



STEPHEN HALL
MERRY-ANDREW THE LIMNER

Introducing Merry-Andrew the Limner

“Merry-Andrew the Limner” could be regarded as a narrative. However if it is, it is an obscure, elusive nonsensical one that unfolds, lurching forward, veering backwards and leaping laterally from connection to connection. It is created from the premise that a perceived truth is always vulnerable to persuasion, alteration and the fallibility of recollection as well as dubious and unsubstantiated information, which of course, abounds. Therefore, to believe something categorically regardless of contrary evidence or to fail to understand your truth could be proved wrong at any time is to live life teetering on the edge of idiocy. Truth and fiction, as it is with good and evil, are intrinsically and eternally entwined, so much so, it is often difficult to tell which is which. But, *idle reader*, you can be assured that in this *telling there is absolutely no deviation from truth*.

Earlier on in the week during which this piece was being written I went through the contents of a suitcase that now belongs to me but was assembled by my mother when she was training as an art teacher in the 1950's. This suitcase is full of art prints mounted onto cardboard that range from prehistoric art up to what was for her fairly current. As a child I would eagerly pore through the hundreds of images widely opening my eyes and world. The other day, I went through it and reacquainted myself with a reproduction of a painting by Daumier of Don Quixote and Sancho Panza called “Sancho Panza Wringing His Hands” and I suspect this image has been responsible for deeply and evocatively lodging Don Quixote and Sancho Panza into my sub-conscious.

The idea for this particular body of work, “Merry Andrew the Limner” was to create a parallel universe to Cervantes’ Don Quixote.

It seems likely to me that Cervantes intended Don Quixote, a dreamer who sought lofty ideals, to be a metaphor for an author, and to a degree, to represent himself. Through Don Quixote, Cervantes is able to take whatever liberties he wishes as he travels through some of the events and experiences of his own life and makes comments and observations about the world in which he lived, a world he knew between 1547 and 1616. Part 1 of the “Ingenious Gentleman Don Quixote of La Mancha” was published in 1605 with Part 2 following a decade later. The most popular books of Cervantes’ time were novels about chivalry. Cervantes was frustrated at the popularity of these largely flippant works over works of greater literary quality. So, in his early fifties, and from a debtor’s prison, he took them on with parody and produced an enduring masterpiece that elevated his standing and popularity in his own and all time.

And now it's time for Don Quixote himself;

Our gentleman was approximately fifty years old; his complexion was weathered, his flesh scrawny, his face gaunt

He spent another eight days of pondering this, and at last called himself Don Quixote. (Quixote is armour that covers the thigh)

After reading too many novels on the subject of chivalry Quixada decided to appoint himself as a maiden saving, monster slaying, wrong righting knight errant, which in his time as in ours, was a profession long assigned as a relic of history. Altering reality where and whenever he deemed Quixada, who changed his own name to Don Quixote, was completely overwhelmed by delusion and inspiration and set off on a quest to better the world, to restore it to the glories of the Golden Age. Before too long Sancho Panza, a local peasant, was recruited by Don Quixote as his squire. Together they would become legendary. Among his great adventures is the one where the brave knight saves a young boy from being beaten by his cruel employer, a farmer.



“Giulietta & Federico Hitch a Ride” or “Fellini Assures Merry-Andrew of the Validity of Using an Alter Ego as a Means of Expression”, 2009, Ink and gouache on paper, 27 x 33cm



"Homage to a Pumpkin Dessert & the Discovery of a Khmer Kitchen" or "Merry-Andrew & Melba buy a Limn", 2009, Gouache on paper, 30 x 43cm

Later they come across the boy who had been beaten, and now beaten much worse after the intervention as it made the farmer even angrier. The boy begged the heroic Knight to promise that if he ever saw him in trouble again he would not try to help him. Another great service the knight and his squire effected was the emancipation of some poor chained wretches, who as it turned out were all desperate criminals devoid of morals who later caused much grief and fear in the surrounding region.

It seems that in a similar vane to Cervantes I intended Merry-Andrew, a unique thinker, creative, and full of noble ambitions, to be a metaphor for an artist, and to some degree, quite a large degree really, to represent myself. Through me, Merry-Andrew travels through events and experiences from my life which I regard as personal; he adopts them as his own and publicly displays them; he also assumes to know my views and feelings on significant issues, dilemmas, global events, and art and culture of our day, but he frequently misrepresents me.

In the last quarter of 2008 I began to plan the production of a visual record of the escapades of Merry-Andrew. The vast variety of these means that no one visual style can do them justice, so Merry-Andrew, Jimmy Grant, Starlight, Melba, Biennale Horse and all the others will go public in an array of stylistic diversity in a rented space so there can be no chance of the bamboozlement of any fine upstanding citizens such as directors of commercial galleries.

And now it is time for Merry-Andrew himself;

Our man was approximately 47 years old even when he was twenty, fourteen, or even five; his complexion was weathered, his face was gaunt, his scalp balding, his posture stooped and his linear quality was often electric and his proportions distorted.

He spent eight days pondering a name for himself before settling on "Merry-Andrew the Limner". He liked the grandiose sound of it but his understanding of its meaning was vague.

(Merry-Andrew: A French derivation meaning buffoon or clown – Limner: archaic English for one who depicts imagery by means of drawing or painting)

After looking at far too many art works from a massive suitcase, the young Merry-Andrew determined that he would become a great artist and consequently change, impress and improve the world. Merry-Andrew, aka Andy started to enter into my world and convinced people in my life that they should move into his. Andy was aware it was essential to have a Sancho equivalent, so an artist friend of mine was absorbed by Andy and the trustworthy and loyal Jimmy Grant came to life. The thieving Andy also took my Mitsubishi Magna station wagon and transformed it into his steed Starlight (the name is not even original; it is the colour of my car) and furthermore, he took my friend's Astra and transformed it into an ass and gave it to Jimmy. Not stopping there my wife was lured into the world of Merry-Andrew and became his lady, Melba. Even my daughters and virtually everyone I have ever met or have any knowledge of have been sucked into Merry-Andrew's great eddy.

Like so many other sensitive and concerned artists Andy and Jimmy set out on great adventures with the intention of curing the world of its ills. The heroic antics of this great pair are far too many to mention and besides if you want to know more, that's what the exhibition is for.

The italics denote quotes from "Don Quixote", author; Miguel de Cervantes, Translator; Edith Grossman, published by Vintage 2005.



"Show & Tell as the Passion is Revealed" or "The Sun Shines Weakly on Miss Fernside", 2009, Acrylic paint, gouache, pastel and compressed charcoal on paper, 75 x 50cm

STEPHEN HALL

MERRY-ANDREW THE LIMNER

The Depot Gallery II, 2-14 June
Opening: Saturday 6 June, 3-5pm

The Depot Gallery II
2 Dank Street Waterloo
11am-6pm Tuesday-Saturday
10:30am-3:30pm Sunday

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Stephen Hall was born in Sydney in 1962. He lives and works in Sydney. Merry-Andrew the Limner is his 10th solo exhibition, he has also been included in many group exhibitions including the Blake Prize on 5 occasions, he was awarded an MFA from the UNSW in 2004, and a Paris residency in 2003. For full CV see website.

Cover Image: "Mumbai" or "Merry-Andrew always plays a straight bat & sheds a solitary tear in passing", 2009, Acrylic paint and compressed charcoal on paper, 150 x 143cm