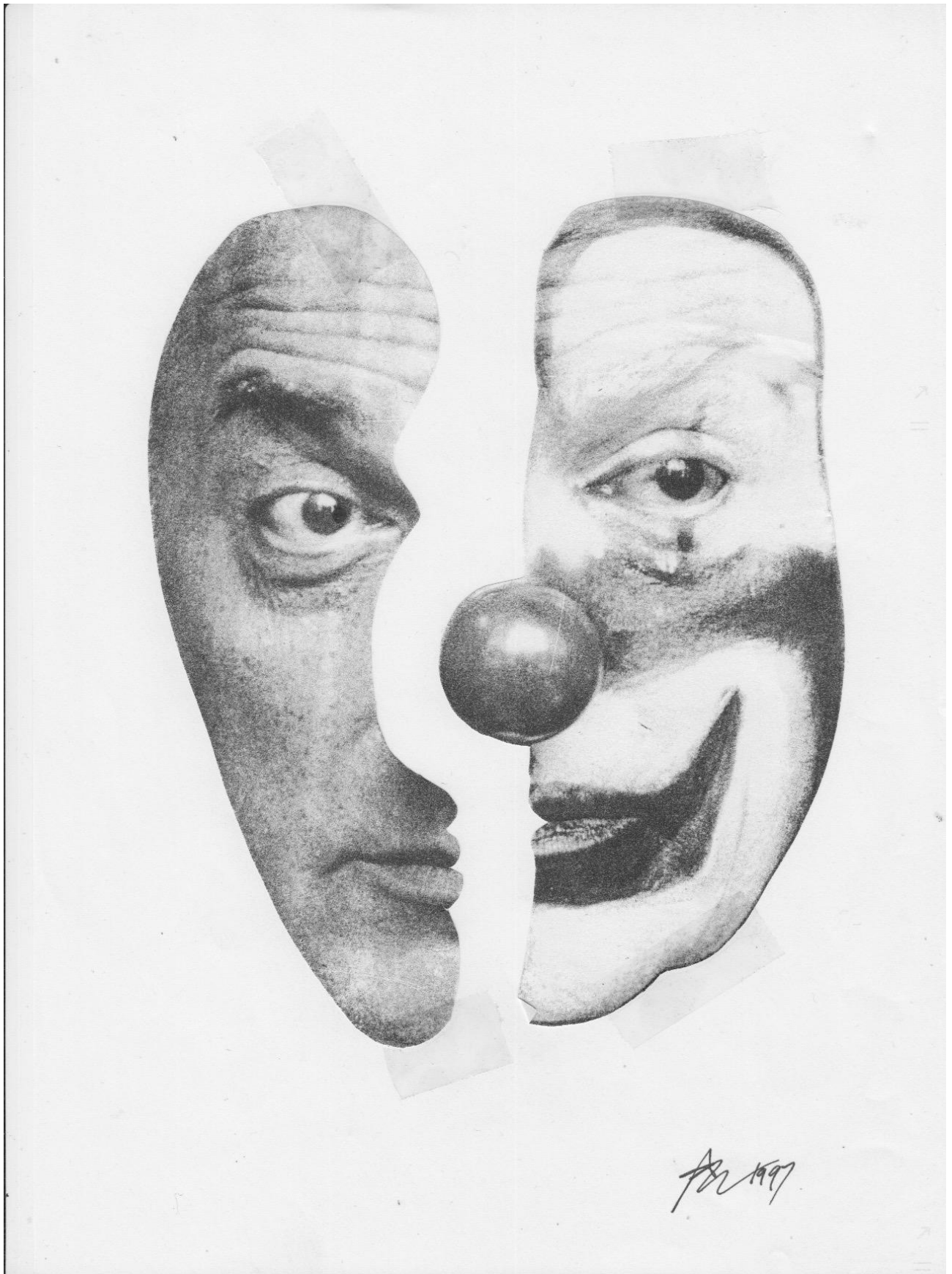


Figure 9: 'Dual'



