

Vision

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How to **Paint a Tiger**

by Gordon Howard



'Flames of Shiva',
a Royal white
Bengal Tiger
A lithograph
from Sollenhoffen
limestone.

The Imperial Regard

Being in the presence of these great cats commands complete attention - anything less... might easily be fatal.

Past and future have no business here. The mind and its meanderings, would only cloud a compelling and immanent present.

All of which would be too late for a tiger - they have much shorter instants, and cover them in great agile bounds.

The usual daydream of homo sapiens is a hunter's green light, in this feline arena. Attention is God.

Intuition, instinct, keen perception and accurate judgment are in the front seat.

Nothing less will do.

Within myself I noticed a sharpening of the awareness, not a nervousness, but rather a constant watchfulness, a reading of their moods and taking particular notice of what held their attention.

Some years ago, a fascination with painting great carnivores, and the cryptic motto of a Master - 'Art supersedes Nature' (Titians motto), led my steps to a wildcat sanctuary two hours drive north of Auckland. On the site I found six Royal White Bengals, twelve Barbary Lions, two shy Servals and a grumpy baboon that could ride a bicycle.

Urgent on the Menu

It was a rare opportunity to observe these fabulous great cats, at closer quarters than one can in a game park and was not without a frisson of risk into the bargain. My role was to provide a gallery of wildlife works to visitors at the end of a tour. And to assist the various film crews with their plans and research. I was also involved in feeding, watering and hosing down the tigers on hot days.

Until I found myself feeding six tigers and twelve lions, I had no comprehension of the word 'urgent' ! The laws of tooth and claw really become evident at suppertime . Everyday in the early morning and evening the lions would start roaring, so that there was a whole chorus of male and female voices calling back and forth. The ground shook with this deep resonance.

A Royal Introduction

To begin with, we are all inclined to treat an encounter as a visitor to a zoo might, and see the demeanour of a wild predator as an entertainment or a curiosity. In these circumstances the behaviour of the animal does not significantly concern us, since the experience soon passes.

Extended exposure however breeds a watchful mind, and for very practical reasons.

I spent six months observing them and noticed some interesting changes in my own behaviour and in that of the great cats.

There are between two to three thousand tigers living wild in the world today.

Tigers and Lions are consummate hunters, and they watch intently, anything that moves. In doing so they remain utterly still, most especially if they think they are being observed. This became an unnerving experience at close quarters when I found myself the object of their observation.

Not a shadow of a flicker interrupts this glassy gaze. Time and natural selection have sharpened their wit, to detect, and act upon the slightest blink or pause in the caution or attention of potential prey. Once something catches their gaze, their focus is not easily diverted and their response depends upon circumstance. When any visitor to the site appeared limping, or had some irregularity of gait or looked small and vulnerable, all the cats would be simultaneously focused and on the move immediately, in hunting mode and all in concert. I have seen exactly the same behaviour with wild lionesses in Namibia.

The African Lion, from complete stillness, and appearing completely at ease, can spring up, with an explosive power so rapid, that it defies sense and reason. I found the effect similar to hearing a gun fired unexpectedly at close quarters. Even when I knew that the lion would charge, it gave no hint of doing so, and I could not control my startled reaction when it finally did.

By contrast, the tigers, I found, would watch me, without movement and then rise in a slow ballet of ragged "tiger chi" stripes, and conquer space as fast as thought. It makes good sense to be behind a stout fence when this happens. Tigers sense their own strength and mass in action and will use this intelligently. Lions are more circumspect, if approached boldly. They are both to be regarded with extreme caution.

A Photographer's Mistake

Taking photos of tigers and lions is never a straight forward shutter press. These hunters of hunters, know when they are the target, even for photos! They understand the attitude, and are acutely aware of the still observer. The photographer is also a hunter adopting the same mannerisms and much the same means as a hunter to take his photograph. He crouches down and remains still observing the prey. So as often as not the tigers would charge the wire with a growl if they saw me crouching for a photo. On one occasion Aslan, a year old Barbary Lion, was let out of his enclosure for a walk about. I stood some ten metres away holding my camera looking for a useful angle. Then I crouched down to get a better perspective for the shot and immediately he charged! My heart jumped like a jack hammer in my chest, this was a very dangerous mistake.

I straightened up in some real haste as the distance between us evaporated. Aslan stopped on a sixpence just a couple of metres away and sauntered off.

The best opportunities for a good 'shot' arose when something else occupied the attention of these great predators and from these images came the substance and inspiration for my paintings and lithographs.

There is no substitute in art for actually observing nature at first hand. The experience motivates the mind and hand, and the practical realities keep sentimental notions well grounded. So much of art today is

wrapped up in an extravagant myth of ourselves, and original nature and the real connection with Earth have been long forgotten.

Talk with a Tiger

The tigers in particular, are incredible mind readers - their attention is so keen, that they are able to observe moods and often act accordingly.

It soon became obvious in working with them, that accurately reading their moods could be mortally important, and acting to change them from a stalking to a friendly attitude, a most sensible strategy.

I found that talking to them usually evoked a friendly chuff response: a breathy sound that they make to say that everything's fine, with a nod of their magnificent

heads. Replying with a similar sound soon became a conversation with the 'Royals', and was one of the few strategies to keep oneself 'off the menu' if they ever happened to escape from their enclosures.

A Tigress or Two in my Studio

When Shikana, the tigress was due to give birth, a sheltered space was constructed on the lower floor of my studio and I moved into the upstairs room overlooking her enclosure. It was an excellent elevation for viewing, but never one with which she felt at ease.

It was remarkable to see the change in her behaviour as she took to the duties of motherhood. Shikana was very placid during her pregnancy - I fed her fresh grass everyday,



'Guardians of the Horizon', a Barbary lion and lioness.
A lithograph from Sollenhoffen limestone.

which she took from my hands. She enjoyed a good back scratch and would chuff 'hello' and lie alongside the wire as long as I would stay.

A Command Performance

While the pregnant Shikana was confined in the lower floor, she would become restless at the lack of space and pace around the enclosure. I would spend some time practicing flute now and then and noticed that when I did so, she would stretch out and relax completely with a blissful expression of contentment and remain so while my practice continued. It sustains a treasured memory as the rarest of compliments.

A Bengal Cuff, an Imperial Accolade

Within a few days after Sita, her cub was born, Shikana's protective instincts took over, and she would sometimes charge the fence in the enclosure, reaching up well beyond my head and growling at me and sometimes giving a single deafening roar.

There were narrow panels in her enclosure that were free of wire to allow clear opportunities for photographs and on a couple of occasions she managed to cuff me around the back of the head and shoulders as I was passing.

Fortunately there wasn't much room for her to get a real haymaker going!

Shortly after Sita was born I had the chance to hold her in my arms. She was the size of a small domestic cat, but robust, really heavy

and already possessed of most potent vigour. There was no mistaking that this was a tiger.

It was wonderful to watch Shikana training her cub, who had a powerful set of lungs and would bellow and grunt when mum's attention became too overwhelming.

Art surpasses Nature

Some of Shikana's 'motherly behaviour' was baffling. Sometimes she would hold her jaws around the tiny cub, mouthing it somehow with her teeth. On these occasions the cub would protest loudly. At other times Shikana would lick the cub vigorously for quite some time. Long after the cub was clean it seemed.

On reflection I remembered an account of the behaviour of a she bear with her cub, given as the explanation for the Master's motto. It appears that this activity enlivens and massages the body and limbs of the growing cub, strengthening muscles and bones and rendering a cub fitter. Later Shikana trained her cub in the art of obedience.

Perhaps this illumines the meaning of Titian's motto: 'The inherent wisdom of creation selects for intelligent behaviour as well as genes.' The Art or intelligence of the mother improves the chances of the cub by entraining a vigorous body and mind. Whether there is an instinctive or intuitive intelligence driving this, it is still intelligence artfully deployed.

And finally to the question where we began this wild meander... There is only one way to paint a tiger... very, very, very... carefully.

A special thanks...

... to those who gave generously to assist in the preparation of this issue, particularly with photographs.

