

RICHARD PURDY

*Three
Historical
Fictions*

THE INVERSION OF THE WORLD
PROGERIA LONGÆVUS
CORPUS CRISTI

1989/90

Richard Purdy
Galerie Christiane Chassay
Traveling Catalogue
1989 / 90

INTRODUCTION

Like an inquisitive, rumbunctious Adam blinking awake on one of his first mornings, Richard Purdy wanders around naming things, peeking under bushes, climbing trees and swimming in his own private memory.

For Purdy, the rules of linear time, of anthropology, of religion, are an unnecessary encumbrance. He follows – excitedly, unconsciously – the whims of pure imagination. He asks the simplest questions: What if? Why not? Yes but? And then answers his own childish questions with years of painstaking, original research. It is original because it does not kowtow to the tyranny of fact. His research undermines fact by presenting well-documented fiction, and it manages to undermine fiction by masquerading itself as fact.

Einstein knew that the distinction between past, present and future was only a stubbornly persistent illusion. Purdy has learned his lessons at the same relativistic blackboard. He builds the past, records the future, speculates on the present. His intuitions of the past, his memories of the future, and his predictions of the present are all playful and, according to the limits of the ima-

gination, possible. He wallows in the vagaries of truth, the insignificance of fact, the evaporation of strict definition.

In *Corpus Cristi*, Fra Lucio Palaccio da Lucca gives us his mystical vision of a city in the form of a man-Christ on the cross, complete with reference to medieval humours, arteries, and the digestive system. Here archaeology (as well as "the city of man") is tipped on its head. Who cares that the city was never built? The city that Fra Lucio mapped out is the ideal body politic, reminding us that our public and private functions can never be separate.

Progeria Longævus presents us with an imaginary illness that causes extraordinary longevity. We trace this "disease" through the life of one man who was born in Venice in 992 and dies in Vancouver in 1992. The Me generation, in which we still wallow, here gets a severe case of schizophrenia. The 208 identities of this 1,000-year-old man present a wealth of individualized panoramas. Together, they provide a sort of frenetic, meandering soul that remains forever restless, curious, slippery.

In *The Inversion of the World*, due to profound desperation at the end of the coming millenium, the world has been inverted, with all the land becoming water and all the water becoming land. That old chestnut about east being east and west being west and never the twain shall meet runs up against a new series of global villages. Geography (and its children, politics and economy) shows us its flip side, mirroring a whole new world for us to entertain and be entertained by.

Perhaps like all humans, Purdy would like nothing less than to compete with God. We all carry within us our own mythology, history, geography. Purdy has given these very human delusions a voice.

PETER O'BRIEN

