



## Loene Furler

from the shed to the dining room and back - a selection of work from 1962 - 2002

Cover: detail **My father/Myself** 1998 *oil on Belgian linen, twigs, mirror, cotton singlet* 250 x 210 cm

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## Acknowledgements

This catalogue has been produced to accompany the exhibition of:

Loene Furler: from the Shed to the dining room and back: a selection of work from 1962 - 2002,  
at the Light Square Gallery, Adelaide, 25 September - 24 October 2002.

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Loene Furler exhibits with Greenaway Art Gallery.

All works are in the artist's collection unless otherwise stated.

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*/ see 1970 Liquitex on canvas 76 x 76 cm*



Stills from film *The Bird* 1968

## Loene Furler

from the shed to the dining room and back

1962 to 2002

Particular shapes and images drift continuously through the work of Loene Furler over a thirty-five year period – umbilical cords anchoring organic forms; a double, rounded shape that can be interpreted as lips, buttocks or a heart; a spiky, testicular form; sets of stairs that lead around or penetrate voids. These images are unconsciously sensual and when patches of vigorous colour or line burst up through tube-like channels they explode with unexpected energy. They sit within her drawings or watercolours and on her canvases like secret messages awaiting decoding by the right recipient.

As a student at the South Australian School of Art in the early 1960s, Furler experimented widely. Vigorous drawings and paintings and a huge range of media are testimony to her unbounded curiosity and thirst for artistic exploration. When not in class producing rapidly observed, highly expressive life studies or abstract landscapes, she was making sketches of her family and friends or patrons at the pub, or wandering the Adelaide Hills drawing a landscape that was to become an important part of her later life. Dozens of sketchbooks were filled with a diverse range of subjects depicted in an equally diverse range of media.

Like the work of many students, Furler's follows various overseas or national trends. A number of her early woodcuts of human forms and landscapes owe much to the passionate energy of the German Expressionists; her large painted landscapes are reminiscent of the semi-abstract work of Brett Whiteley (whose work she does not recall seeing until later). The student painting, *The housewife*, alludes not just to the physical nature of the kitchen but to the nature of a domestic life. It is early expression of a lifetime's interest in the limitations of our language when describing spiritual occupancy of space – 'that "other" for which we do not have an adequate vocabulary'<sup>1</sup>. But even in these early works there is a boldness and organic quality which is characteristic of Furler's work to date. Other features of her work which are distinctly identifiable are the blank spaces occupied by amorphous shapes and patches of texture, themselves in turn inhabited by a range of naturalistic forms.

The blank space – areas of prepared linen canvas or white paper – becomes increasingly important in Furler's work. By the late 1990s these expanses present themselves as areas in which elements are ceaselessly arranged, leaving her the 'freedom to roam' <sup>2</sup>over the work's surface.

In 1965 Loene Furler completed her studies at the South Australian School of Art. The following year she commenced a twelve-month period of teaching in Adelaide at a secondary college for girls, her first experience of an activity that would sustain her economically during a hugely varied career paralleling consistent and persistent practice of her art. In late 1966 she traveled to London, and in August 1967 there married painter Vytas Serelis, whom she had met while studying. While Serelis worked as a freelance artist for publications such as the magazine *London Oz* and *Time Out*, Furler taught art in London's east end, a confronting experience after the comfortable atmosphere of Adelaide.

While her time in London was probably what gave her an ongoing taste for travel, Furler also felt limited and frustrated. She met some extraordinary people – Germaine Greer and David Bowie among them – but felt keenly the physical confines of the shared house in which she and Serelis had a room, and the limitations of her role of wife and helper. Subjugating her needs to accommodate those of others, Furler's creative activity during this period was minimal, although she did undertake a six-month film-making course. In 2002 re-visiting her film *The Bird* of over thirty years earlier, reveals astonishing similarities to her present imagery – symbols of vision limited by entrapment, faces reflected in mirrors, heart shapes and unidentified organic forms.

Apart from film-making her artistic output was limited to small works and collages, the latter being politically or socially topical, referencing subjects like the British passion for soccer, man's sojourn on the moon and male-female relationships during the decade of 'free love'. Nevertheless the opportunity to see works of art she had hitherto only known from reproductions was invaluable, and she became for a time significantly influenced by British painter Francis Bacon, whose work she had first seen at the Art Gallery of South Australia. Magazine and record cover illustrations, culturally significant in the late 1960s and early 1970s, exerted a further important influence during her London period.