Also thank you to the 'Vision' team – Nicolette Farrelly (editor), Selwyn Daniels (proof reader), Marilyn Marshall (editing) and Andrew Iten (layout).

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The Four Pieta

of Michelangelo Buonarotti

by Nigel Rankin

Pieta, n. Picture, sculpture, of Virgin Mary holding dead body of Christ on her lap. (Concise Oxford Dictionary)

Last year my wife and I were lucky enough to have a few days in Florence. We went to as many of the sights as we could in the time available, including the Accademia Gallery and the Duomo Museum, where we saw two of Michelangelo's pieta. On a previous trip I had seen the pieta in St. Peter's in Rome and in subsequent reading I discovered that there was a fourth pieta in Milan. After a little more Googling and reading I thought it might be of interest to write my impressions of them all.

Michelangelo sculpted the four pieta mentioned above, three of which are unquestionably by his hand and one which is the subject of some debate as to its authenticity. Each has a name, relating it to its location or to some aspect of its history. In this paper the four will be dealt with in historical order.

The first and best known is the Vatican Pieta, so called because it is held in St. Peter's in Rome. It was not commissioned by the Vatican but for a French Cardinal's tomb. However, the tomb was destroyed in the building of St. Peter's, and so it has remained there to the present day. Michelangelo was only 23 years old when he began the work, but he completed it in about a year, having spent the previous nine months supervising the transport of his chosen block of Carrara marble from the quarry to Rome.

The Vatican pieta is a masterpiece by any

standard and any age, luminously beautiful, serene and flawless. The composition, execution and finish are all of the highest order, never to be repeated for all the other pieta are finished. It is also his only signed work, engraved on the band which crosses the Virgin's bust. One of Michelangelo's biographers, Condivi, describes it as being "of so great and rare beauty, that anyone seeing it is moved to piety".

This pieta is the only one in which the body of Christ is horizontal, lying, seemingly almost weightless, across Mary's knees. There is no evidence of distress in the sculpture, the overall impression being of stillness and peace, in spite of the complexity and detail of the figures and their clothing. The Virgin is portrayed sitting on the rock where the Cross was raised, with the body of Christ resting lifeless on her lap, as if in sleep. With her gaze downcast she supports the Body with her right hand, and in a single gesture of emotion, extends her left hand, part in supplication and part in demonstration, as if to draw our attention to the nature of the age we live in and to its effects.

There is an interesting paradox. Mary's face looks much younger than that of her dead Son. There is no explanation available from Michelangelo as to the reason for this, but he used this image of the Virgin at least one other time, in the Bruges Madonna. In this piece the head of the Madonna is virtually identical in shape, headdress and downward gaze. It is possible that Michelangelo had decided that this represented the ideal which he was attempting to portray.

The next pieta, the Palestrina, is held in the Accademia (Nic, this is the correct spelling for the institution in Florence) Gallery in Florence, only a few steps from the David. It was started in 1547 and finished about 1559, and is named after the place where it was found.

It is dramatically different from the Vatican pieta. The flowing openness of the Vatican pieta is gone, replaced by a sculpture which is compact, rectangular, flat, almost brutal. The body of Christ is now upright but clearly broken, supported with difficulty by Mary on Christ's left and another figure behind. Christ's head and right shoulder look to be dislocated, so lifeless does the Body appear. Distress is now evident on Christ's face and also on the face of the figure behind the Body. There is debate as to how much Michelangelo worked on this sculpture and there are clues which support both sides of the argument, but the power and drama of this piece are spectacular and undeniable.

The third pieta, the Bandini, was completed in 1555 and is also held in Florence, in the Duomo Museum. It is named after Francesco Bandini, who owned it until late in the 17th century. It is thought that Michelangelo intended this version for his own tomb, but became dissatisfied with it and broke off Christ's left arm with a hammer. One of his pupils reattached the arm and completed the group.

Again, the body of Christ is upright, supported this time by Mary, Mary Magdalene and Nicodemus. The head, arms and right leg are held in distorted positions and Christ's left leg disappears into the sculpture behind Mary's body, again in a grossly unnatural position. In spite of all this the piece is full of movement, with the limbs and bodies of the figures joined in mutual engagement. The remarkable feature

of this version is that the face of Nicodemus is said to be a self-portrait of Michelangelo himself; it is certainly very similar to the bust by de Volterra. If it is truly a self-portrait it would have been done as an act of devotion as Michelangelo was a profoundly religious man.



Lastly the Rondanini pieta (Picture 4), which Michelangelo was working on in the days before he died, at the then prodigious age of 89 years. It is named after the Palazzo Rondanini, where it originated, but is now held in the Castello Sforzesco in Milan.

It is almost two sculptures in one, as there are two components present, in two completely different styles. Firstly, the redundant right arm of an earlier, classical version which Michelangelo rejected, but never removed, has to be dismissed. There are now only two figures, Christ's and Mary's, but both are upright, elongated, devoid of detail and surprisingly 'modern' in appearance. The bodies of Mary and Jesus are standing very close, almost melded together, in a tender embrace suggesting the love of a mother and child. Christ's body is being supported by Mary, but his head is not hanging as if dead but is inclined to his left, as if listening to her voice.

In this last pieta Christ's body is naked, devoid even of shroud, suggesting that by avoiding any distracting decoration Michelangelo was trying at the last to reduce the figures and their meaning to the barest essential. The overall effect is of an intensely spiritual, personal, dying effort to demonstrate in marble something which he knew deep within himself.

Thus the four pieta span Michelangelo's creative life. Any one of them, especially the Vatican, would have assured an artist's reputation. That he sculpted all four demonstrates his extraordinary creative genius.

Bookshop News



by Geoff Long

Here are some samples from recent additions to the bookshop...

Dandelions

A man who took great pride in his lawn found himself with a large crop of dandelions. He tried every method he knew to destroy them. Still they plagued him.

Finally he wrote to the Department of Agriculture. He enumerated all the things he had tried and closed his letter with the question: "What shall I do now?"

In due course the reply came: "We suggest you learn to love them".

There is more to this and the other short stories, from a variety of sources, that form the book "Song of the Bird" by Anthony de Mello - a Jesuit Priest. Quite charming and something that can be easily picked up as a gentle reminder to laugh with life.

Universal Ethics and Moral Conduct

"The basis of all systems, social or political, rests upon the goodness of men. No nation is great or good because Parliament enacts this or that, but because its men are great and good..."

You also may find this a thought provoking statement which comes from a small book which is a compilation of talks given by Swami Vivekananda called "Universal Ethics and Moral conduct". It is not as heavy as it sounds and it draws from a number of teachings to offer some insight on today's questions – such as the "Utility of Morality and Ethics".

From the Zen book by Daniel Levin.

A famous storyteller came to a town, and a big group of people gathered around him. He had to shout his story so that everyone could hear. After the crowd had dissipated, he was still shouting. Someone asked why he was yelling when there was nobody there to listen.

The sage said, "In the beginning I had to ?? scream ? that others could hear my story, but now I must scream so that I can hear the story".

So often we teach what we most need to learn.

Good Company 2

This book is now available in the bookshop, in hard cover only.

To finish with, a piece from a financial review called "The Daily Reckoning" which is free on the web and accessible by Googling "The Daily Reckoning":

You see, you start out life full of expectations and confidence. Then, you become more cautious. Then, you become more realistic. And then, you become discouraged and hopeless. Finally, after you've given up all hope of ever making the world a better place, you become amused by it; you realize that there's no reason to change it. It's funny enough the way it is.

Any queries about books and their availability, please contact Geoff Long: advasco@xtra.co.nz

The Dialogues of Plato – A Voyage of Discovery

by Marilyn Marshall

**Therefore, Phaedrus, I say of Love that he is the fairest and best in himself,
and the cause of what is fairest and best in all other things.**

(The Symposium)

The invitation to attend a mid-summer Plato residential in Auckland included the tempting draw card: “If you have ever wanted to come to some understanding of Platonic philosophy, this is your best opportunity. Not to be missed.”

