



Dean Bowen

A Jar of Stars

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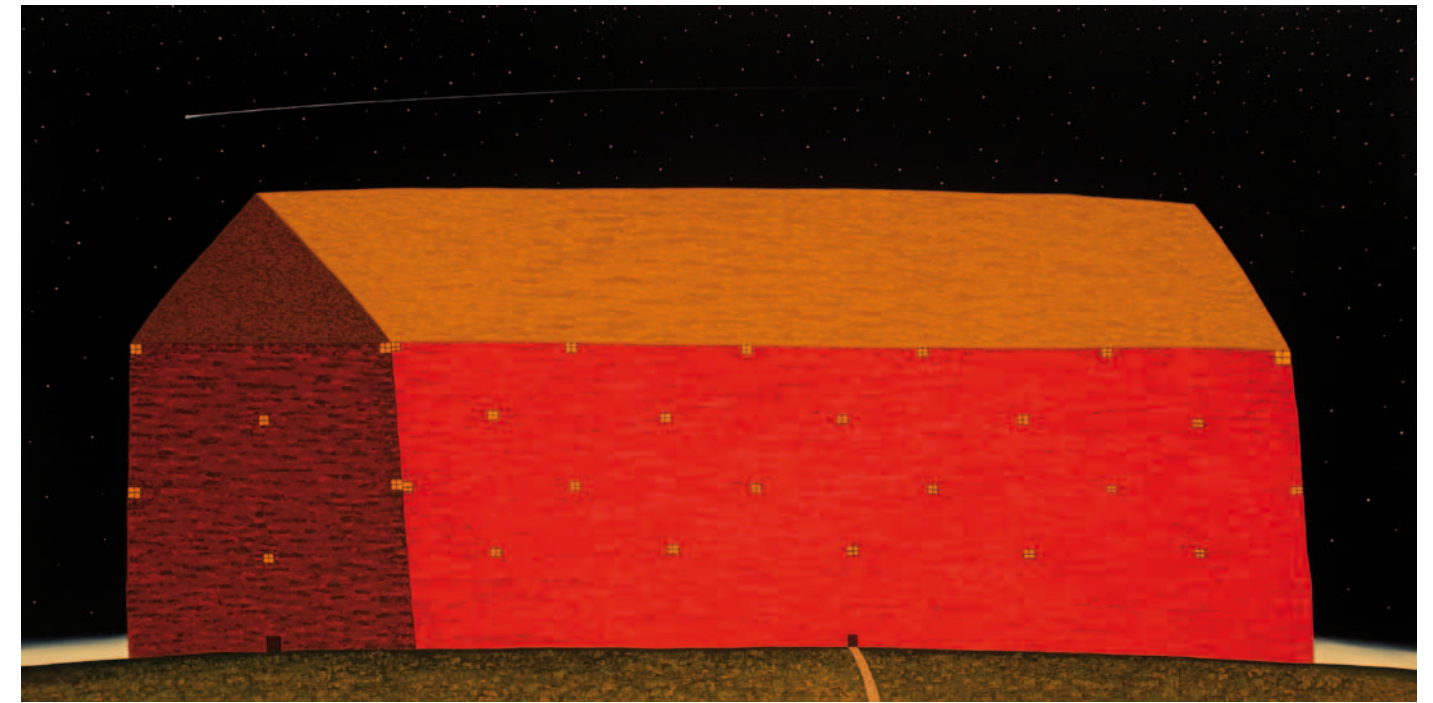
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Front Cover
Chirpie, 2011, oil on linen, 45 x 53 cm



Metempirical, 2011, oil on linen, 122 x 244 cm

A Jar of Stars

At night looking up at the stars, sprinkles of light here and there, I remember my country dog, running fast, jet black. The great adventures through the bush, discovering echidnas, ants, rabbits and birds. Lizards under a log. Angry magpies swooping country kids, maybe a peck on the head. Fat dog wanting to chase a ball... Even way back then, I remember, covered in freckles, thinking about all the characters. Red hair, curly, odd-shaped teeth, the lucky ones and others not so lucky. Pets near by. Faces shaped, telling stories about the sort of person anyone might be.

