



Sphinx, 2008
Ink on Fabriano Artistico 640 gsm paper
76 cm x 58 cm



LANGFORD 120
THE OYSTER EYE
PETER ELLIS

THURSDAY 11 AUGUST TO SATURDAY 10 SEPTEMBER, 2011
EXHIBITION OPENING SATURDAY 13 AUGUST, 2 – 5PM

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GALLERY DIRECTORS Dr Irene Barberis & Dr Wilma Tabacco
GALLERY OPENING HOURS Wednesday to Saturday 11am – 5pm and Sunday 12noon – 5pm
PHOTOGRAPHY Mark Ashkanasy **GRAPHIC DESIGN** Gracia Haby & Louise Jennison
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THE OYSTER EYE

PETER ELLIS



Of Oyster Eyes and Overdue Library Books

The last time I discovered an imagination as rich and varied as that of Peter Ellis was when I interviewed Steven Campbell in New York at the time of his double-header show at the Barbara Toll and John Weber galleries in 1983. Both artists have the rare ability to condense the whole of existence, from the microscopic to the macrocosmic, into a Zen-like statement. Both use line and colour, delineated through the contrast of figure and ground. More bizarrely, and delightfully, both quote freely from the writings and imagination of P G Wodehouse. The very first greeting I received from Steven as I climbed the stairs of his SOHO loft was "What ho!", spoken, a little unnervingly, in his strong Glasgow accent. And twenty-five years later his words echoed in my head when Peter Ellis told me the title of his exhibition of new works would be "The Oyster Eye" which he told me "is derived in part from a P.G. Wodehouse line in which Bertie Wooster has an aunt whose intense stare could open an oyster from twelve yards away."

We are immediately plunged into a Neo-Surrealist world that permits not just telepathic thought but telepathic actions. An oyster, one of the hardest things to open in the known universe, succumbs to the bizarre mental powers of an aged relative. I remember Steven telling me how "In my paintings when I start with a gesture – and I always do – I start with an odd gesture." The image becomes a completely ridiculous vehicle for something else. Imagine my joy when Peter Ellis then began to list *his* influences and working methods, "Often I discover a creature that becomes an actor in a larger painting or drawing. In this exhibition there are penguins, scallops, oysters, accident prone bears, strange mechanical devices involving shape shifting, scientific experiments gone wrong, ghosts, even the depiction of the imagined last thoughts of Edouard Manet."

A self-confessed "obsessive image maker" of thirty-five years' standing, Peter identifies with the Surrealists and the Dadaists but has always been particularly drawn to the work of Francis Picabia. "Occasionally Francis transmits a drawing to me from across the ether," he tells me, as if it is as commonplace as acquiring a new app for one's phone. "This year I was surprised to receive an image from his dog Zizi which is quite unnerving."

Peter Ellis stretches our minds and our imaginations and gives us great pleasure in doing so. He takes us back to ancient Chinese calligraphy and to slightly more recent investigations by Sherlock Holmes. Punk music lurks as a background influence.

This new exhibition has references to imagery which has been meticulously researched in the Metropolitan Museum in New York and the British Museum. The acceptance of chance, the realm of magic, the incomprehensible, the use of paradox and humour, these all go into the mix. But we can just as easily find ourselves back in the artist's childhood, filled with references to 19th and early 20th century children's books and zoological texts. He tells me that "My father was alarmed that at the age of 11, I had an overdue library book titled *The Naturalistic Behaviour of Non-human Primates*."

I have long been an admirer of Peter's work and am excited that there is now an opportunity to view his recent work in depth. I sense I will revisit this exhibition many times and drink deeply from the font of his unclassifiable imagination. I hope that you do too.

Dr Peter Hill is a Scottish-born Australian and Adjunct Professor of Fine Art at RMIT University. He exhibited in the 2002 Biennale of Sydney and his book *Stargazing, memoirs of a young lighthouse keeper* won a Saltire Award in Edinburgh in 2004. He is the Australian correspondent for *ARTnews* magazine in New York.

Back cover
The Bloomslang Experiment (detail), 2008
Ink, gouache, gold leaf on 63 shikishi paper panels
216 cm x 264 cm

Reverse, left to right
Gamble against the spirit world, 2007
Ink, gouache, gold leaf on 54 shikishi paper panels
162 cm x 216 cm

Ectoplasmagoria, 2011
Ink, gouache, gold leaf on 48 shikishi paper panels
162 cm x 192 cm

