

**Neuer Aachener Kunstverein**

present

a Chamber Opera by

**SLAVE PIANOS**

## **THE BROCCOLI MAESTRO**

in Two Acts, for Six Voices, Six Players and Tape

Libretto by SLAVE PIANOS after writings by Tony Clark, Judith Pascal, Stephen Bram, Angela Brennan, Geoff Lowe, Rose Nolan, Jacqueline Riva, Jane Trengove, Gary Wilson and Constanze Zikos.

Sunday, 14 October 2001

8pm

KLANGBRÜCKE

Kurhausstraße 2

Aachen

Tuesday, 16 10 2001

8pm

MALKASTEN

Jocobystraße 6a

Düsseldorf

CAST

Stephan Saus *Tony Clark/St Thomas Aquinas*  
Viviane Hoetzel *Judith Pascal/Philosophy*

Claudia Schulze Althoff *Rose Nolan/A Secretary & Jaqueline Riva/Courtier*  
Jolanta Kosira *Angela Brennan/Courtier & Jane Trengove/Courtier*  
Won-Suk Woo *Stephen Bram/Courtier & Constanze Zikos/Courtier*  
Hans-Helge Gerlik *Geoff Lowe/King Louis IX & Gary Wilson/Courtier*

MUSICIANS

Matthias Rein *Harpsichord/Chamber Organ*  
Nina Leonards *Violin*  
Ludmilla Wutzel *'Cello*  
Juli Sokolianski *Trumpet*  
Li Lansong *Bassoon*  
Ulrich Poth *Percussion*

*Prelude*

**ACT 1**

- 1. Art History/The salt works (1770-1805)**  
S. Bram `Constructing a simple three point perspective volume'  
J. S. Bach `Chorale No.188: Ich dank dir schon durch deinen Sohn'
- 2. Temples/The cemetery under construction (1971)**  
M. Fusinato `Mono'  
M. Feldman `For Samuel Beckett'
- 3. Recognition/Mortuary Station (N.D.)**  
Hours of fear `4'  
P. De La Rue `Missa Pro Defunctis: Kyrie'
- 4. Landscapes and Myriorama/The power station (1914)**  
G. Lowe `15'  
A. Berg `Op. 7'
- 5. Arabic Interpretations/The Albert Memorial (1863-1872)**  
Heures Roses `Towards a New Art'  
R. Wagner `Tristan und Isolde'
- 6. Acquiescence /The amphitheater (1st Cent. A.D.)**  
House of Journalists `Il Palazzo'  
Antiphon from Office for the Dead `Si acendero'
- 7. Chinoiserie and Kufic /The gothic revival church (1879)**  
G. Lowe and J. Riva `Player Guitar Free 2001'  
C. Debussy `Preludes: X'

*Interlude*

**ACT 2**

- 8. Jasperware/The gate (1475-1564)**  
The Living Rococco `Untitled'  
C. Monteverdi `L'Orfeo: Vi ricorda o boschi ombrosi'
- 9. Mural/The cenotaph (1927-1934)**  
R. Nolan `R.R. 4 L.L.'  
E. Satie `Socrate'
- 10. Manichean Heresy/The art gallery (1946-1959)**  
T. Clark `Love and Passion'  
I. Stravinsky `Cantata: Ricerca I'
- 11. Important Contemporary Sculpture/The theatre (4th Cent. B.C)**  
C. Zikos `93-94 Perspecta Negative'  
J. Cage `One<sup>8</sup>'
- 12. Encouragement, Failure/The factory (1909)**  
T. Clark `Moore minus librium'  
A. Schoenberg `String Quartet No. II, iv'
- 13. Stretchers/The suburban pavilion (1981)**  
Solver `3'  
N. Cave `Nick the stripper'
- 14. Painting/The ruined tower (c.1390)**  
G. Wilson `Sargeant'  
Anonymous `Alph vibrans monumentum, Coetus venit heroicus, Contratenor, Amicum quaerit'

*Postlude*

# THE BROCCOLI MAESTRO

## ACT ONE

### 1. Art History/The salt works

GEOFF LOWE  
academic intellectual speculative

### 2. Temples/The cemetery under construction

JACQUELINE RIVA  
Like Vermeer, without the fourteen children, with his brushes and easel set up in the corner of a tiny flat or private hotel.

