

# SET FIRE TO SELF - DRAWN.

James Robinson

February 13th - March 9th, 2003

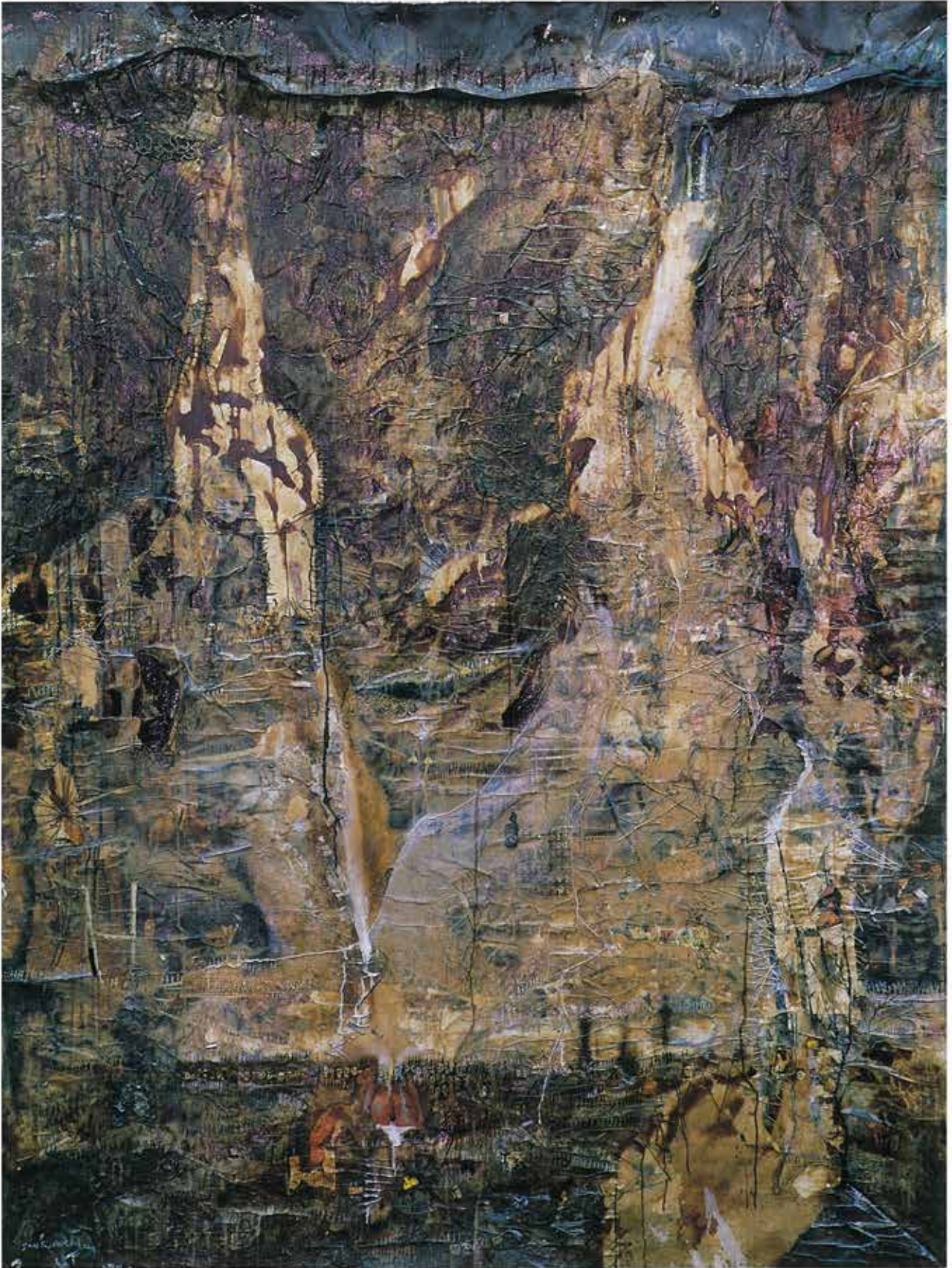