This sense of having had her life and her personality de-constructed and her artistic output devalued created tensions for Furler once she and Serelis were back in Australia. Having settled in the Adelaide Hills she began to pursue a surrealist tendency in her painting, developing hyper-real compositions integrating incongruous components. In these works, images like an eyeball sprouting flowers or a walnut shooting branches and roots float through space. Some are markedly intense, expressing feelings Furler had at the time concerning relationships. Some of the many self-portraits which appear throughout her career are present in these paintings – the image of her face emerging from paint squeezed from a tube or reflected on pieces of a broken mirror near a net that closes around tiny eyeballs, limiting their vision.

In 1971 Furler travelled overseas again, this time alone. From that time on solitary international travel became a lifetime habit, and an abundant source of experiential subject matter. The following year she returned to study at the South Australian School of Art. Her decision to take up sculpture initially and then ceramics, was driven to some extent by a desire to reduce the conflict becoming more apparent in her marriage, in which two artists were working in a similar manner, one – Serelis – technically highly adept and the other – Furler – fired by an unstoppable imagination. Many of the ceramic pieces she produced during this period are now lost. Again, they included several self-portraits, one in which her face was submerged in a sink and surrounded by dishes, another with her face in a gutter and a third in which her hand covers her mouth. She made a huge series of works around the themes of paranoia and listening, in which ears (slipcast in ceramic from a cast of her own ear) were placed in envelopes; tiles bore inscriptions such as ‘who said that?’. Portraits were wrapped like parcels so they became largely obscured, and purse-like and garment-like bundles contained perfect ceramic balls, hidden to all, including the artist.

In 1975, the year after she had left her marriage, Furler’s only child, her daughter Sia, was born. During the last part of the 1960s and in the early 1970s she had produced a widely varying parcel of work, encompassing surrealist-influenced images, realist and semi-realist ceramics including, in 1972, an installation piece (unfortunately unrecorded) created around the entrance to the Adelaide Festival’s Raga tent. Expressing feelings about a period of significant – and sometimes very difficult – personal change which had nevertheless seen laid the foundations of her later art practice, the installation incorporated a very narrow walking plank guiding visitors precariously across a field of ceramic breasts.

Furler's other occupations – her ten-year career as an accomplished singer, songwriter and bass player in a band, for instance, or her need to make a living – have seldom, if ever, interrupted her artistic output. An exception was the period from 1982 to 1987 during which she taught printmaking in the Pitjanjatjara Lands, working at Indulkana and then Ernabella in northern South Australia. The effect of this work was two-fold. Her interest in fabric work had grown in the late 1970s and as a result of her experiences with the Aboriginal communities had flourished, culminating in a variety of distinctive designs offered for sale in lengths for clothing. This short-lived business venture was brought to its knees by its own success, when Furler was forced to make a decision to cease the activity or have it take over her life. The Lands themselves also created a change in her work. The organic and botanical forms always present in her paintings and drawings adopted the distinctive look of the vegetation of this dry region. Her enduring need to draw saw the development of several landscapes of the desert region, landscapes which contrast starkly with those created in response to the relatively lush environment of the Adelaide Hills, with which she was so familiar.

The conflict between the need to make a living and her desire to paint has always been (as it is for any artist unable to combine the two) a source of acute frustration for Furler. The restriction on her time sometimes leads her through periods of self-doubt; her series *Conflict* is a direct reference to this. During these times she becomes anxious that her life's work is seen by others as a mere hobby. Self-portraits appear torn, broken or partially hidden. A double breast form also emerges on her canvases, born out of this stress and conflict, a self-disparaging and blunt reference to issues of gender.

The demands on Furler's time increased in 1989 when she became adviser to the Minister for the Arts, Local Government and State Services,<sup>3</sup> a job that she loved and thoroughly enjoyed, but one which totally dominated her life. A collage of paper clips, post-it notes, phone messages and a text repeat, like a mantra, '... and I am still thinking about it when I go to bed ...'. It is an unusually direct reference to her preoccupation with that exceptionally demanding role.