GEOFF LOWE  
His practice is relentlessly domestic.

CONSTANZE ZIKOS  
Did he use his index finger or his big left toe painting these peculiar images?

### 3. Recognition/Mortuary Station

TONY CLARK  
Architecture shall again be the subject by which our premonitions of victory and defeat can best be conveyed. This may lead to harsher judgements

JUDITH PASCAL  
For architects, an Old World teaser:

### 4. Landscapes and Myriorama/The power station

JACQUELINE RIVA  
The Myriorama landscapes were made to a formula and anyone could have done them provided they followed the formula.

CONSTANZE ZIKOS  
It's more to do with Barkly Street, pots and pans, and bins. It's pure elbow grease Classicism, an aperitif.

ANGELA BRENNAN  
It is funny that he uses broccoli to paint his vegetal forms. And there is spaghetti and hair stuck on his paintings, and paint applied with a cake decorator.

GEOFF LOWE  
In fifteen years I've never been to any landscape with Tony.

### 5. Arabic Interpretations/The Albert Memorial

JUDITH PASCAL  
the problem's really how  
to get survivors out,  
and keep the empty buildings  
as Museums of Themselves.  
From City into Monument,  
proceeding from the precedent:  
Alhambra,  
al-Hamraa, the Red.

TONY CLARK  
In my youth I lived in the part of Rome that was most like Canberra - the Fascist bit. There is no link between classicism and fascism, the column and the jackboot.

In relation to classicism, Nazi red herrings are always introduced. It's the failure of the left that pushes people into the arms of the church, into the arms of right-wing politics and, to some extent into the arms of the classicist art. Classicism is a kind of final solution.

True classicism is not simply putting on a toga. Classicism is the last refuge of the scoundrel.

### 6. Acquiescence/The amphitheater

JUDITH PASCAL  
Recite:  
the Cities are places  
of collective Memory;  
and Memory  
itself formed  
of objects and places,  
as the City is.

TONY CLARK  
The forms, language and apparatus of 'high' culture are not out of bounds.

### 7. Chinoiserie and Kufic/The gothic revival church

JANE TRENGOVE  
When Tony makes little Chinese temples out of plasticine and then paints them he is obstructing you.

## ACT TWO

### 8. Jasperware/The gate

CONSTANZE ZIKOS  
The Jasperware is the wrong version of Jasperware. People can't identify with it. They'd lose their mind over it.

There is no cameo. There is no Pegasus. There is no anthem. It's just a piece of porcelain.

### 9. Mural/The cenotaph

STEPHEN BRAM  
The St. Kilda Library mural works because it is neither spectacular nor banal. It's nothing but a stylized rendition of a wall, which is a very slightly self-reflexive joke.

ROSE NOLAN  
Most of the staff really hate this mural. I met Nick Cave because he came to see Tony's mural.

ANGELA BRENNAN  
It is as good as Frank Lloyd Wright.

## 10. Manichean Heresy/The art gallery

JUDITH PASCAL  
And once there were Great Ideas  
they flowed  
through the history of Cities

TONY CLARK  
I stress that I cannot provide that antidote - I am not that  
light, but was sent to bear witness of that light.

My figure is present with its absence.

## 11. Important Contemporary Sculpture/The theatre

ANGELA BRENNAN  
Do you think he was cross when he made these?

JACQUELINE RIVA  
Why?

ANGELA BRENNAN  
The appropriation of a work by Eva Hesse is disturbing. I  
think he wants to be Hesse ... and who wouldn't want to be  
Hesse - I would.

JACQUELINE RIVA  
But she's dead!