Raw Hardcore, 2003, Mixed Media on Canvas

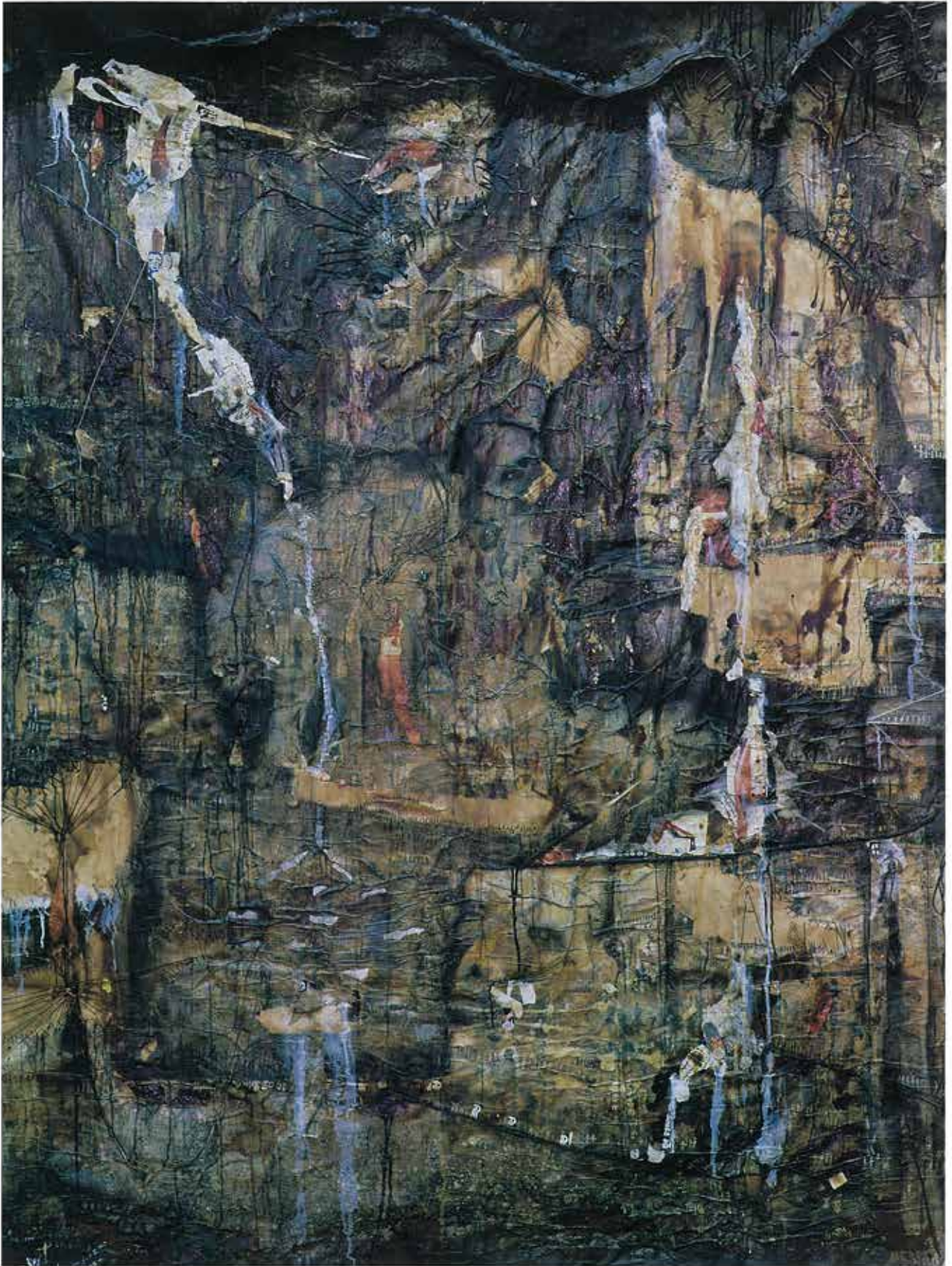
**new**contemporaries  
emerging Art in Australia

