

MARCO LUCCIO'S 'CITYSCAPES OF NEW YORK'
Steps Gallery Opening Tuesday 1st April 2008. Address by John Ancher.

Good evening, Ladies and Gentlemen.

It is my enviable privilege to welcome you, Melbourne art lovers, to Marco Luccio's compelling glimpse into modern legend, 'Cityscapes of New York'.

I'm a colonial from sleepy Hobart, so why should I be the one to speak about the quintessential metropolis?

The answer is, I'm qualified to speak about the Luccio interpretation of New York. To speak about the development of the artist whose subject is New York.

About New York I know nothing from first hand experience. But like everyone of you, because we all watch television and go to the movies, I know plenty about the projected image of the world's most famous contemporary city. I know what artists, film-makers, writers and broadcasters have gone out of their way to show me, just as you do, whether you've been there or not.

We are fed an awareness of New York, from planes crashing into towers, to Central Park, to Coney Island, Brooklyn Bridge, the Empire State, the Statue of Liberty to Broadway.

We all have indelible impressions of a place whose reputation is founded equally on reality and mythology – King Kong and 9/11, United Nations and Coney Island, Madison Square Gardens and Central Perk, the Museum of Modern Art and Old Blue Eyes, the dreams of Broadway and Pete Sampras at Flushing Meadow, the Guggenheim v the Harlem Globetrotters, Gotham City, Batman and Robin.

Marco and Debra took up residence in this oasis of phantasmagoria for ten weeks a year ago. Debra went in search of ballet dancers to draw. Marco came with 42 copper plates itching to etch. They both returned to Australia with creative treasure, shocked at how dramatically Melbourne's metropolis status had shrunk in ten weeks.

Marco was always going to be captivated by the physical reality of New York. He was predictably enthralled by features of built fabric, light effects down urban canyons and the monumental scale. He was also seduced by the winsome appeal of the city's mythology.

The physical effort Marco made in responding creatively to his ideal subject material was remarkable. Feeling compelled to work on site, he first drew his subject then, once his response to the urban geometry before him was established, he picked up the copper plate he just happened to have with him and inscribed it 'au plein air' on the New York pavement for three hours or so, graphically busking for the amusement of curious New Yorkers who by now circled him in throngs. Some offered to buy everything because they'd never seen a virtuoso display like it and they could tell it was classier than rap.

Once or twice the possessed Aussie etcher was obliged to brush snow out of his fresh burrs.

Marco always began his process of responding to New York's architecture, archaeology, moods and aspirations on site. The images you see here tonight have been exhaustively worked up in the studio. With the prints, sometimes a dozen proofs were pulled between reworkings before Marco considered the image finished. His drawings too have been extensively developed in the studio. With so many images in this show, his workload has been gargantuan. He is a relentless perfectionist, a fact that can easily be overlooked when an artist's trademark is the brutal expressive line. Achieving those black gauges is exhausting work when your mark-making implement is an engraver's burin.

So I could write an article for Imprint, I was shown quite advanced proofs of prints at the beginning of last December. I thought I was looking at works close to their finished state. Seeing them now, it's amazing how so many of them, and most particularly the drawings he showed me, have been transformed.

Marco lent me seven of his proofs so I could study them closely before writing the article. I was thus given a wonderful opportunity to look into these dry points deeply without having the pressure of jumping to conclusions as I might have done had I needed to record immediate impressions. This was my considered response to those prints:

Marco Luccio, urban artist, tells a city's story through the edgy medium of dry point. His prints accentuate joie de vivre through the exuberance of the mark-making. In New York, he explores the geology of that city's unique architecture. Fissures in facades and exfoliation of the built fabric are celebrated. The metropolis as quarry. In the frantic web of Luccio lines, the nerve endings and tendons of hard materials are always exposed. Arteries of habitation pulse and dreams of another brave new world are challenged.

Luccio infuses the iconic with the imaginary. In his prints, New York is touched by Atlantis, Piranese, Cecil B de Mille and the archaeology of film sets. The sense of place he captures is remarkable for its individuality. New York has rediscovered its mythology in these images.....The dry points in this show, gestural and inventive images of a city we all instantly recognise but are seeing here afresh, represent the medium at its most persuasive.

My article focused on the prints. Seeing the finished drawings, I certainly could have included them in my remarks about Marco's ability to layer his urban subject matter with inference and eclectic reference. The drawings, like the prints, are a tour de force. I am bowled over by his assemblages of postcards and poems on note paper over-printed and drawn upon, works I have not seen before today.

This fabulous show, which in the tight space of the Steps Gallery is New York caged and bursting to get free, launches Marco Luccio printmaker as Marco Luccio artist. I have great pleasure in declaring the show open, and the artist in full flight.

John Ancher, April Fools Day 2008.