CONSTANZE ZIKOS  
He is cross-dressing through all these paintings ... a  
deranged designer of textiles. A very multilingual process,  
in reverse.

## 12. Encouragement, Failure/The factory

JUDITH PASCAL  
More anciently,

feet moving  
in time  
with the moving skies:  
that was language

the stable meanings  
case with the skills  
and various habits  
of our body  
'The collective  
is a body

TONY CLARK  
As a true son of the professional middle class, I had always  
believed that it was the mission of the contemporary artist  
to campaign against all the tawdriness and hypocrisy in the  
world, and that this should be achieved using formal means  
of the highest probity and integrity. Fine painting could not  
be the means by which any thing cultural or significant  
could be achieved in our time.

## 13. Stretchers/The suburban pavilion

ROSE NOLAN  
I loved the show of stretcher bars at Anna Schwartz  
Gallery.

STEPHEN BRAM  
The paintings don't appear to be careful.

ROSE NOLAN  
It's the economy of means.

STEPHEN BRAM  
If they looked like they were painstakingly done they would  
be kind of trivial.

GARY WILSON  
The making of a very beautiful thing out of nothing is a  
very Melbourne phenomenon.

ROSE NOLAN  
People responded really badly to the exhibition.

GEOFF LOWE  
They have some quality like he hasn't done any work, that  
he doesn't give a shit about you, that he is trying to send  
you up and you fear that.

## 14. Painting/The ruined tower

GARY WILSON  
Tony is trying to make painterly paintings relevant.

JANE TRENGOVE  
He makes a place for painting by almost negating it.

ROSE NOLAN  
Tony's interested in getting things wrong. He is interested  
in people's work who get it wrong without even trying.

JACQUELINE RIVA  
The "not trying" I am really envious of.

GEOFF LOWE  
Trying is lying. He is stylish, a dandy ... and he doesn't try  
- the history of art is full of so much trying.

ANGELA BRENNAN  
And rubbing out and leaving a mistake.

GEOFF LOWE  
So he tapped into some other ability. He paints beneath  
himself.

## Sources:

1. Tony Clark "ANTI-MUSIC/OPERA" *Pneumatic Drill* No.35, 1981
2. Max Delaney *Tony Clark. Public and Private Paintings, 1982-1998*, Museum of Modern Art at Heidi, Bulleen, Victoria, 1998
3. Tony Clark "Fascist Classicism" *Art and Australia* Vol.25 No.3 Autumn 1988
4. Judith Pascal "Fuck the Polis" *Strolling: Catalogue* Museum of Modern Art at Heide, 1998
5. Tony Clark *Halftime Minutes* Speaking at the Montmartre Motel, Grey St. St Kilda 27 Oct. 1987
6. Rebecca Lancashire "The broccoli maestro" *The Age* June 1998
7. Tony Clark "Houses, Palaces, Cities" *Artlink* Vol.6 N0.3 Autumn 1986
8. Tony Clark "POSTERITY WILL JUDGE: Tony Clark on de Chirico" *Tension* 21 1990

## The Virtuoso of Failure

From the moment he burst onto the Melbourne art scene with his *Technical Manifesto of Town Planning* (1982), Tony Clark has been a virtuoso of failure. He has failed and failed again, failed and failed better, and has orchestrated his efforts with consummate professionalism. The paradox of Tony Clark is that he has harnessed an obvious lack of artistic talent to a 'couldn't-care-less' attitude towards technique and finish, and placed the results within a frame garnished with the intellectual equivalent of costume jewellery – to capture the hearts of artists, critics, dealers and curators.

This is a very late-20<sup>th</sup> century phenomenon, and, it is tempting to say – a very Melbourne phenomenon. Although Clark has made his mark in other Australian cities, and gained a toehold in Germany after being included in Documenta IX in 1993, he owes his rapid rise to a special set of circumstances. In the early 1980s, Australian art was emerging from a long, boring winter of conceptualism, minimalism, earth works, feminist polemics, trade union banners, and embarrassing performance pieces. Sensing that it was time for a change, the young critic and social climber, Paul Taylor, had launched the magazine *Art & Text*, with the aim of promoting a new wave of emerging Australian artists. The new work was an unlikely alliance of 'TransAvantGarde'-style paintings, and late-blooming Pop art. The intellectual pedigree came largely from Roland Barthes, and from Dick Hebdidge's book, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*.