It sounded good but as the weeks went by and the invitation was repeated in group notices, I still delayed registering. The Dialogues had always been frustratingly difficult to comprehend, resulting mostly in a kind of “headache”. Only rarely in glimpses of enlightenment could the fine thread of reasoning in the dialectic be followed before it disappeared in a maze of mental gymnastics.

If I took the plunge and attended, was it going to be headache or illumination? Finally, convinced that this could indeed be the best opportunity for a break-through, I registered and joined 40 other students who arrived at 268 West Tamaki Road on the evening of 13 January to begin a voyage of discovery. We were to meet Mr David Horan, who was to guide the event, the next morning as he had yet to arrive from conducting a two day Plato residential in Wellington. Before that, he had led a Summer School in Melbourne, and short

seminars in Sydney, Perth and Brisbane.

At the first morning session we were immediately struck by his enthusiasm and devotion to Plato, the Socratic method and what Socrates had stood for. It soon became apparent that David Horan was not only a devotee but a real scholar. The wealth of knowledge he made available to us, was obviously the fruit of much disciplined study. Not just of Plato either: when a passage from Shakespeare’s “The Tempest” was mentioned during a later session, he could quote it exactly. Likewise, he quoted from the writings of St. Augustine, and others. At times, his recall was astonishing.

It was obvious that if we were prepared to abandon fixed ideas and positions concerning Platonic philosophy, we would benefit greatly from what this man had to offer.

The Euthyphro Dialogue

A film David Horan had produced of this Dialogue was shown before we split into groups to commence our study of it. Professional actors played the parts of Euthyphro and Socrates. Later, we were told that this was one of the most difficult

dialogues and a sigh of relief rose up in some quarters. It certainly was! At times we felt lost in the convoluted dialectic and wondered if, by persisting in his questioning of an increasingly resistant and angry Euthyphro, Socrates was bashing his head against the proverbial brick wall? The inner sceptic even began to think “no wonder he was poisoned!”

In this dialogue Socrates attempted to find out what Euthyphro really knew about the world of the Gods (he claimed to know much) and examined the soundness of Euthyphro’s decision to have his own father prosecuted for murder.

From this dialogue arises the famous Euthyphro Question: “Is the pious or holy beloved by the gods because it is holy, or holy because it is beloved of the gods?”

Like many of the dialogues, the “Euthyphro” had an

inconclusive ending. As Euthyphro, unable to take any more questioning, walked away, Socrates was left feeling rather disconsolate. This was an inevitable

outcome of such persistence, you might think, but it would be a mistake to jump to a superficial conclusion. Later, we were to discover the real reason for Socrates’ habit of interrogation

The conversations in our group studies of “Euthyphro”, which were facilitated by Mrs Frances Horan and local tutors, and in sessions with David Horan, were remarkable for the high level of enthusiasm and participation by all from the start – no awkward silences, no wondering what to say. As the outer layers of our preconceptions

were gradually dissolved during dialectic sessions and in response to David Horan’s own complete openness and generosity of spirit, we spoke freely. A few were sceptical of the genuineness of Socrates’ intentions when subjecting people to intense questioning. Surely it was a little fallacious to say that Socrates really believed the people he questioned had true wisdom and knowledge that he was eager to learn? Wasn’t he just trying to expose their ignorance? This, of course, is the common view of the Platonic Dialogues but, having arisen, the question needed to be satisfied.

As part of the process of resolution, our attention was directed to “The Apology”, in which Socrates stated at his trial what impelled him to relentlessly pursue his unpopular activities. He had been accused of

corrupting the youth of Athens and had some powerful enemies among those he had questioned to discover the truth of their statements. In the Apology, Socrates disclosed that the Oracle at Delphi had said

that there was no man wiser than he, Socrates. Truly believing that he was not wise and knew nothing, Socrates wondered what the god had meant and set out to try the question. He decided to examine those who were said to be wise, to establish that they were indeed wiser than he, but instead discovered that they were foolish and knew nothing. Knowing he was making enemies, Socrates nonetheless felt impelled to continue his quest.

In the following passage from the Apology, Socrates sets out the conclusion he had arrived at concerning the words of the Oracle:

“Then dialectic, and dialectic alone, goes directly to the first principle and is the only science which does away with hypotheses in order to make her ground secure; the eye of the soul, which is literally buried in an outlandish mire, is by her gentle aid lifted upwards”.

Republic Book VII 533c

“This investigation has led to my having many enemies of the worst and most dangerous kind, and has given occasion also to many calumnies, and I am called wise, for my hearers always imagine that I myself possess the wisdom which I find wanting in others: but the truth is, O men of Athens, that God only is wise; and in this oracle he means to say that the wisdom of men is little or nothing; he is not speaking of Socrates, he is only using my name as an illustration, as if he said, He, O men, is the wisest, who, like Socrates, knows that his wisdom is in truth worth nothing.”

is his pursuit, how foolish would he be not to recognize that the beauty in every form is one and the same! And when he perceives this he will abate his violent love of the one, which he will despise and deem a small thing, and will become a lover of all beautiful forms....”

After this was put before us, we were asked to think of one “special/sacred event, or thing”, reflect on it and then to go for a walk for 10 minutes. When we came back we spoke of what had been discovered. From our

“And we have forgotten how to read: how to pause, liberate ourselves from our worries, return into ourselves, and leave aside our search for subtlety and originality, in order to meditate calmly, ruminate, and let the texts speak to us.

Philosophy as a Way of Life – Pierre Hadot

Socrates also pointed out that because of his investigations he had no time to give either to any public matter of interest or to any concern of his own, but was in utter poverty by reason of his devotion to the god.

The acceptance that Socrates was a truly humble man who sincerely believed that he knew nothing began to replace the scepticism, leaving the mind open and receptive. Without this receptivity, the dialogues would continue to be viewed in a superficial manner and their message would be lost.

One of the most potent, and practical exercises we were given to help turn the mind from consideration of the mundane to the sacred or holy had been formulated by David Horan from the following passage in “The Symposium”:

“For he who would proceed aright in this matter should begin in youth to visit beautiful forms; and first, if he be guided by his instructor aright, to love one such form only – out of that he should create fair thoughts; and soon he will of himself perceive that the beauty of one form is akin to the beauty of another; and then if beauty of form in general

feedback, it was obvious that the progression outlined in the Symposium had taken place, quite naturally, and could be understood in our own experience. To view everything as sacred was no longer far-off or unobtainable but could happen at any time just by following the instruction.

During our last session we sat enthralled while Mr Horan described the long line of Western scholars who had followed the Platonic tradition and explained to us the

DIALECTIC PRINCIPLES (or Motives)

1. Enter into all discussions from a “pure love of knowing the truth”
2. Be willing to be refuted

DISCIPLINES

1. Listen (precisely with interest)
2. Respect (without prejudice or criticism)
3. Suspend (personal opinion or view)
4. From these ask questions to uplift
5. Follow the Answer and the Answerer.

disciplined processes of his work translating the dialogues. He suggested that perhaps the function of the dialogues was to overwhelm the ordinary activities of the mind – those which try to understand, try to work everything out – so that they were silenced. Then, a finer part of the mind could begin to operate.

The general feeling as we departed on Saturday morning was of delight and deep satisfaction. We had had a taste of everything, from the undeniable truth of Socrates' words "an unexamined life is not worth living", which we acknowledged in the dialectic sessions, to the fresh experience of an ancient relationship: teacher on one side, student on the other, discourse joining them, knowledge arising. The benefits of this flowed in full measure – all it needed was willingness to set aside the old ego and participate in a spirit of enquiry

The effects of this encounter will vary according to the individual – in this case it has led to further study and penetration of the dialogues and a growing appreciation of the finer realms of which they speak. We owe an enormous debt to the "divine Plato" for setting the dialogues down, thus making them accessible, and an even greater debt to

Socrates himself for his willingness to sacrifice all in pursuit of ultimate truth.

Those of you who attended the Plato days with David Horan in January will be delighted to learn that he will return early in 2011 to guide us through a week on Plato and dialectic. Keep the 14th – 20th January free and watch the notices for more details.