During the 1990s Furler's work grew – literally and figuratively. Symbols and images that had appeared from time to time in her paintings began to populate her canvases as she continued to explore disparate elements of

her life. Her passion for travel has led to a fascination with the contrasting environments in which she moves – the historic, constructed nature of Venice or the surrealistic appearance of the red-and-white striped obelisk at Robe, for instance, compared with the ancient, undeveloped landscape of the Australian interior. Always comprised of painted or drawn elements brought together on canvas or paper, her works literally became more constructed, with the finished components being stitched or glued on the surface, carefully arranged to be ‘read’ and considered in relation to one another.

Loene Furler’s art feeds on self-reflection. Aware of the baggage we all carry she continually introduces clues by which we can unlock codes and decipher the meanings integral to her work. Rows of painted symbols that look like paper shopping bags reference this baggage. Sometimes the painted bags are replaced by real ones, torn away at the bottom, as if somehow the contents have become so heavy they have fallen through and are lost. In *The Tourist*, the traveller – Furler herself – moves through either the world or the day (that is, space or time) with the same quest and returns from journeys with ‘souvenirs’ to be neatly arranged on a mantelpiece, an attempt to create order out of insistent chaos. On small, postcard-sized sheets she explores in watercolour some aspect of her expression, such as the symbols of Buddhism. Subsequently these appear assembled onto canvases or heavy sheets of paper, or on separate pieces of canvas applied to a larger framework. Works from the late 1990s feature particular images such as wide, transparent bowls containing single apples or the arresting verticality of an upright lily.

In two large assemblages exhibited in 1992 at a Post West<sup>4</sup> show called *Forensic*, Furler utilised her technique of gathering discrete images to create an expressive, disturbing whole. In one of these titled *The raw, the hidden and the exposed*, a self-portrait floats netted and inverted, while another image of the artist, pale and obscured, is supported by a de-constructed body. These unsettling portraits share the unstretched canvas with applied and painted ‘notes’ on vulnerability – crosses (signifiers of the crucifix or adhesive dressings as panaceas), abstract forms unconsciously reminiscent of female genitalia, an isolated pear, an encased apple. Across the top, all that remains of Furler’s baggage, cast aside in an attempt to change and focus, are string handles and dotted outlines. Running through the composition like a mid-line or horizon is a golden thread – literally a lifeline.

This thread appears consistently in Furler’s work of the late 1990s, developing into a rich, golden cord, as if dividing earthly existence from the mysteries of the post-death experience. In a commissioned portrait of the late John Pickles, painted

in 1999, the cord is taut, a single knot holding a small branch sprouting leaves representing members of the subject's family; a narrow band of blackness denies the living access to the unknown. *My father/myself*, created after the death of her father in 1998, is one of Furler's most personal and crucial works. Here the cord stretches cleanly across the upper section, and black squares contain the letters D E A T H . The father's mirror on the floor reflects the daughter; the pile of sticks is assembled from wood cut and brought to her by her father to burn for warmth. These and other mementos are combined as a tribute not just to the man but to the honor of being present at the awesome moment of his death.

In 2002 Loene Furler inspects the contents of the shed. There she finds a past that is so powerfully linked to the present that she is forced to stop and dig. The golden cord that traces a line across her work hauls her back to her origins. She rubs at and restores old surfaces, she revisits ideas and is stalked by memories. She returns to the darkness of painful relationships and is struck by the power of maternal love – her ties to the child who lived and is cherished and her ties to the one who died before ever being known.

She despairs at paint cracked beyond repair and is staggered by the huge and physically overwhelming actuality of her commitment. She decides to review the baggage and moves vast quantities of it into her dining room. Stepping carefully through the spaces between stacked canvases and heaped drawings she extracts precious fragments from the pile. But it is the stills from her 1968 film which resonate most powerfully, displaying a silent familiarity and relevance – a voyeuristic figure looking through a window, a caged bird, a net drawn up in front of a face, an egg held gently and then crushed. It is these that unsettle and motivate the creation of new work.

Jane Hylton

August 2002

<sup>1</sup> Discussion with the artist on 24 April 2002

<sup>2</sup> *ibid*

<sup>3</sup> The Minister at that time was the Hon Anne Levy, MLC

<sup>4</sup> Post West was an artist-run venue in Gray Street, Adelaide, which operated from February 1992 to February 1993.