Within a few years, the *Art & Text* putsch had conquered the citadels of contemporary Australian art. The artists who had been promoted by the magazine – including Jenny Watson, Mike Parr, Imants Tillers, Dale Frank, Peter Tyndall, Maria Kozic, John Nixon, Howard Arkley and a host of others – had become obligatory acquisitions for public art museums, and were first choice for overseas travelling exhibitions. The Marxist professors who had championed trade union banners and feminist art, were seduced by the conspicuous coolness of the new art, and jumped aboard the bandwagon.

In retrospect, the whole episode seems like a triumph of hype over substance, just as the financial boom of the 1980s was characterized by spectacular displays of wealth bouyed up by imaginary money. The best of the 'new wave' artists have maintained a presence in the Australian art scene, but there is no longer any suggestion of a small, closely-knit vanguard dominating every public exhibition.

In 1982, when Tony Clark made his artistic debut, Paul Taylor had put together an exhibition called *Popism* for the National Gallery of Victoria, as a showcase for his favourite artists. Iconoclasm was the order of the day, and Clark's *Technical Manifesto of Town Planning* was a breath-taking new addition to the field. The work consisted of thirteen small canvas boards and one photograph arranged on a shelf. Each canvas board featured a piece of classically-inspired architecture, painted in the roughest, most awkward fashion. Clark's method has been described as "Expressionist", although it could just as easily have been called 'inept'. Moreover, it was self-consciously and comfortably inept, as though it would have been beneath the artist's dignity to expend any greater effort.

By this stage, Clark had already collaborated with the artist, John Nixon, on a series of equally raw musical pieces that appeared in 1981, and have recently been resuscitated by SLAVE PIANOS. His next venture was a set of *Sacro-Idyllic landscapes* of 1982-84, which led quickly to Clark's *Myriorama*, a seemingly endless series of small temples painted on canvas boards, according to a formula devised by Englishman, John Clark, in 1824. Tony Clark started on this project in 1985, and by 1997 it was still crawling along. Quite possibly it remains a work in progress. Other projects have included the *Chinoiserie landscapes* of 1985-89, which began with a plasticene model of a Chinese temple, depicted on a series of small canvas boards against a decorative background. The *Kufic landscapes* of 1991 introduced Islamic characters into the mix, while the *Jasperware* paintings of 1993 borrowed from Josiah Wedgwood's decorative schema of a white emblem, in bas-relief, against a flat, monochrome background. Another, much-touted work of 1994, called *Important Contemporary Sculpture*, translated a 'formless' rope sculpture by Eva Hesse into a silhouette wall piece, painted in gold.

Common to these diverse projects was the capacity to activate a series of art historical paradigms to produce a vertiginous impression of erudition and profundity. To the uninitiated viewer the works may appear amateurish, incompetent and repetitive, but to those alert to the play of references, Clark's work took on the status of a philosophical investigation. It held a special appeal to those artists, writers and curators who felt able to decode the work's iconographical associations, and explain how Clark 'subverted' various canons of taste and style. In brief, Clark allowed his admirers to enjoy the satisfying feeling of being 'insiders', while the rest of the world may have remained blind and deaf to his wisdom.