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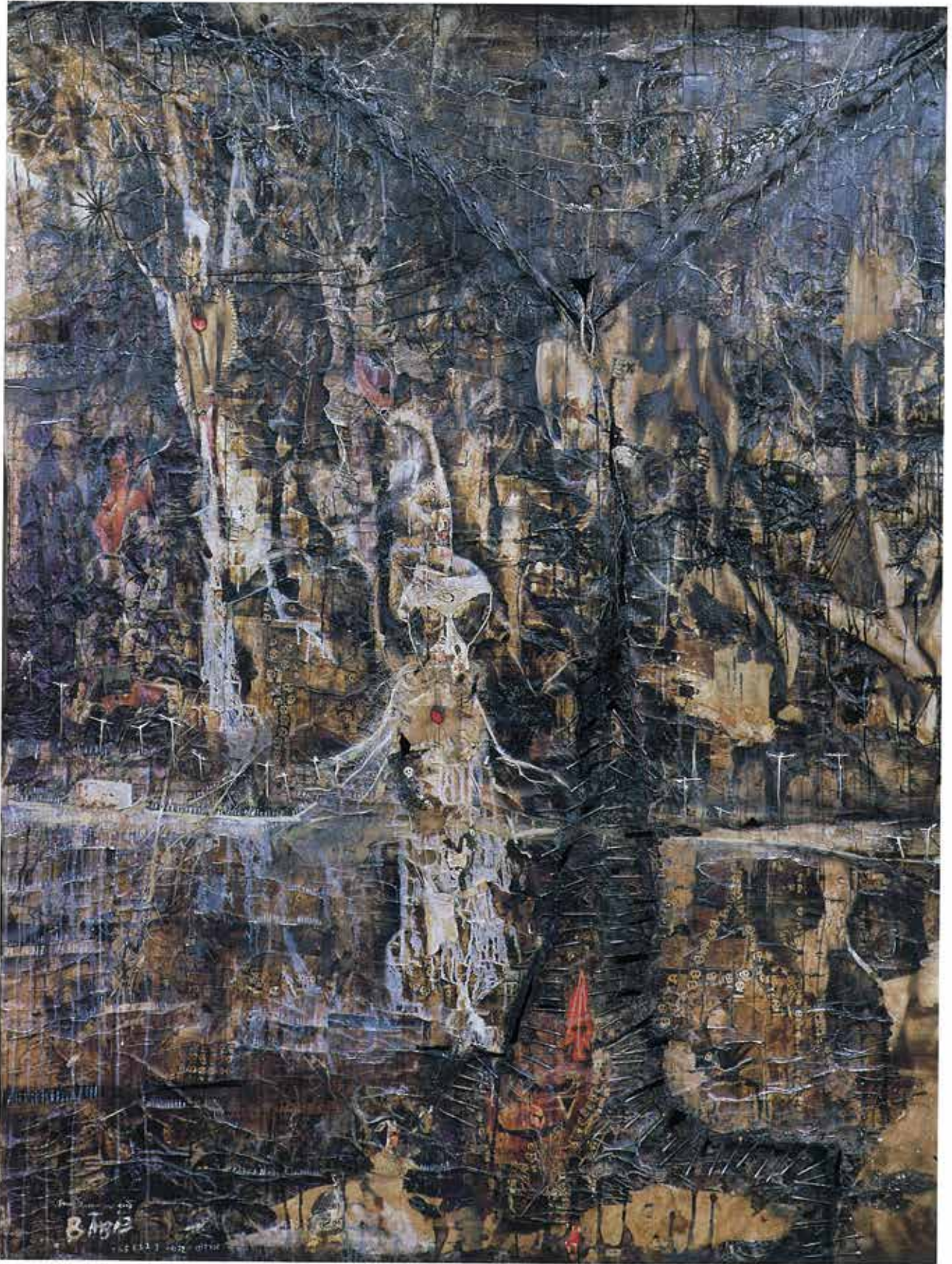
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Set Fire to Self Drown - 1 2003  
*Mixed Media on canvas, 2m by 4m*