In the meantime there is a Plato / Dialectic Group which meets on Wednesdays at 268 West Tamaki Road from 9.45 am – 12 pm: enquiries to Lilian Beanland: wandlbeanland@xtra.co.nz

Thanks must go to those who worked hard to make the January event possible, particularly Tessa Stephens whose attention to administration helped to ensure that everything went smoothly. In this she liaised closely with Frances Horan who takes care of all the details behind the scenes to assist her husband. Thanks also to Lilian for her enthusiasm and encouragement. And it goes without saying that we are all very grateful for David Horan's generosity and careful guidance.

** The Jowett translations of the Dialogues are readily available on the internet in text and audio formats if you do not have the books.*



David Horan is a senior member of the Dublin School of Philosophy, and, in conjunction with the School and the Irish universities, he has organized a public "Day With Plato" event

for the past 23 years. He has produced dramatisations of the dialogues for these events and more recently produced three film versions of Plato's dialogues. He has run Plato Study Weeks with the Dublin School in Ireland and in Italy and has facilitated four Plato Summer Schools in

Melbourne. He has lectured extensively on the dialogues and has conducted study days and weekends. He and his wife Frances have led group tours to Greece for 12 years, combining the study of Plato with visits to the sites of the ancient world.

David is currently producing a new translation of the dialogues—a substantial project that began in 2008 and will run for some 10 years. Apart from the translation work, his current research interest is self-knowledge in the dialogues of Plato. This work is being conducted at the Centre for the Study of the Platonic Tradition in Trinity College, Dublin.

“An Artistic Journey within” Discovering the true artist

by Sue Cole

A free one-day introductory course to discover the true artist within was held by the Hamilton branch of the School of Philosophy on Sunday March 28th. The key principles of the day were attention, self awareness, *the three gunas, and who am I?

The day was aimed at people who enjoyed art and were interested in discovering a deeper meaning in all activities in their lives.

It was held in the rented facility of the Hamilton School at 87 Boundary Road, Claudelands and ran from 10am until 4.30pm. The day was attended by 20 participants which included 6 people from the Auckland School. Attendees were asked to bring their own lunch and were served a very substantial and delicious morning and afternoon tea. It was a pleasure to be able to provide hospitality to the members of the Auckland school who have provided it many times to Hamilton students during residential weekends and weeks.

Those who were up early to prepare for the day were rewarded by the sight of a local event ‘Balloons over Waikato’, with several hot air balloons flying low over the houses.

Tony Clarke, who is now IC of the Hamilton School, was the facilitator for the day. Geoff

Taylor, a member of the Hamilton School, provided a session on sculpting ‘with attention to touch’. Participants produced some amazing sculptures. The one that was notable for me was of a baby’s hand with the fingers curled around a small ball. The attention to detail was outstanding.



The day was divided into four sessions, each one addressing one of the key principles. Participants were observed practicing straight lines and circles, drawing in the garden or parts of nature and a landscape. The three gunas were illustrated using the three primary colours, yellow, red and blue.

The verbal feedback from people as they departed left no doubt that the day had been a success and enjoyed by all. Many were asking when the next one was being held, so watch this space and the notices.

**The “three gunas” represent energies. Sattva is lightness and awareness, rajas is movement and tamas is sleep.*

The Ficino Panels

This year, a booklet was published by the Ficino Educational Foundation which incorporated text and paintings depicting the five elements: Space, Air, Fire, Water, and Earth. The paintings were a 2007 commission given to Ngaire Bennett of the Auckland School of Philosophy. Both artistically and philosophically, the paintings are very important works and thus I asked Ngaire to write text to go with them in the hope that a book might be produced. This she did and in March this year they went on sale.

Being associated with Ngaire Bennett in the production of the 'Ficino Panels' booklet was both a pleasure and a privilege. Both text and paintings are not only beautiful but also very profound. Indeed, it was a spiritual exercise.

For the children at Ficino, the Panels themselves represent inspiration on a daily basis. They put the world in a wider and deeper perspective. There is so much in them to discover. Every time one looks, one sees more.

Interested in finding out a little more about the beginnings of the project and the process involved, I put a few questions to Ngaire:

How exactly did the Panels come about?

How did ideas arise for each panel?

They are a story of Creation – what significance do they have for you? What feelings arose as you were painting?

Tessa Stephens



Ngaire's reply:

“Digby Crompton, on behalf of the Executive Committee of the School of Philosophy, approached. Mark Broadwith, (Head Master of Ficino School in 2007) as to the possible nature of a gift from the School of Philosophy to acknowledge the first ten years of Ficino School. It was mentioned that some painted panels representing the five elements, to enhance the assembly hall, would be appreciated. Mr. Crompton then suggested the use of the numbers 1-9 of the enneagram

in the panels, and that is how they came to be based on the circle of nine points¹, as described in the book.

Once the decision was made to create the panels, their execution became a great joy and the images seemed to come by themselves and took on a life of their own.

Graeme McGregor prepared the frames and designed the shape in accordance with the golden Rectangle, using two rectangles in consideration of the space available. Mr. McGregor was also responsible for painting the skeleton forms of the Platonic solids on the panels.

The first panel to be painted was the element Earth, showing the numbers 1 and 9. The wonder and beauty of the universe is said to be the fulfillment of the desire of the Absolute at One to be many. Yet in this context, our planet Earth in particular, seemed so fragile. That is why the idea arose of humans being so vital in the responsibility of care for this most beautiful planet. They were seen as very important in this first panel where the numbers 1 and 9 are both shown. Human beings do indeed have a responsibility to look after our planet, and also great power which may be used lawfully or unlawfully.

Each panel contains a monkey. The idea of the monkeys representing the senses came from seeing the exquisite tapestry panels, 'The Lady and the Unicorn', displayed in the Cluny Museum in Paris.

Years ago, under the tutelage of Mr. Peter Tibbits, the story of Abraham and Sarah was painted as a triptych, and a drawing from the artist Nicolas Poussin (1594-1665) was used to present the figures of Abraham and Sarah. These were used as the man and his wife in the panel representing Earth.

In the second panel the numbers 2 and 8 appear. Because of the mysterious quality of number 2, where it is said knowledge of all the unmanifest, multifarious forms of the

creation are held before creation arises, and also because the element water at 8 has this magical and mysterious quality of binding all things together, moonlight was chosen to convey the essence of water in this panel. Moonlight is connected with water in many mythologies. The significance of this panel awakened the awareness of the sacredness of water and the measure of its use.

The third panel includes the numbers 3 and 7. The number 3 signifies the blissful nature





of the Absolute. The number 7 comes in the realm of fire. The explosive image of light and heat led also to Sir Isaac Newton's discovery (sometime in the 17th century) of how a ray of white light passing through a prism, separates the colours of the spectrum. Painting this panel was a very enjoyable experience allowing great freedom in depicting fire and light.

"The number 4 in the fourth panel signifies the universal feeling of existence, and the number 6 represents the element air.

In painting the beautiful bird soaring up through the element air, the experience was also poignant in realising that this egret is an endangered species due to the gradual disappearance of its forest habitat.

In the fifth panel signifying the element Space or Ether, the two number 5s are shown. This is to demonstrate how number 5 falls in the middle from both sides. On one side is the coarse physical world which is subject to some observation and on the other side is the world of subtle and causal nature.



This panel was great fun to paint, and even trying to depict some idea of this vast cosmos was really challenging.