This process is documented in the catalogue of a survey exhibition held at the Museum of Modern Art, Heide Park, Melbourne, in May 1998. In his preface to *Tony Clark: Public and Private Paintings 1982-98*, the museum director, Warwick Reeder, discerns both “technical virtuosity” and an “anti-painting posture” in Clark’s work. This sort of paradox is repeated on almost every page of the catalogue. His painting is described as “punk classicism”; it inspires both “desire and revulsion”; it is positioned somewhere between “homage and satire” or “belief and disbelief”. In a “colloquium” a group of Clark’s artist friends discuss his work, admiring the way Tony “gets it wrong without even trying.” They compare him to Vermeer, “without the fourteen children”. They find certain pictures to be simultaneously “lumpy and horrible” and “beautiful”. They note that a mural Clark painted for St.Kilda public library in Melbourne is “really hated” by staff – which leads to the thought that “if it is disliked then maybe that’s the sign that you’re onto something.”

So too with a 1997 show of paintings on single stretcher bars, to which “people responded really badly”. One participant confesses his fear that “there is some quality like he hasn’t done any work, that he doesn’t give a shit about you, that he is trying to send you up...” Another speaker decides this is “really good,” since it provides “a tension”. For the next speaker this means Clark is to be praised because “he doesn’t give you any easy solutions.”

This extraordinary exchange of opinions, which is without parallel in Australian art publishing, has provided Slave Pianos with much of their libretto for *The Broccoli Maestro*. Further contributions are drawn from Clark’s own writings, and those of his female alter-ego, Judith Pascal.

By now it should be clear that Tony Clark’s reputation has soared on the wings of paradox and contradiction. He is not being praised for his skill and hard work, but for his “slapstick” and careless approach, which denotes a dandy’s contempt for the conventional social and artistic values. The fact that he has painted with a stick of broccoli, or allowed a picture to be covered with stray hairs from his lounge room carpet, is a sign that he is working on a higher plane from those artists who strive to achieve a pristine and unified surface. His most persistent preoccupation is Classicism or Neo-Classicism, which he debunks by painting classically perfect forms in the most incompetent manner. The references that he drops – to Mantegna, Wedgwood, Aldo Rossi, Claude-Nicolas Ledoux or St.Thomas Aquinas – to name only a few – are bewildering to most of his audience, but serve as shared badges of belonging for those included in the loop. In the world of Tony Clark, failure is success, trivialization is homage, incompetence is the highest form of skill, and mere names are passports to the realms of philosophy. Even pretentiousness is ruled out, because to be deliberately pretentious is to take shelter under the mantle of irony.

One realizes the mystical power of this position when reading one of the essayists in the Heide Park catalogue, who tells us that Clark’s work is “a depiction of the (almost) literal disintegration of western culture itself... a declaration of the impossibility of any such markers of cultural centrality or originality.”

To a mutually-supportive avant-garde sheltered at the ends of the earth, it must be comforting to think that cultural centrality and originality are all washed up. Neither is it a small matter that one artist from St.Kilda has single-handedly debunked the entire Classical tradition, using a piece of broccoli as a brush and his lounge room floor as an easel. Truly, this is the stuff from which grand opera is made.

John McDonald  
Canberra, October 2001

---

THE BROCCOLI MAESTRO draws together materials from four sources: 1) the writings, musical compositions, paintings and ANTI-MUSIC/OPERA of Tony Clark; 2) the writings of Clark’s literary pseudonym Judith Pascal; 3) musical compositions and commentaries on Clark’s work by his colleagues; and 4) historical musical correspondences with Clark’s seminal painting ensemble *The Technical Manifesto of Town Planning, 1982*.

The present libretto folds Clark’s scheme for *Aquinas* onto a series of anecdotes and critical responses to the painter’s work by fellow artists. It uses the form of Clark’s ANTI-MUSIC/OPERA (see following page) as a template for inserting the painter himself into the central Aquinas role with his feminine, scholarly alter ego, Judith Pascal as Philosophy.

The interleaving of related but disparate textual materials has a direct parallel with the musical structure. The fourteen scenes of the opera correspond directly with the fourteen canvas boards of the *Technical Manifesto*. Two streams of musical materials, one derived from Clark’s involvement in the original ANTI-MUSIC activities (1979-1981) and the other from his wide interest in classical formal structures, are folded together and presented simultaneously.