Set Fire to Self Drown - 2, 2003  
*Mixed Media on canvas, 2m by 4m*



Set Fire to Self Drown - 3, 2003  
Mixed Media on canvas, 2m by 4m

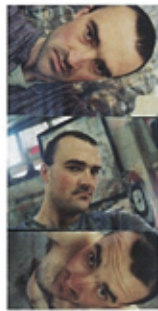
James Robinson, lives and works in New Zealand  
 Website [www.jamesrobinson.co.nz](http://www.jamesrobinson.co.nz)  
 D.O.B. December 7th 1972

### Tertiary Education

1992 Nelson Polytech Foundation in art course  
 1995-96 Hungry Creek Art and Craft school/Awarded Diploma in Art and Craft  
 1999-2000 School of Art BFA course Otago Polytech/ majoring in printmaking  
 2000-2001 School of art BFA course Otago polytech/ minor in printmaking/majoring in painting



Almost Meat - Detail a,  
Mixed Media on Canvas



trip J cave man



Inside Studio



Small Works  
Mixed Media on Canvas

## James Robinson, Artists Statement

There are four series of work present with interconnecting story between them as process and intent.

Werk has been executed over the last 6 months in Dunedin NZ in a ex video game parlour (wizards) in central quasi public space Dunedin that has served as my unofficial residency allowing the opportunity to expand and contradicting the isolation tendencies of art practice

1-set fire to self drown.  
 Mixed media on free hanging canvas in a series of 9 (intended as three trip dychs)

underlining collage elements are from 1300 copies of work book sketches from 1995 to 2003

2-the notes that flew me back from oblivion  
 selected notebook drawings from 1995-2003 (the dna behind the body! See any one can express them self! Liberate you too!)

3-raw hardcore ( portrait of james and martin robinson - r.i.p. martin robinson born 1972-died 1997)  
 made from many many hand painted patches...(with guests helping a bit..cred list on back )  
 chch white dysfunction urban dislocation mental illness  
 addiction solo parent stress type money an attention  
 oppression fatherless sons unemployment suicide jails  
 institutions an death no worth male self hate guilt transcendence....with a good dose of..  
 "I fuckin did it my way!!!" awareness intelligence ..blessing or curse ?  
 godd told me to measure the fuck up...now I rise.

### Selected Solo Exhibitions

- 2003 "Set Fire to Self - Drown" invited to show in Sydney at newcontemporaries
- 2002 "Unutterable loud obviousness (mutterings from Dunedin NZ)" solo show at Stephen McLaughlan Gallery's, Flinders Lane Melbourne Australia
- 2001 "Vulnerable (ego commodity)"- Solo exhibition at the Arthouse dealer gallery entitled- 292 Montreal St. Church Christ, New Zealand
- 2000 Finalist in Wallace art awards with the painting 'CRUDE'

You wanna dispute it?

croud pleezin pop kulture up in there...comen suffer- th path is the prize if ya can accept it. Rise...grow now nigger...proud warrior king motherfucker..we all the son of a man...r member?!

136 minutes (in 15 sets of nine)  
 made from a process performance painting 6 metres wide in Wellington NZ..performed at a fringe type unground free rock spoken word type free jazz noise art event..i translated visually with sloppy house paint and over priced fine art shit too.  
 Picture sucked at the end..process important ..so I cut it into cd sized bits up to fix my dead van and try to afford this show....done a group of 250 minutes hard out for ever...and went into the mountains also to paint them in a snow storm in the west coast south island..while avoiding drunk mothers.

...I been "do it your self" welfare funded artist (tried the factory work for real..but I wasn't good enough for it)for 13 years..i done 60 shows...so yeah I work it..spiritual/personal/political actions....mmmmm  
 im part of a community of artists writers performers and most importantly musicians (cos I wanna really be a rock caveman yelling guy with lyric an geetars..primal ritual space and earth in a moment!) in underground aboveground NZ.  
 I love my people....still oppressed by the state...an our selfs..  
 So fuck that.....  
 Im here.  
 Gimmie the world..  
 I got stories to tell  
 Brewing that human condition ..translating the ancient...just my angle..still working on it.  
 Stat tuned.  
 Thanks.