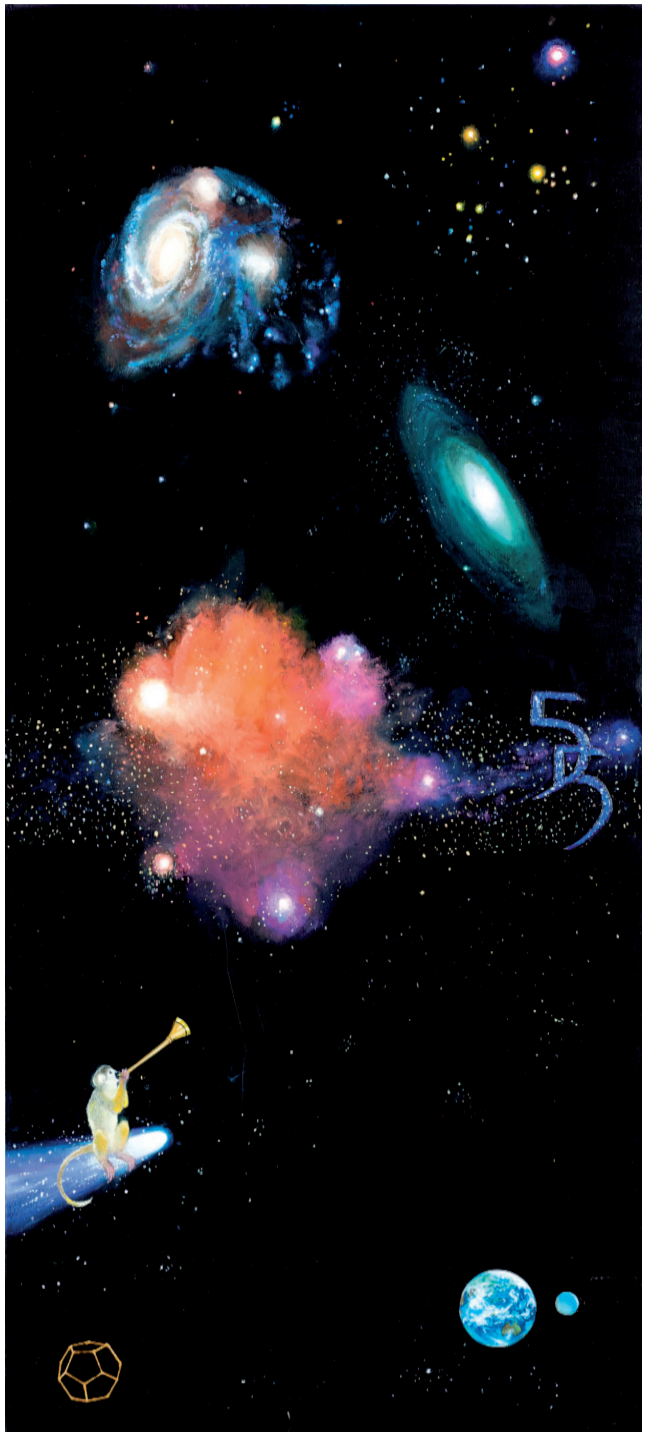
Stories of Creation always present a wider view, and as Shakespeare's Hamlet said, 'There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, than are dreamt of in your philosophy'."

On two occasions I was lucky enough to witness the spontaneous enthusiasm of the Ficino children when panels were unveiled at assembly for the first time. The children love them. Apart from enjoyment of the colours and forms in the paintings, they readily home in on the magic and mystery within each. Young children are often very sensitive to things of subtle substance. On the other hand, their elders tend to be caught up in a mad whirl of activity on a daily basis. For those of us in this category, I can recommend taking time away from the demands of life in order to read the booklet. The opportunity to pause and absorb the subtleties of the art and philosophy within will enable you to rise refreshed and empowered.

Tessa Stephens

Booklets are available from the School of Philosophy bookshop for \$30.00.

1. The circle of Nine Points is a story of Creation. It depicts the movement in stages from Absolute at One through to gross earth at Nine.



Contributions

from

Ficino School



My Great Holiday

by Mathew Hudson

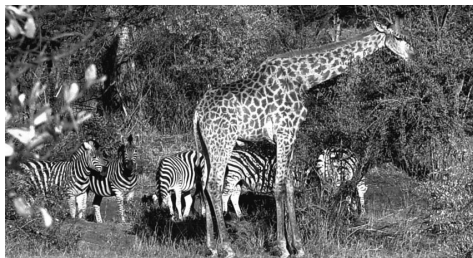
Class 3

In the holidays I went to Moewaka Quarry. I had a swim at a very deep and very cold river. I put my head under the misty water, then I went to find some fossils. I found good ones too!

I slid down the Quarry on my feet with shoes on. I jumped over plants ahead of me. It was like skateboarding but you were doing it without one. Then it was lunchtime! Dad, Arion and I went to have lunch.

After that I did some skimming. I found good skimming stones. Some were smooth and some were rough.

Next I went with Orly to see into the distance. It was very beautiful, but it was a very long climb up. Dad said, "Get down, get down, quickly!" So Orly and I zoomed down quickly. Then I found a very big hill to roll down. It was very steep. I got dizzy at the end.



A Scorching Stroll in South Africa

by Riddhi Kavale

Class 4

One scorching hot day as the sun shone brightly, starving giraffes stretched their lengthy necks to munch on the dry crunchy leaves, while a herd of stripy zebras chomped happily on dry brittle grass.

The giant dark and gloomy forest with its prickly thorns and bushes waved its bare branches rapidly, trying desperately to give the animals some fresh air to cool them.

The zebras chattering to each other, making snorting noises as if they were looking for other zebras, wandered amongst the scraggy branches.

After a long meal, the animals, plump with food, set off back to the dry plains.

I can't swim but Dad said you can do it. And I could.



by Vishwas Valmikinathan

Class 1

Why?

By Gyorgjika Farrelly

Class 7

Something was terribly wrong with my father that evening when he came home. His face was shadowed and as soon as he arrived he took my mother into his study and when she came out she was crying. They ushered all of us, Christopher, May, baby Ann and myself, Sarah into the drawing room.

"We have some bad news for you children," said my father. I felt a chill go through me though the room was warm.

"Please just tell us" implored Christopher the eldest who couldn't bear suspense.

"All right," sighed my father, "My work has crashed, that means we've lost a lot of money."

"And," whispered my mother, regaining control of her voice, "We have to sell many of our things."

"Like our house?" asked May, the bookworm, "Like in..." she trailed off as she often did when thinking about books.

"Yes, our house, and we are going to Route 66 to go and find work" Father replied, "We may never return to the city."

I remained silent holding baby Ann, watching her peaceful sleeping face, what Father had said whirling round in my head. Where would we go? Where would we find work? What would happen to my friends? Too many questions, no answers.

"Is Mr Smelton still coming to tea?" asked May.

Father hesitated "Well ... no, he ... well ... no." he faltered.

"Why?" May asked.

"... well, he's dead" Father said quietly.

"How?"

"He lost so much money he couldn't cope and

killed himself" he said even more quietly.

I looked up in alarm. Dead? No, that couldn't be! "But, what about Celly?" I cried referring to Mr Smelton's daughter.

"She is fine" replied Father.

"Now we must pack," said Mother, speaking again, "we are leaving tonight."

* * * * *

I came back to the present. I remembered I was not in my comfortable home back in New York. I was in our small covered wagon crawling along 66. No longer wearing latest made frocks, going to tea parties. Where hunger had been a slight want for the next meal, chores setting and clearing the table. With time to play with dolls and write letters to friends ...

My thoughts were interrupted by Ann crying again. I got up to comfort her. When I got to her a feeling of foreboding swelled inside me, she was tossing and her bed was drenched with sweat, there was a rash on her cheeks and neck and the tongue in her open mouth was scarlet.

A few weeks later we buried Ann by the side of 66 by a lone and dying tree and carved her name in the bark. It felt like leaving a part of me there in the dry earth.

We carried on speaking little, eating little. I wondered what was happening to my friends. Was the cruel world taking its toll on them too? Travelling along 66. Why does life do that?

"The people in flight from the terror behind – strange things happen to them, some bitterly cruel and some so beautiful the faith is refired forever."

John Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath*

This story was recently entered into:
THE ELSIE LOCKE WRITING PRIZE
2010 for original writing by children in
Years 7 and 8. The topic was as follows:

*"Describe an incident or tell a story set in
the 1930's Depression. Events described may
be real or fictitious."*



I took the first agonizingly slow and careful step onto the bridge, it shook a little. I held my breath and gripped the rope railings so hard my knuckles turned white. The bridge grew still and I knew it could bear my weight. I walked more quickly now, but the fear of falling was unstoppable. To distract myself from thinking about it I focused my eyes on the endless road that stretched beyond the bridge.