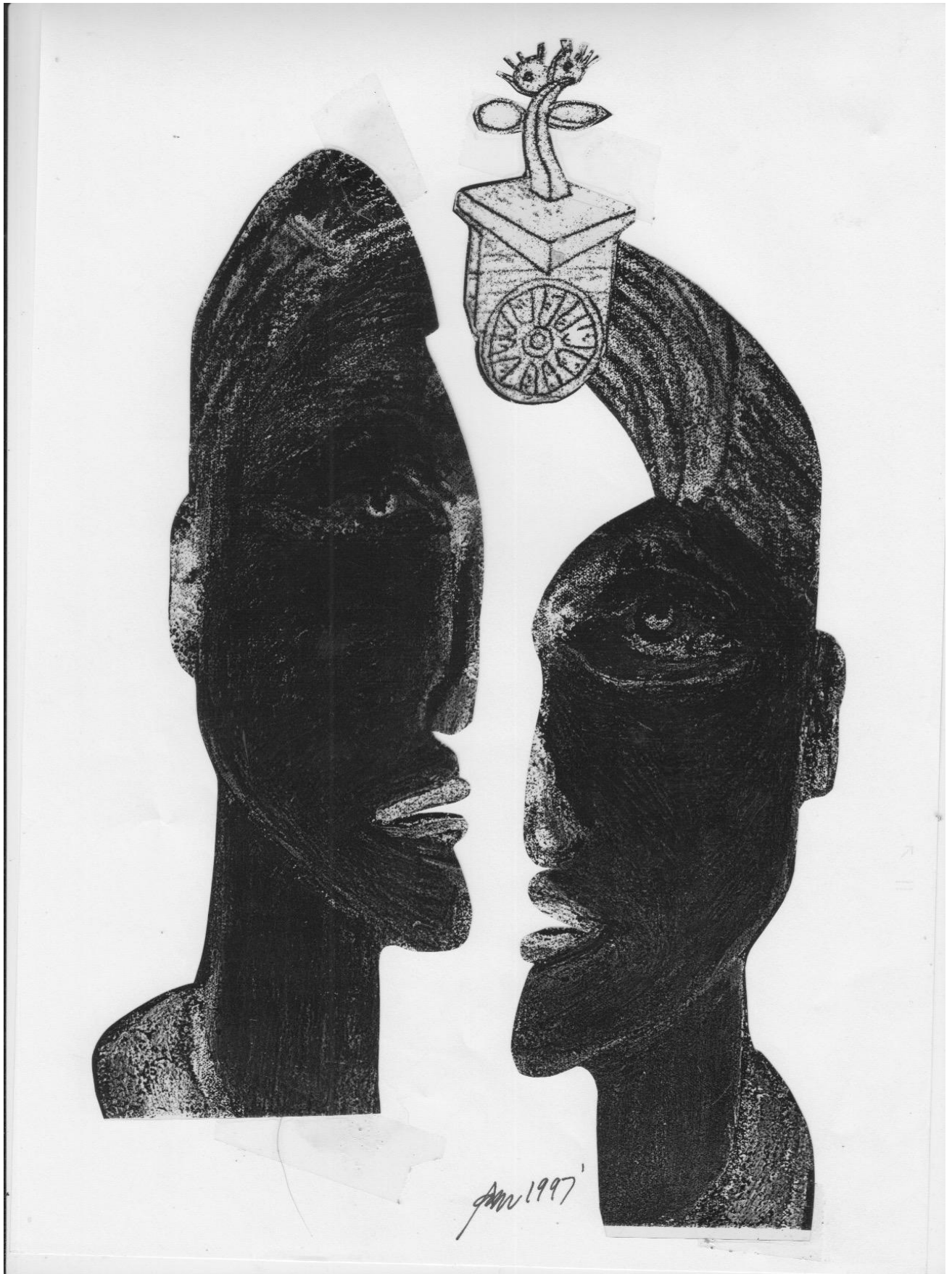


Figure 10: 'Self Portrait 1'



