

Detail of PRETEXT, 1991



## P R E T E X T

*"O yes, detected in his very heart of home:  
his children's father and their brother  
son and husband of his mother;  
bed rival to his father and assassin." \**

The intended meaning in this work is alluded to in the title. The component parts of the installation are purposefully configured, proposed and presented as oblique references which disguise the true purpose of the interrelationship of the objects presented. This visual/virtual image of 'dissimulation', is intended to precipitate and provoke discourse around the notion of incest. The installation interrogates the extent, implication and culpability of each and every person's conscious, unconscious or sub-conscious Oedipal guilt.

The marriage of realism and modernism, while constituting the form of the work, adds an independent interrogative dimension. The contradiction and tensioning of the material relationship between the style of realist illusion in concert with the deployment of modernist conceptual devices, reinforces the necessity for a re-evaluation of the efficacy of painting!

The tactile substance of the work is intended as a communication, an invitation to re-examine the applicability of pioneering psychoanalytical theory. The viewer is

encouraged to engage and respond ideologically and otherwise, to the centrally positioned nude, which embodies the notions of desire through voyeurism, suppression and denial by access only to the back view. Responses by the viewer to the painting are established at a remove from [their] reality, as the representation remains in the realm of two-dimensional illusion. A twin dimensionality is referenced by the placement of the real rug, depicted in the painting, on the floor and up the stairs under the table. This acts as an invitation to enter or participate in dialogue within the frame[work].

'Access' to the work is gained via the carpet to the stairs, but this is denied by the unnatural relationship between the table's positioning and its architecture. The wall of drapes, define the limited boundary within which the installation is to be read. The partially stretched canvasses flanking the painted reclining nude situated within the elaborate iconic superstructure, function as a metaphor for the *structure* and *sub-structure* of societal mores. All of the elements combine to create a projected micro-unit or family, an enforced normative paradigm, within which incestuousness festers. The intention was to create an harmony of disjunction. The physically abnormal table supports the centrally placed crucible, the wooden drawer, which contains the heart of the work: my late mother's 'mummified' caul.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The occurrence of a human membranous caul at birth was considered to relate to its recipient being blessed with occult insight. It was commonly dried out and kept as a talisman for protection, specifically against drowning. A metaphor perhaps?

The cultural cross referencing in the luxuriant carpet reflects [our] concerns with appropriation of the exotic, a status symbol indicative of our social mores, as well as a projection of [newly acquired] material wealth. As the viewer reflects on the recurrence of the rug, both as illusion and by its actual presence, the comodification of the carpet offers a similar reading of the nude as commodity and by implication, the nude could well be on offer in the real world! Questions arise which refer to the notion of innate and malevolent male voyeurism in general and the extent of the specific culpability of the male manufacturer/artist

The ancient Greek notion of KAIROS, personified opportunity - or what Michel Foucault refers to as, the strategy of timeliness is textually referred to in the work. An altogether separate source, Ion of Chios refers to Kairos as being a God - the youngest son of Zeus. Hence: opportunity is God-sent!

*"The importance of the 'right time' in sexual ethics appears rather clearly in a passage of the Memorabilia dealing with incest. Socrates states unequivocally that the precept that parents shall not have sexual intercourse with their children nor children with their parents constitutes a universal dictum, laid out by the gods. He sees the proof of this in the fact that those who break the rule receive a punishment. Now the punishment consists in this: regardless of the intrinsic qualities that the incestuous parents may possess, their offspring will come to no good. And why is this? Because the parents failed to respect the principle of the 'right time', mixing their seed unseasonably, since one of them was necessarily much older than the other: for people to procreate when they are no longer 'in full vigor' was always 'to beget badly'.*

*Xenophon and Socrates do not say that incest is reprehensible only in the form of an 'inopportune' action; but*

*it is remarkable that the evil of incest is manifested in the same way and with the same consequences as the lack of regard for the proper time".*

Bear in mind that Oedipus never consciously willed the heavenly ordained events which augered his demise. So, aside from the obvious questions raised by the issue of the bounds of social responsibility and criminal culpability connected with incest, 'the choice of moment' can also be associated with the principles of the doctrine of causality.

Access to inner knowledge via beliefs in predestination, synchronicity or even fatalism, hold attraction to many. Most people at some stage toy with systems of divination and the notion of fortune (itself a goddess personified) and its relationship to success, has a strong hold in people's internal self governance.\* It is my assumption that in seeking this power in people's affairs there exists a link to the establishment of confidence [to proceed] and aspirations [to succeed] which implies in capitalist societal terms, fundamentally, product-ability and its resultant reward.

Associated with the interests of state and family control mechanisms, and in seeking to introduce an associative signifier of behavioural compliance [which is often and intelligently rejected] I have introduced a powerful neo-Christio icon-like cross symbol.

I have often ruminated on the meaning of the passage from revelations inscribed on the flyleaf of my late mother's bible:

*"Be thou faithful unto death  
and I shall give thee a crown of life".*

Victor Gordon



PRETEXT, 1991  
mixed media installation, 2500 X 2500 mm

\* The Australian Historian Manning Clarke refers repeatedly to the "bitch goddess of success" in his autobiography.  
1 The Memorabilia of Xenophon. iv, 4, 21-23  
2 The History of Sexuality. Vol 2 - The use Of Pleasure by Michel Foucault. P59. Viking Penguin. 1986