Crossing a bridge

by Joanna Li

Class 6

At the end of a dim, foggy forest was a long, narrow road leading to a swaying tight rope bridge which stretched from one side of the gaping chasm to the other. It was a dark night but I could make out a tall, broad-shouldered figure standing in the moonlight. A figure with a long, curved sword. A figure whose golden glowing eyes pierced the gloom. A figure that stood waiting; waiting for a chance to strike. I gulped.

Suddenly the silence seemed heavier than before and pressed down on me. I began to take quick short gasps of air, but I knew I must not warn the enemy. I forced my trembling hands to be still and to breathe evenly and slowly. A small rustling sound made me start off. I made my numb legs move. One step. Then another. And another. Just a few more steps until the bridge.

Then with a jolt I realised and wondered. Where was the guardian of the bridge? I started to sweat in fear. I whirled around in case he had crept up behind me. No one there. I slowly turned around to face the bridge again, half expecting to see someone there. Much to my relief there was no one, but my neck hairs were prickling which told me I should stay alert.

I was halfway across when I heard a cracking sound. I looked nervously behind me. The wooden planks were beginning to fall! I started to sprint as fast as I could, my heart pumping painfully with every step. Only a few more steps until the end.....I was not fast enough. I could feel the planks breaking beneath my feet. Was this how it all ended?! I made one final desperate leap for the edge. I braced myself for the fall...and my feet hit solid ground! I tumbled onto the ground and sighed with relief. Then I looked over to the other side and there was the guardian of the bridge. His golden eyes glowed in the darkness and they narrowed so they were just slits. I could almost hear him cursing that he had failed to destroy me...I shuddered and fled that place for I never wanted to see that cliff, ever again.

The Tempest

by Taylen Paterson

Class 5

The waves crashed against the boat like an angry dog charging and attacking its victim. The sea foamed like the dog's spit, the sailors climbed the rigging as high as a mountain. The angels blew their horns and trumpets like the phoenix's cry. During the dark and stormy night the sailors fell out of the ship like a child throws a toy and it was crushed like it was in a monster's hand. As the waves got stronger the boat tossed and turned like a restless sleeper.

Play of Spirit by Class 2

Class Two performed the Play of Spirit in which the Gods, after winning a great battle, become boastful of their powers. The mysterious Spirit appears and the gods try to discover his identity.



Here Spirit is unmoved as Wind whirls and demonstrates his power to blow all the other

Letter to a Biographer

by Arion Hudson Class
7



Dear Mrs Mc Bandoler,

I am writing to ask you to write a short biography about my grandfather. He is dead, so you will not be able to interview him. Even if you did meet him three years ago when he was alive, you would not have been able to hear him because he did not speak properly and he would not have remembered anyway.

You can, however, talk to any of his relatives and two of his friends by arrangement with me, by phoning my mobile. You can also interview me at 5 pm on Sundays. I also have some recorded tapes of his memories which you can use.

I would particularly like you to focus on his farming life, but still include the rest of it, including the funeral.

I hope all goes well and that you have fun writing, editing and typing the biography up as I am very keen on writing myself.

Yours sincerely,

Gods over. He cannot, however, blow away a straw presented by Spirit. The Gods finally discover that it is through the power, grace and goodness of Spirit that they can do anything.

The School Hall was packed, the air was full of excitement



and expectation. Class Two appeared, brilliantly costumed and offered a wonderfully energetic and well articulated performance for their first of many plays to come!

Practical Philosophy

Term 3 begins week commencing 19 July (Part 1 Tues 20 and Thurs 22 July).

Term 4 begins week commencing 11 Oct (Part 1 Tues 12 Oct and Thurs 14 Oct).

You can attend either of the venues indicated below.

**27 Esplanade Rd,
Mt Eden or
North Shore,
Lake House Arts Centre**

Course fee is \$135 for nine weeks.

For further information

www.philosophy.school.nz

or call us toll free on
0800 610 539
for more details

Sydney

Sanskrit Week

by David Crompton & Jenny Laird

Mahratta, home of the Sydney branch of the School of Philosophy, is a stately, elegantly furnished building surrounded by beautifully landscaped lawns and gardens.

This substantial environment was the setting for a Sanskrit residential week which unfolded from 9th to 16th January. It is the 20th year that such residential weeks have been held in Australia to study aspects of the Sanskrit language.

A day of celebration, with lectures, was held at the end of the week to mark this anniversary. Various speakers gave talks, including Dr. McComas Taylor, linguist and Head of the South Asia Centre in the Australian National University. He confirmed that Sanskrit, unlike Latin and Ancient Greek, is still spoken today in parts of India. Vincent Wallace, from the Dublin school, showed slides of his visit to India to learn Sanskrit where it was still spoken. Diane Kruger gave a talk on Aboriginal languages including Aboriginal grammar. She also showed us words that were similar in different languages. The Egyptian word 'tahu' means 'beloved' and the Maori word 'tahu' also means beloved. She warned us, however, to be wary of concluding that there is a historical correlation between two languages where words are the same or similar. For example, the Egyptian word

'ratu' means 'afflict', a similar Maori word '-rata' is a kind of native tree.

The Australians have made great strides with the study of Sanskrit. They have sat numerous exams, attended residential weeks in the UK, visited Sanskrit centres in India, produced reading material and CDs of verses, chants and stories, set up a Sanskrit website, participated on an international Sanskrit website, and more. It certainly sets a great example; and they give generous support and encouragement to us more fledgling 'Sanskritists'.

Dr Gary Grohmann heads the Australian faculty. He, along with Elizabeth Rochetta and a dedicated team organise this event every year. Other tutors in residence were, Richard Elias, head of the U.K. Sanskrit faculty, Helen Harper from London, Vincent Wallace, Dianne Kruger and Gai Kroczek from Perth and Dr Barry Mayall from Melbourne.

It was a full programme, which included chanting of Vedic verses, dictionary study and reflection upon verses from the Bhagavad Gita and then a study of grammar. Each afternoon began with a half hour of personal study. Several options were offered in the following two sessions: grammar through song, Calligraphy and Vedic dance, translations of stories for exam preparation, grammar, singing, and sounding.

The programme appeared to provide nourishment and encouragement for all; no matter what the level of understanding or ability with the Sanskrit language was.

Who could forget the grammar through song sessions led by Vincent Wallace! These sessions included music, song and actions and even a song about a pussy cat which visited a king's palace, and created much mirth. The Irish day school is using 'Sanskrit grammar through song' as a means of introducing the children to the Sanskrit language with a fresh approach.

Richard Elias conducted the evening meetings which were enlightening, fun and nourishing for all. One felt awed and grateful for the wisdom, simplicity and depth of experience he offered. He also read words from The Gospel According to Thomas, at the beginning of each day, a Gospel which he mentioned was very dear to his heart.

At the beginning of the residential week, Elias told the history of Leon MacLaren's introduction of the study of the Sanskrit language to the School of Economic Science.

He was a remarkable man with a remarkable vision, to whom one feels grateful. An aspect of hearing of the history of an event is that it expands the view and thus nurtures appreciation and understanding on a more substantial level - events get put into context.

After the week had ended and with a number of hours to fill before we caught an evening return flight to Auckland, John Schell very generously showed us some of Sydney's sights: Mrs Macquarie's seat and the Botanical gardens, a temporary display at the Sydney Art Gallery celebrating Indian art and culture, and Botany Bay. Sydney, certainly, is a beautiful city and very international.

On returning to New Zealand, it was found that a mental energy and interest had been reawakened. This has translated into a more focused and systematic study of the Sanskrit language, which is beautifully structured and consciously reflects natural laws. There is also a clearer understanding of concepts, increased enjoyment and renewed appreciation of Satsanga, and of the nourishment and good company it provides.

Auckland School Cultural Groups

Come and enrich your life!