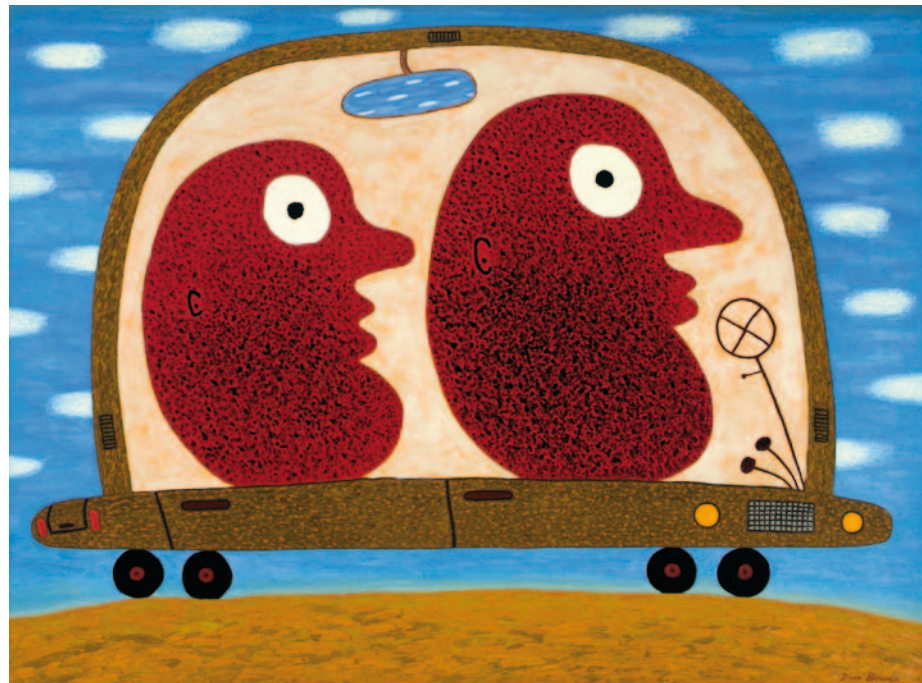
Dean Bowen¹

Dean Bowen's bewitching characters twinkle with charm and personality. Whether sourced from memories of growing up in country Victoria, or informed by the experiences of living in the hustle and bustle of an urban city, his canvases, works on paper and sculptures are imbued with whimsy and an enduring appeal.

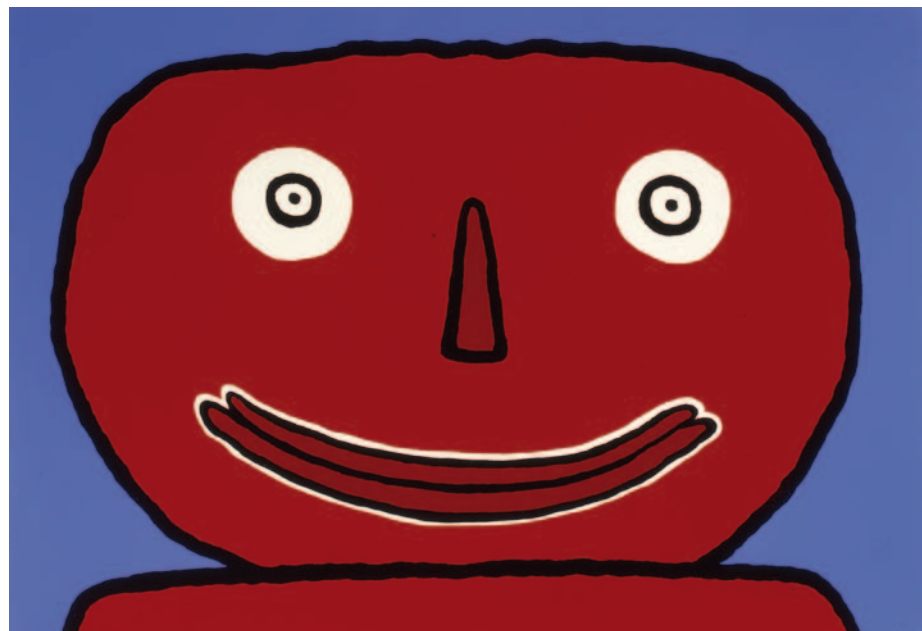
Many of Bowen's canvases and prints align with traditions of portraiture where 'by the face ye shall know the heart.' For instance Mr Wonderful's beaming smile communicates a joyous soul, while *Night face*, 2003, a self portrait, is affable but also introspective. Like most virtuosos, Bowen's portraits are deceptively simple. The paintings are pared back to their essential elements: form is abstracted, perspective is flattened and the palette is often restricted

to amplified hues of jewel-like colours. Character is conveyed in the simplest of gestures: the placement of an eye, the curve of a form, the angle of a line.

Many portraits feature animals from Bowen's past and present. By making these humble creatures the subject of a portrait, he elevates them to an equal plane. However rather than depict a bird or a dog, Bowen creates a portrait of an individual. Each has a personality as varied as their human counterparts. Birds populate many of his canvases. He turned his attention to them following their habit of disturbing him by scampering on the tin roof of his studio. The tic-tac noise of their scuttling broke the artist's concentration. However rather than convey his annoyance at their intrusion, Bowen's birds



Above: *The rough nuts*, 2007, oil on linen, 92x122 cm



Below: *Mr Wonderful*, 2007, aquatint, 76x114 cm



Bouchon, 2008, oil on linen, 153x244 cm



Perched bird with twig, 2002, oil on linen, 153 x 153 cm. Private collection

are winsome, cheeky, even flirtatious and radiate an exuberance for life. In one canvas, *Perched bird with twig*, 2002, a bulbous bird perches on a stick thin branch threatening to break it with his impossible weight. He grins with pleasure at his defiance of physics.