*Student* 1963 monotype 27.5 x 18 cm

*The Port* 1962 Pen and ink wash 27 x 23 cm



*Landscape* 1965 oil on masonite 92 x 92 cm





*The Housewife* 1965 oil on masonite 121.5 x 121.5 cm



*King Jim* 1966 oil on masonite and canvas collage 121.5 x 121.5 cm



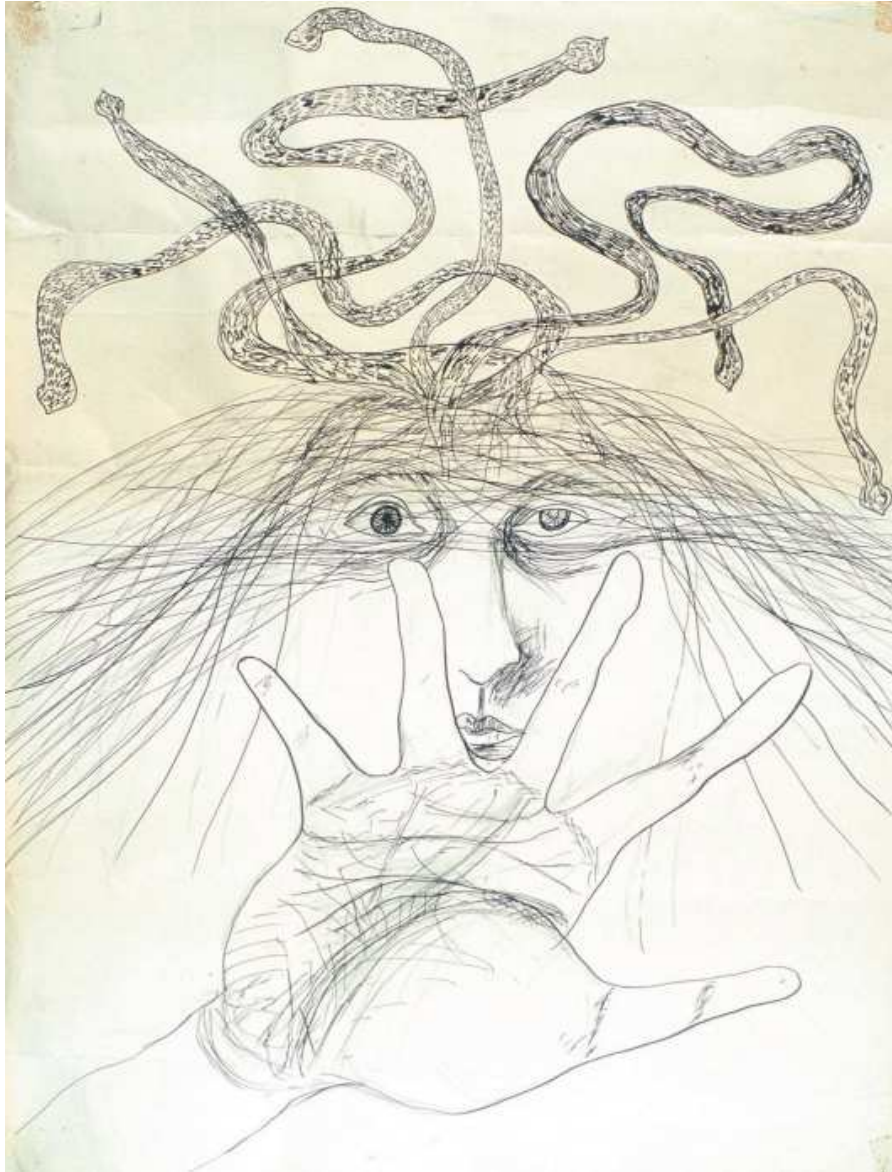


*Vietnam and Prince Charles 1* 1966 collage 30.5 x 25.5 cm

*Vietnam and Prince Charles 2* 1966 collage 34 x 25.5 cm