## James Robinson: Set fire to self, drown

God, it is all dark  
The heart beat but there is no answering hark  
Of a hearer and no one to speak

These lines, written by the New Zealand poet, John Caselberg, were admired by the country's leading artist, Colin McCahon (1919-87), who transcribed them onto his paintings. Caselberg's poem is called *Van Gogh*, but it uses the tortured, visionary Dutchman, as a symbol for the artist in New Zealand - a land where physical and cultural isolation has pushed painters and writers to extremes. McCahon's case is exemplary, but think also of the poet, James K. Baxter, or the painter, Tony Fomison, to name but two famous examples.

For the artist, New Zealand is a kind of earthly paradise, a land of rolling green hills and sublime scenery - but with a human landscape that displays all the characteristics of a small village community. In such a setting, artists have come to feel, and to express themselves, with extraordinary intensity. New Zealand's art and literature is filled echoes of the Old Testament, with works that may be ruthlessly modern in style but medieval in content. There is a monastic dimension to the place, and no prophet seems to avoid martyrdom - whether it be McCahon and Baxter drinking themselves to death, or Fomison's heroin addiction.

Enter James Robinson, a young artist in that extreme, New Zealand tradition, who draws, paints and writes with an intensity that makes one think of Van Gogh, or perhaps Antonin Artaud. Like those artists, he seems devoid of those social and psychic skins that allow us to exist as cool, autonomous beings in the workaday world. We make choices and decisions about our lives on a daily basis, but for these skinless creators, even the smallest events may lead to ecstasy or catastrophe; may open a window onto the void that has to be neutralized by frenzied, creative activity.

It is difficult to avoid comparisons with the kind of luke-warm, 'radical' art so beloved by today's public galleries. Look, for example, at the supposedly scandalous work of young British artists such as Tracey Emin or Damien Hirst, currently showing in museums all around the world (including Sydney), and then look at Robinson's work.

If New Zealand were a medieval monastery, James's home town, Dunedin, would be the dungeon. The nine large paintings in *Set fire to self, drown*, are not so much a descent into the lower depths, as a circuit of the walls of a cave from which there is no way out. Like Virgil guiding Dante through the *Inferno*, Robinson takes us on a tour of his private heavy-metal hell: the distillation of a life spent on the edge of psychosis. All the bad things that have happened to James - and the catalogue is a long one - have been transmuted into a viral outbreak of signs and symbols, a splattering of cosmic graffiti, built up layer upon layer.

Robinson's cave walls seem to be covered with animal hides - the residue of some bloody ritual - stitched and nailed together by a latter-day caveman. Yet they are also visionary landscapes, reminiscent of the teeming vistas of Bosch or Breugel. The artist has mined the drawing books he has kept since 1995, to provide the thousands of individual images that lurk beneath his dark, resinous surfaces.



Raw Hardcore - Detail, 2003  
Mixed Media on Canvas

On the facing wall there are hundreds of other images, spread over dozens of tiny canvases. The pictures are disturbing and violent, the artist's working methods compulsive and spontaneous. It approaches a form of Art Brut, but Robinson cannot simply be classified as an 'Outsider' artist. Beyond all the frenetic activity, there is a creative intelligence at work - a hyper-literate, passionate imagination that leaves its mark on all these images.

Reviewers in New Zealand have themselves been driven to extremes, trying to find ways of describing Robinson's work. It has been called brooding, nightmarish, confrontational, anarchic, and "somewhat surreal", but nobody seems to have left one of his exhibitions without feeling stirred and impressed. To brave the initial onslaught and enter into Robinson's universe, is to discover a vision of exceptional delicacy, vitality and humour. It is as though all the shadows are ultimately cancelled out by the sheer superabundance of his invention.

In this work, we recognize an art to blow the lid off a world where everything is progressively more sterile, pre-packaged and bureaucratic. It is a convulsive surge of the psyche, an angry monster art that refuses to doze quietly on a gallery wall.

John McDonald, Director  
newcontemporaries  
February 2003