



Clockwise from top left:

Figure 1: *Bird Dog*, 2008, acrylic and medium on canvas, 350 x 410 cm.

Figure 2: *Sea Dog*, 2008, oil on gesso on canvas, 640 x 765 cm.

Figure 3: *Just Little*, 2007, oil on gesso on wood, 335 x 555 cm.

Figure 4: *Fortune Teller*, 2008, oil on gesso on canvas, 350 x 410 cm.

Sea Dogs

In conversation, a friend, who is a vet, said to me, “one can tell a lot about the human animal by the way we treat other animals.” Recently I have taken to including dogs in the composition of my paintings; they stand in to represent themselves and all other animals including the human. My work has always created discourse on the ‘Human Condition’ but using a dog’s shape allows for a distinct visual impact. Also, not so prevalent in my thinking but always there, is the history of imaging dogs for our own myth-making. I’m interested in how dogs have always associated themselves with people, (although they don’t need to), allowing themselves to be domesticated and work for us on tasks that would be quite impossible to undertake on our own. I want to remind people of what I will term as “all animal equality”; that every species has an important place in this world; that the human is no more superior and indeed has comparatively lost their connection with nature.

The German artist Georg Baselitz, (b)1938, happened on a fresh interpretation of portraiture painting when he simply inverted the human head, actually painting it upside down, taking away the normality of it, the usual way we see it, creating for himself a whole new concept from which to depart. Also from Germany, the artist Jorg Immendorff, (1945–2007), sometimes included himself in his paintings in the form of a monkey, making his selfportrait unrecognisable, whilst he gazes directly back at the viewer.

The impetus for much of my painting stems from paralleling an actuality, an experience, something witnessed or which I feel compelled to discuss, with a composition from my imagination developed via a plethora of memorised observations. This helps me defy nature to a degree, or at least to rearrange it so the viewer is confronted with something other than the usual way of seeing things.

Witnessing the McNaught comet as it was visible in southern space in January 2007 was a truly humbling experience. The discovery in 2008 of a “Black Hole” in space, thirteen million times the size of our sun is truly wondrous. I’m overwhelmed, it strikes me how infinitesimal and insignificant our existence is, how vulnerable we are, how humans in their vanity conveniently forget the tiny lifetime we have. I make three drawings and one painting with the title *Just Little. Navigator* makes reference to these Islands of Aotearoa being part of the Pacific group;

that there was no other way of discovering these but via the sea, both by Māori and Pakeha. *Sea Dog* pictures a dog's head in profile floating in a sea of turquoise, contained inside a white wrought iron fence. This is a compositional structure that I have incorporated in several recent paintings after making drawings from the original structure that surrounded the Kurow cemetery in the Waitaki Valley. It can also refer to a border, a limitation or a protection, but mostly for me it's because I delight in painting a thin white line through a dark colour field, or its opposite. In the last one hundred and fifty years we have lost forever seventy five percent of our native bird species, sometimes called "losing three quarters of the 'Morning Chorus'." *Bird Dog* pictures a dog head shape detailed with an exotic bird and backgrounded by a native bush scene and waterfall. My *Fortune Teller* is a dog; after all they have twenty times more power in some senses than the human. However, I've never had my fortune told, I don't think it's possible, I don't think we need such predetermining – each day as it comes for me!

Peter Cleverley is a painter who exhibits regularly in New Zealand. He is also a lecturer in Painting in the School of Art at Otago Polytechnic in Dunedin, New Zealand.



Figure 5: *Navigator*, 2008, oil on gesso on canvas, 1860 x 1640 cm.