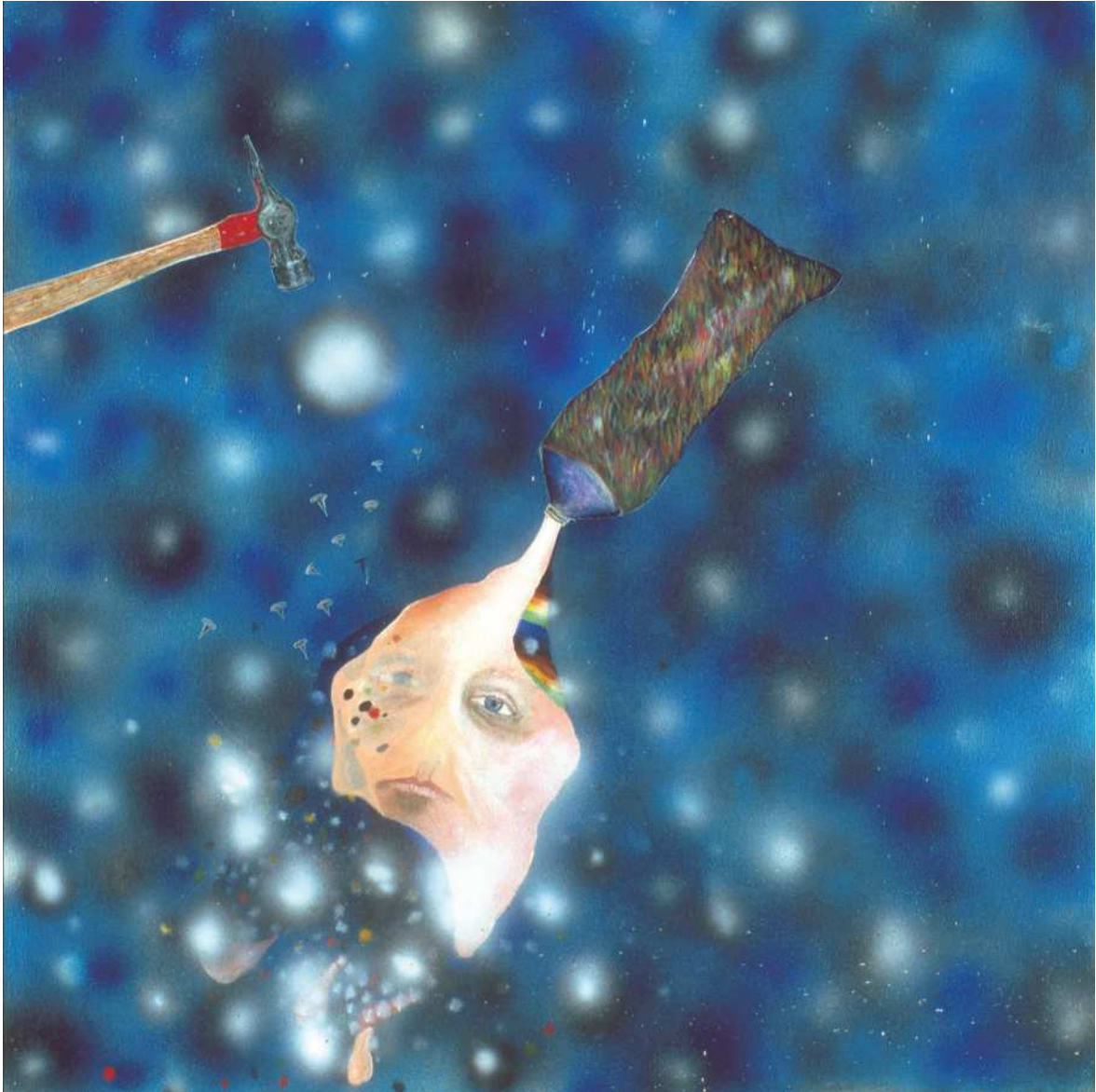


*Soccer players, London 1967 collage 50 x 30 cm*



*Self portrait, London 1969 pen and ink drawing 50 x 38 cm*





*Squeezed (self portrait)* 1971 Liquitex on canvas 76 x 76 cm



*Fractured (self portrait)* 1971 Liquitex on canvas 76 x 60.5 cm



*Who said that?* 1973 Ceramic stoneware with on-glaze 16 x 15 cm

*Hidden* 1973 Ceramic stoneware 18 x 14 cm