Economics	@ 27	Sat. 7.15	9.45 am	Russell Allen	276 8770
Forms of Government	@ 27	Sat. 10.00	11.45 am	Russell Allen	276 8770
Portrait Drawing	@ 27	Sun. 6.00	9.00 pm	James Hanna	846 9931
Plato	@ 268	Wed. 9.45	12.00 pm	Lillian Beanland	521 5054
Portrait Drawing	@ 268	Tue. 12.30	3.30 pm	Paul Brickland	445 9012

New members to these groups are welcome.

For enquiries, please phone the group tutors listed.

At 27 Esplanade Rd, Mt Eden & 268 West Tamaki Road, West Tamaki.

Ficino School Fair

The Ficino School Fair definitely seems to be going from strength to strength. It was another successful day reflecting the qualities and atmosphere which are so evident in the school itself.

Hard work pays off and this showed in the quality of the presentation of all the stalls; from the delicious food which was on offer to the overwhelming variety of sauces, pickled goods, preserves and spreads available on the preserves stall and the yummy selections of cakes, fudges and biscuits on the cake stalls and more.

There was plenty for the children to do as well with several new activities and stalls which



were extremely popular.

The profit of \$20,000 was well up on last year's and part of the proceeds will be going towards upgrading the school library. We hope the success of the fair will continue in the future!



Auckland School Of Philosophy

50th Anniversary Celebrations

Saturday 13th / Sunday 14th March 2010

In March this year the School of Philosophy celebrated its 50th anniversary with, current and past members attending part or all of three main events.

These were:

- Saturday lunch in the grounds of the main house at 268 West Tamaki Rd. Two exhibitions were featured: a display of works from our Art Group's output through the

years; and a photographic display from times past when 'the world was young'!

- Saturday evening dinner in the Grand Foyer of Auckland Museum.
- A Sunday morning talk by the leader of the Melbourne School John Jepson, who never fails to successfully mix wisdom and sparkling humour!

Here are some pictures from Saturday's events...



A delicious lunch in typical gorgeous Auckland weather.



Enjoying lunch. From left: Barrie Preston, John Jepson, Judith Lowenhertz, Beverly Russell.



From left: Brian Wilson, Graeme Robinson (foundation leader of the Hamilton School).



From left: Gary Nicholls, Graham Soughtton, Terry Connor (Wellington School).



Mary Garrett & Karen Crompton enjoying the sun and good conversation.



John Russell & Walt Beanland.



Musical accompaniment by Pene Brawn-Douglas with leaders past and present displayed in the background.



Long time member Harry Carter.



Michael Chan.



Marita Brewster speaking to Mark Rassie.



Saturday Evening Dinner At Auckland Museum



Peter & Leah Ashton. Peter was the MC for the evening.



Lauren Roscoe & Denise Bree. Lauren sang beautifully in her exquisite soprano voice after dinner to the accompaniment of Samuel Ames.



Nigel & Fiona Rankin. At the outset of the evening Nigel welcomed us all being the Principal of the School.



Pre dinner drinks in the in the "Origins Gallery" of Auckland Museum.



Looking stylish - Cynthia Koks, Samuel Ames & Rachel Koks.



Anne & Harry van der Vossen with Madeline Denison.





Top left to right: Judith Lowenhertz & John Jepson – Melbourne School. Elizabeth & Digby Crompton. **Far right:** Beverly & John Russell. **Bottom left to right:** Cathy & Bruce Dean–Wellington School, Barrie & Emilie Preston.



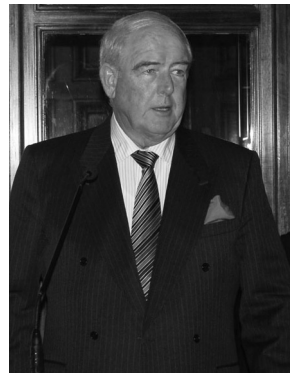
Seated for dinner in the Grand Foyer.



John Russell – Leader for over 40 years, giving an overview of the history of the Auckland School.



Beverly Russell recounts the Auckland School's beginnings under the leadership of her Father Mr Dick Ryman 50 years ago. (Mr Ryman is now aged 97)



John Jepson, Leader of the Melbourne School conveys best wishes from the Australian schools.



Judith Lowenhertz presenting Barrie Preston with a crafted glass gift from the Melbourne School, dubbed 'The Bowl of Nous' (a reference to the fount of Wisdom from the Hermetic tradition).

During the evening we watched a pre-recorded video of the World Leader of the philosophy school movement Mr Donald Lambie.

“Reflecting on the events on which you are engaged, the 50th Anniversary of the School in Auckland, it occurred that the nature of school work and spiritual work, such as spiritual discipline, is that it generates a particular kind of energy – a very special kind of energy.

This is the energy which allows a man or a woman to hold to an ideal. Most people when they start off in life, start with some kind of ideal, but all too often we see, and regrettably we see, that that ideal gets lost on the way, somehow or another gets covered on the way. But to hold to the ideal, to retain its purity, to retain its freshness is a great thing in life.

As far as the School is concerned, that ideal is Truth. And to hold to that for a prolonged period of time – in the case of your good selves, for 50 years – is a wonderful thing to do. So my full congratulations in that and not only from myself but from everyone in the School here in London.”

Mr Lambie also spoke about the firm foundation the Auckland School has established and that this is propitious for whatever the future may bring.

This theme was taken up further by John Jepson in his address to the Auckland School the following morning.

He spoke about the rapidly developing strength and maturity of the philosophy schools across Australasia, and that the spark igniting a new Western cultural renaissance could easily come from this part of the World, and that if so our schools are well placed to fully participate in this.

Certainly there can be no doubt the Auckland School will still exist in another 50 years, and will continue to offer it's insight and inspiration to this community.

Celebrating 50 Years of the Auckland School of Philosophy

In March this year the Auckland branch of the School of Philosophy celebrated its 50th birthday. There was a full weekend of events with past and present students taking part. There was a photo presentation at the School's West Tamaki venue as well as a gala dinner held at the Auckland War Memorial Museum and a very interesting lecture presented by Mr. Jepson covering the history of the School in Australasia.

At the gala dinner we were lucky enough to have a speech from Mr. Russell, who served as a leader of the school for 40 years. He gave an overview of the history of the School and his direct involvement in it along with his wife Beverly.

There was also a telecast speech by Mr. Lambie wishing the school well for the future.

The following booklet contains both Mr. Russell's and Mr. Lambie's speeches and has been produced as a commemorative booklet of the occasion.

Notes for a speech by Mr J. Russell at the Auckland School's 50th Celebration Dinner

The origins of the Auckland School are in a sense a rather personal series of events, one might almost say a family affair, because the founder of this School was, in the first place, my Part II tutor, then he became my summer holiday host as I manfully fought off the irresistible advances of his eldest daughter, Beverly then he willingly listened to my encouragement to start a School in Auckland, which he did in 1960, then he became my Father-in-law, then he handed over the reins in 1967 to his son-in-law. It must be the most blatant example of self-inflicted nepotism in the history of the School.

To be fair to all the parties concerned, in those far-off days we had no notion of what lay

ahead of us, and certainly no idea of how the School worldwide would develop.

Dick Ryman, Beverly's Father, who is still going strong at 97, joined the very first Part I in Wellington in 1956, the first School to be founded outside the parent body in London which itself had only gone public a year or so earlier. He attended up until mid-1958 when his occupation took him north to Auckland. In the meantime we had become friends, though not as friendly, perhaps, as his daughter and I were becoming. During this time my own start in the School in 1957 had seen a somewhat timorous progression from tea-maker to tutor within two terms – it was so difficult to get good staff in those days – and on to 2 I/C of the School in 1959 after a quite stunning meeting with the founder of it all, a then rather young Mr MacLaren.

In those days the study of philosophy as it was followed in the School was unusual, but the numbers coming to the classes were good

– I regularly tutored 60 – 70 a night in Part I – and there was plenty of enthusiasm. We didn't know about the Gita and Upanishads or the vast amount of Vedic and Indian literature that existed, but was effectively hidden from us. We had the Bible, Shakespeare, The Cloud of Unknowing, Goethe, and a marvellous anthology called 'The Spirit of Man' and little else except the unending flow of material from Mr MacLaren. The content of this was a mix of quite brilliant reasoning on his part, illustrated by quotations, observations from students, and often supported by science and real-life experiences. It was all interesting, at times engrossing, and we eagerly awaited the next session.