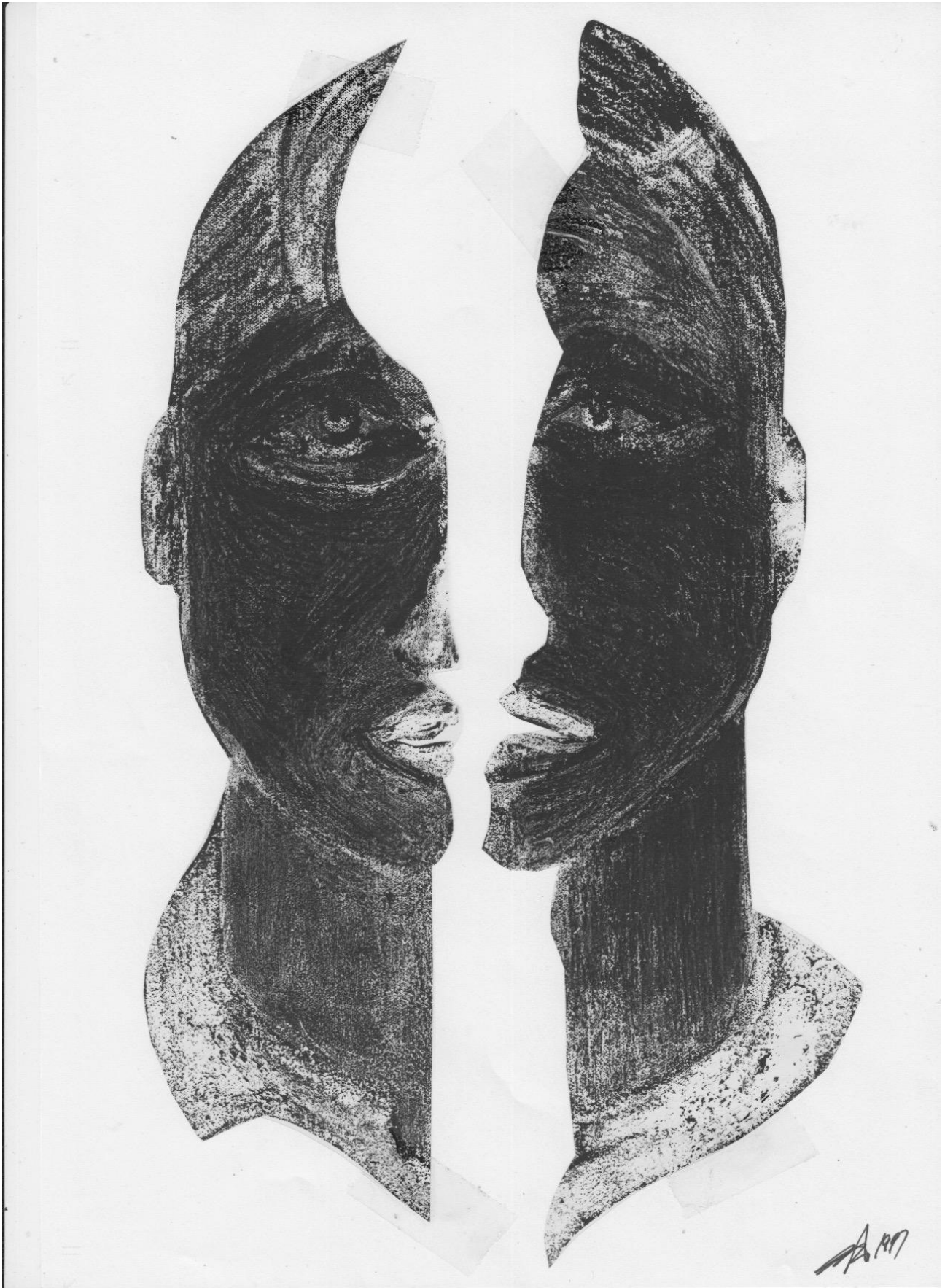


Figure 11: 'Self Portrait 2'

emotive real  
reference  
relative  
discourse created via  
words,  
play  
event,  
when your eyes  
retrospective viewpoint,  
colour one looks  
blackness equates  
creates  
question begging  
answered.  
assimilative past  
my case  
experience  
fear equate  
pain  
Drawing upon  
language  
context  
derivation  
past events  
closed,  
experience?  
refer  
concepts raised  
"Starlight Night"  
Gerard Manley Hopkins.  
poem  
underlying emotion steers  
writings  
answers  
believe

pm 1997

Figure 12: 'Prose 1'

hindsight.  
 subliminal  
 perceived present.  
 Past only occurred  
 importance of language  
 coded symbolic meaning  
 my state of dislocation from  
 Reactive memory response incorporated  
 safety of the Printmaking group.  
 originated rather only to deal  
 returning to the rela  
 related emotive signifiers.  
 turning on my heel  
 in terms of signifiers  
 my own experience  
 examine in the context  
 . Action,  
 described  
 action in situ.  
 terms of context  
 consideration given  
 known as correlated  
 derived from event  
 recalling observation  
 Response must be considered  
 Memory forging response  
 thence taken by the individual  
 emotive filter one operates through  
 terms of consideration  
 through the Benedict  
 event of a midnight stroll  
 response, therefore,  
 revamp known  
 New Norcia  
 present  
 "insane"  
 "unreal"  
 examined  
 did not occur  
 with religious order  
 these events into  
 terms of Sensationalist  
 Reactive Memory Response.  
 idolitary oppressive zealousness  
 Memory critically appraised, translated

Apr 1997

Figure 13: 'Prose 2'

*Sensationalist Reactive Memory Response.*

use of descriptive language

. My capacity to relate  
where such invocation  
mood obviously drew

past experience  
call this reaction  
these symbols  
me to examine  
to question  
terms of semantics.

part  
question raised  
articulation  
following extract  
proposes points  
further  
relation

fieldwork experience:  
[Paragraph 1]  
sane,  
lucid  
appearance of "normal"  
above case

".....O look at the fire folk sitting in the air!

The bright boroughs, the circle citadels there!

Down in dim woods the diamond deives! the elves eyes,

The grey lawns cold where gold, where quickgold lies,

Wind beat whitebeam! Airy abeles set on a flare..."

constructed  
dislocated response

Am 199

Figure 14: 'Prose 3'