*Secrets* 1973 Ceramic stoneware 19 x 18 cm

*Leg candle* 1971 Wax height 36 cm



*Phillip packaged* 1974 Ceramic stoneware and on-glaze 35 x 24 cm





*Right from the start we are bound*(Sia) 1976 oil on canvas 104 x 88 cm





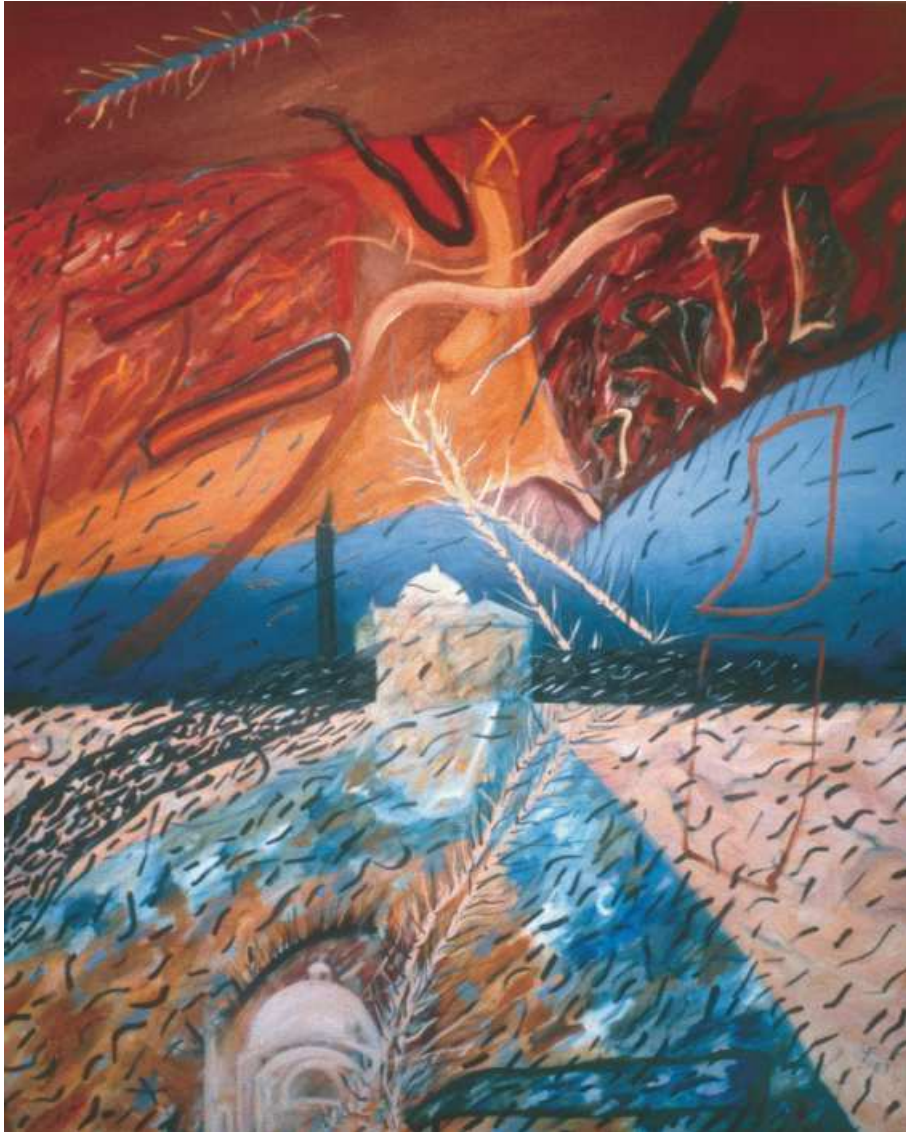
*Who said that?* 1979 oil on canvas, collage and ceramic 97 x 66 cm  
collection Marcia Furler (photographed by Artist)



