

Kerry Stelling

REVIEW

“ANCESTRAL MEETINGS”

An Exhibition of Works by Anneke Silver at Perc Tucker Regional Gallery.

Author of *Permaculture*, Bill Mollison, insists there is no resource management problem yet unsolved, if humanity can give up its delinquent behaviour towards nature and adopt mature earthcare principals, such as agriculture that nurtures, instead of over-ruling the environment.

Similarly there is no mystery that needs remain veiled if some fundamental truths can be faced. God has only been “father” in recent times. Maybe the world would be better, richer, greener if Earth, God and “Mother of All” could again be seen as one. This is the domain into which Anneke Silver ventures with “Ancestral Meetings”, her exhibition of electric images featuring ancient goddess figures. The writer enjoys the venerable bulk of these goddess figures but remains impartial on the subject of fertility exploited as a point of authority.

Anyone who travels one end of the continent to the other discovers a vast menopausal tragedy. Only 20,000 years ago, Australia’s green mantle of primordial forest was mysteriously banished forever along with entire species of plants and animals. What remained to relieve the new aridity was a new sclerophyll vegetation which needed regular conflagration or “burn” to renew itself. So millennia ago much of Australia was transformed into the new earthscape that Amazonia and perhaps the whole planet will soon adopt – a marginal habitat, largely bare and scorched.

In referring to the Australian landscape, Silver’s imagery faces another truth. The female psyche and its preference for nurture over conquest has been banished to its own marginal habitat in recent millennia. Throughout the Patriarchal age of mastery and machinery woman has barely been permitted to retain her soul. Hints of defiance were also tamed with the fire regime of that new age. Silver chooses the new colours of the land, the dreamtime tells us, underwent so much fashioning by ancient spirit beings. Rather than the green of natural richness she chooses the



ochre reds or earth's bared flesh, the sombre charcoal black of completed immolation, and gold, presently the colour of temporal wealth and vanity, hard to handle without implied taint.

The female figure has constantly featured in Western Art only its demeanour has changed. In her Goddess series Silver revives a neolithic cruciform outline suggesting the arms of the cross may have once meant the embrace rather than ban or bar like the modern machine of sin, suffering and salvation also depicted in "Goddess obscured".

Silver's Goddesses are grave and matronly but images from Minoan seal rings permit the pagan Goddess to dance regeneration with convincing undulation. Plants and trees seem to join in. Another figure breaking out of the ecclesiastical gravity is the dancing male figure in "Time of Ritual". Like a lively last word on the issues addressed - "Warning chant from a marginal Habitat" confronts the viewer departing the exhibition like an undulating map of the territory shared by Silver - as if to say the end of the line is here, and the time to start the dance of regeneration is, as always, now.