Mr MacLaren was very conscious of three things in all this: one was the knowledge we were all in quest of but which, on its own, didn't go anywhere spiritually; another was what he called being – the need to find and develop one's own inner power and strength; and the third was the culmination of these two developing together into understanding. We had what was called 'the exercise', a process which, practised diligently, unquestionably helped the body to be still, then the mind, and was of great benefit, but clearly didn't go deep enough, though we had no idea what that depth might be.

We soldiered on like this, with much emphasis on attentiveness in all we did, care and service at all levels, diligence in the practice of the content of the weekly meetings and so on until 1961, when everything changed. The Maharishi had hit town, to be precise, London. Later on Mr MacLaren told me 'I was at my desk in chambers when the 'phone rang. It was Dr Roles, who said 'MacLaren: there is a man of higher being in London – have a look at him, would you?'

Well, as we all know, through the Maharishi we found the meditation, the answer to Work on Being, and His Holiness, the Shankaracharya, who began to give us the ancient Vedic knowledge, or the Teaching,

together with the system to promulgate it. Things really got moving then, though we all had to adjust to a more universal view of philosophy in every respect, and not least to Sanskrit in order to better understand the teaching and its level upon level of depth.

During the next few years we went from strength to strength. The School in Auckland was founded and flourished in rented rooms in Eden Crescent and the two Schools (Ak/Wn) increasingly joined forces at residential weeks in places like Otaki, Kawau Island, Orewa, and in other ventures of shorter duration. Somehow we all survived.

Eventually the time came when Dick Ryman could no longer juggle his business life with the Leadership of the School, and asked to be released. A 'phone call from London tipped me off about Mr MacLaren's decision to appoint me as successor, but his letter did not arrive until a week or so before take-up date in January 1967. After something of a fan-dance we drove north, eventually taking up residence in a flat in Mt Eden.

Somehow the School survived the transition. Beverly's parents stayed on for some time in one of the senior groups, and we moved forward steadily, term by term. There was increasing movement between the fast-growing number of Schools around the world, and the regular annual visits of Mr MacLaren, always accompanied by one or more senior people from London, gave us the latest news and methods developed or discovered during the preceding year and kept us up to date.

As the years passed the School grew in strength and numbers. After attending upon Mr MacLaren in London over Christmas/New Year 1967-8 it became clear that the School needed its own property and 'the House', as we all called it, in Upland road was acquired in 1968 with great generosity from within the School, and massive effort by many. We later relinquished the lease on the Eden Crescent rooms and over a period bought three adjacent

houses in Grafton Road. There was no difficulty in filling all the rooms with groups as our numbers then were large, well over 600 at one stage, and an increasing number of activities and studies were available. Nursery Groups, Sunday School, Youth Groups, Choir, Artwork, Sanskrit and a host of necessities such as cleaning, maintenance, gardening etc. In addition, as the strength in the School grew, more was required at the senior end of things. With the demise of the original Wellington School, Auckland had to take on the responsibility for giving the meditation throughout N.Z. and Australia, as well as the oversight of, and regular visits to, the resurgent School in Wellington that immediately began to arise as the old order faded. There were also the odd 'short notice' events to be attended upon at Mr MacLaren's request, sometimes in other countries, that took time and effort to deal with. All of this meant that the more senior people in the School necessarily had to step up, as it were.

All of this immeasurably aided the process of development in intellectual, emotional and spiritual terms, as it became increasingly clear that unless we studied and practised what we were tutoring there was no depth in what we said and did, and our basic ground was fragile.

In due course the Upland Road house was too small for us, so the Glendowie house was purchased, and is undoubtedly one of the finest School houses of the many that are scattered around the world. Soon after that parents in the School increasingly began to ask about a Day School in Auckland in the manner of the very successful St James Schools in London. We can probably all remember how we then set about starting the beginnings of what became the Ficino School, the sale of the Grafton Road houses, the purchase of the Mt Eden property, and the opening of the Ficino School.

While all of this was going on at a busy and very practical level – all voluntary, unpaid, but wholly devoted input – the inner and unseen

work went on with an increasingly fine level of attention. The penetration of the mysteries of the Teaching became easier as the skill with Sanskrit increased. Years of meditation and devotion to its practice were increasingly evident, and its effect in people's lives, and especially in their tutoring, were testament to the wisdom of Mr MacLaren's insistence in the early years on knowledge and being coming together, through practice, in understanding.

The totally indispensable bounty of the transcripts of the conversations between Mr MacLaren and the Shankaracharya were central in all this. They are, in a sense, a life-giving element in the School's existence and have that curious feature of always meeting the need. As one's consciousness increases so more meaning is found in the answers, though one has read the words many times. The whole process of true School work is like this, one has to keep pursuing it, practising it, and watching to see what is revealed.

One cannot say what the future might hold, not least because the real future and purpose of it all is full realisation, and what can one say about that? What is very clear is that, if a true School's life is of three generations – each about the length of a long human life – then we, as a School, are well into the second half of the first generation. The first is the practical one, leading naturally into the second which is much finer requiring quiet penetration, unremitting trust in the true spirit of man, the Self, and in the words of the truly wise. If one works like this one will know which are the truly wise. The third stage will be the flowering of all that has gone before, but who would be brave enough to speak about that.

Meanwhile it is the task of the present and future membership to uphold the tradition that started 50 years ago and carry it forward in the original spirit of faith, hope and continuous effort. And in this pursuit we may be absolutely certain that no efforts made in the genuine enquiry into Truth are ever wasted: they will always bear fruit.

Mr Donald Lambie's Address to the Auckland School of Philosophy

On the occasion of the 50th
Anniversary Celebrations
–13th/14th March 2010

(transcript of recorded video address)

Well, warm greetings to all of you in Auckland from here in London. It is astonishing that we can be communicating with each other in this way from the other end of the world.

Reflecting on the events on which you are engaged, the 50th Anniversary of the School in Auckland, it occurred that the nature of school work and spiritual work, such as spiritual discipline, is that it generates a particular kind of energy – a very special kind of energy. This is the energy which allows a man or a woman to hold to an ideal.

Most people when they start off in life, start with some kind of ideal, but all too often we see, and regrettably we see, that that ideal gets lost on the way, somehow or another gets covered on the way. But to hold to the ideal, to retain its purity, to retain its freshness is a great thing in life.

As far as the School is concerned, that ideal is Truth. And to hold to that for a prolonged period of time – in the case of your good selves, for 50 years – is a wonderful thing to do.

So my full congratulations in that and not only from myself but from everyone in the School here in London.

Shri Shantananda Saraswati spoke about School work as involving two elements. The first, he said, was raising the level of consciousness; conscious activities in the realms of laws, arts, sciences, and so on. All of this is to help to produce a finer standard of life; a more beautiful, a more dignified, peaceful, happy life both for people engaged in those activities, and for others as well.

The second aspect of School work he describes as providing help on the way to liberation. This is a very good description of what we are about, and what you have been about over this period of time.

And the School where you are is extremely well established, well set, and it is a propitious situation for the work to advance; and we never know what the future will bring. The needs and situations of people in one way remain the same, but in other ways present themselves very differently, and we have to be open and responsive to those new situations which will occur.

But, essentially, the work is to refine and refine and refine. And this, I have no doubt, is what will happen not only in Auckland but in the School around the world.

When Mr McLaren died in 1994, the first place that my wife and I came to very shortly after that was Auckland. We were both received with great hospitality, most beautifully, and that helped the new situation to unfold easily and naturally. And so as far as we are both concerned, there is a special place in our hearts for Auckland so it really does give me great pleasure to have this opportunity to wish you well, and I give you all of the love and blessings and good wishes from myself, my wife, and from the School in London.

I hope the events upon which you are engaged this week are enjoyable, and that all of the work, as it unfolds, likewise will be enjoyable.

And so all my love to you.