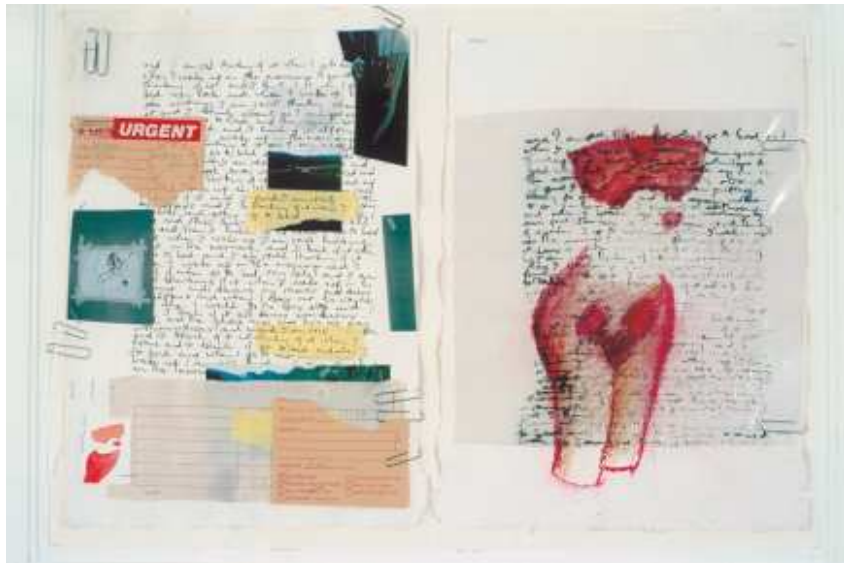
*Fabric designs/prints* 1986 Coloured inks 71 x 69 cm  
Collection Carolyn Pickles



Loene Furler 1986



*Ernabella/Venice* 1988, oil on Belgian linen 153 x 122 cm



*I'm thinking of it all the time*, collage 1990 42 x 29.7 cm Collection of Carolyn Pickles





*The Raw, the hidden and the exposed* oil on Belgian linen 1993 300 x 200 cm



*Baggage* 1993 watercolour 35 x 25 cm

*Fresh apple* 1994 watercolour 35 x 25 cm

*Pain* 1994 watercolour 35 x 25 cm

*Pain and baggage* 1994 watercolour 35 x 25 cm

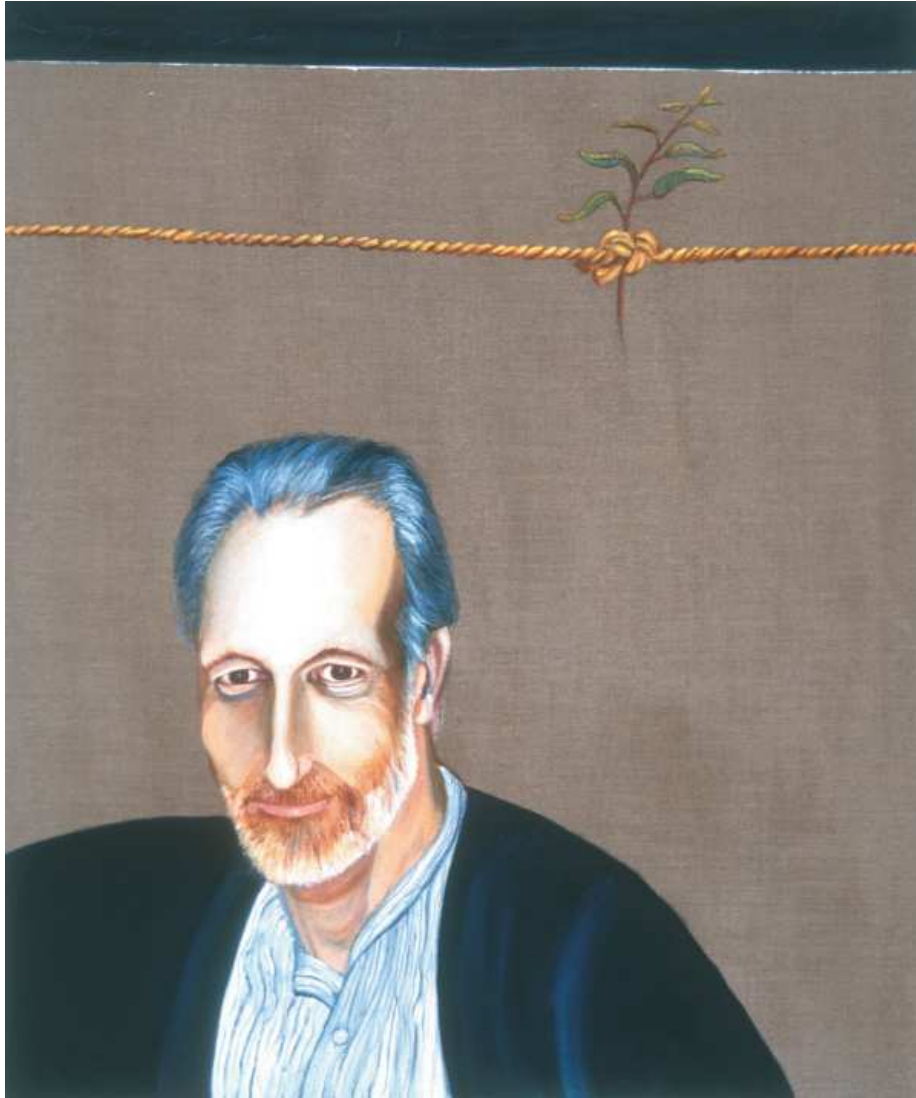


*A scattered mind seeking signs* 2000 watercolour and attachments 98 x 75 cm



*The Tourist* 1997 oil on Belgian linen Two panels 162 x 102 cm Collection of Ed and Sue Tweddell





*John Pickles* 1999 oil on Belgian linen 92 x 76 cm Collection of Carolyn Pickles



*A scattered mind* 1999 oil on Belgian linen with attachments 152 x 92 cm



*Mirror/Slippage* 2000 oil on Belgian linen with attachments 245 x 152 cm



*1968 revisited* 2002 still from 1968 film Kensington Park London

## **Noting/Noticing**

I talk to myself, again, ask the same questions.

Usually I travel around the same space, daydream, answer to no-one.

Where does talk begin.

Is talk a place.

For me the sixties were Existentialism and London; the seventies were Feminism and motherhood; the eighties were left-wing politics; and the nineties are Reflection-or perhaps, Reflectionism.

So, I talk to my self, still.

A world, secrets.

Theory can be a weapon, power.

Today, this time: it is always (the) present.

There is sound, taste, touch, sight, smell, and the other.

The other is memory.

Memory is (the) present.

Presence.

And histories, feelings.

Maybe spirituality.

Is oblivion total understanding.

Is it through writing as an “hysterical subject” (Kristeva), bound to the body and its rhythms, that I progress? Can I substitute the word writing for painting? Is it through painting as an “hysterical subject”, bound to the body and its rhythm that I progress? Hysterical-have I understood? Or, do I progress through feminine writing/painting as ‘written’ by Cixous-their proximity to voice.

Voice/speech is close to song, and to unconscious.

And so feeling, to feeling, without fear.

A tourist.

A venturer.

With or without theory.

With or without conversation.

I stare out the window.

**Loene Furler**

Edited by Linda-Marie Walker

## Curriculum Vitae

**Born:** Melbourne Victoria

**Studied:** South Australian School of Art  
Contemporary Film Makers Studio London

### Selected solo exhibitions

- 2000 Greenaway Art Gallery, Adelaide  
1997 Greenaway Art Gallery Adelaide  
1994 Greenaway Art Gallery Adelaide  
1986 Jam Factory Craft and Design  
Centre, Payneham  
1981 Macquarie Galleries, Sydney  
1966 White Studios (Lidums) Adelaide

### Selected group exhibitions

- 1998 Alice Prize, Alice Springs  
1998 Hutchins works on paper, Hobart  
1997 Portia Geach Sydney  
1993 Members exhibition,  
Contemporary Art Centre, Adelaide  
1992 Forensic, Post West, Adelaide  
1992 Dalai Lama, Art Images Adelaide  
1988 Hill-Smith Gallery Adelaide  
1982 Macquarie Galleries Sydney  
1981 'Ten Australian Ceramic Artists'  
Powell Street Gallery, Melbourne  
1981 'Lovely Motherhood Show',  
Experimental Art Foundation Adelaide  
1980 Arts Council Gallery, Canberra, ACT  
1978 Contemporary Art Centre  
1976 Women's Art Movement Exhibition,  
Experimental Art Foundation  
1972 RAGA Arts event, Adelaide Festival

### Prizes

- 1965 Royal South Australian Society Prize  
for composition  
1963 Kim Bonython Painting Prize

### Collections

Art Gallery of South Australia  
Faulding Collection  
Janet Holmes a Court

### 2002

Currently a Lecturer at the AIT-Arts Light Square  
Adelaide. Chair, Experimental Art Foundation,  
Chair, Elastic (Artist Week committee) Member,  
Art Gallery of South Australia Foundation  
Council, Member Festival, Events and  
Commissions committee ARTSA.

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