Bowen's compositions are typically tightly framed around the torso or face. This brings his animal friends close to the picture plane, insisting on a face to face encounter with the viewer. Birds, bats, cats and dogs stare back at us inviting us into an intimate relationship, entreating us to become their friends. Bowen's work is informed by an understanding of the fragility of nature and this plays out in his work in the range of beguiling expressions that appeal to our better instincts. For instance *Pensive penguin*, 2011, depicts a somewhat bewildered fellow who captivates the viewer with his perplexed gaze. Twenty-three bird species have become extinct in Australia since European settlement and four species of Australian penguins are listed as vulnerable on the Australian government threatened species website. *Pensive penguin* is aptly named. His beseeching expression encourages us to think more considerately of the creatures we share the planet with.

An environmental message can be seen beneath many of Bowen's works. While drivers happily ensconced in bubble cars hum up and down the bitumen arteries of suburban streets, the whirling vortex of roads and traffic humorously suggest the madness of it all. For instance the painting *Bouchon*, 2008, French for bottleneck, depicts the thrum of urban life. In this painting pockets of congested houses nestle together while clipped trees stand to attention on handkerchiefs of land. The road cuts and divides creating both order and its own form of chaos ferrying cars, trucks and buses on their journey. The voracious appetite of urban car culture is wittily expressed in *Urbanology*, 1995, an early etching inspired by the artist's daily

commute in the stop-start traffic along Punt Road in Richmond. Depicted with snapping bonnets, reminiscent of crocodiles, irritably biting at the bumper of the car in front, the work encapsulates the impatience at the heart of urban life.

In contrast there is a peaceful spaciousness in Bowen's rural scenes. A vast expanse of land sits beneath a canopy of streaky white clouds in paintings such as, *Northbound*, 2006. Instead of the loneliness of country roads, the solitary car captures the freedom that driving on the open road can bring. A number of works turn a spotlight on the drivers themselves as they shuttle from place to place: a distracted mother and children, the local hoon, a resolute chap focused intently on the road ahead. According to the artist travelling in cars is a form of journey that provides a chance to observe the passing parade of landscape and humanity. 'The journey acts as a symbol, both physically and psychologically, taking us beyond ourselves, enhancing and reminding us of the preciousness of life.'²

It is Bowen's nocturnal scenes however, that best capture a sense of wonder at the world. For instance in the large canvas, *Metempirical*, 2011, a shooting star on its arched trajectory streaks across a night sky. Flickering stars dot the sky and the beginnings of dawn wake the horizon. The magic of life is poetically conveyed in such fleeting moments. By directing our attention to such ephemeral joys, Bowen alerts us to the marvels of life all around, thereby soliciting our protection of the earth upon which we live.

Dr Wendy Garden
Gallery Curator
Maroondah Art Gallery

¹ Dean Bowen, *Personnage et animaux*, artist book, 1996.

² Dean Bowen, *Journey*, exhibition catalogue, Galerie Miyawaki, Kyoto, 2005.



Pensive penguin, 2011, oil on linen, 45 x 53 cm



Dean Bowen with sculpture at Glen Park Playspace. Photo: Danielle Butcher.

Boy with an Owl and Playful Echidnas

Dean Bowen has recently completed an exciting public art commission for Maroondah City Council. A large bronze sculpture entitled *Boy with an Owl and Playful Echidnas*, was installed at Glen Park Community Play Space in February 2012. This commission reflects Maroondah’s commitment to enhance public space and offer the community access to significant works of art as part of daily life.

The sculpture depicts a standing figure balancing a native owl on its head. At its feet are small echidnas. A symbol of wisdom, the bird also represents the unique wildlife of the Dandenong Ranges. The sculpture, while playful in nature, reminds us of our relationship and responsibility to the conservation and protection of native birds and animals. It adds a sense of peacefulness and contemplation to our experience at the Play Space. The tactile and humorous quality of the sculpture has longevity in its appeal ensuring a visit to Glen Park is a memorable experience.

The sculpture uses the lost wax method of casting and is very robust and durable and able to withstand extreme weather conditions. The bronze is patinated and waxed for longevity, requiring minimal maintenance. The sculpture was cast and installed by one of Australia’s leading bronze foundries, Perrin Sculpture Foundry in Cheltenham, Victoria. The drystone wall, upon which the sculpture is placed, is cemented together covering an inner concrete plinth and footings.

Dean Bowen has completed a number of important public art commissions including outdoor sculptures for the City of Canberra, Hobsons Bay City Council, City of Greater Shepparton and Canterbury Primary School. Maroondah City Council is very pleased to be home to another of this artist’s delightful works.

Leanne Wilkinson
Arts Planning and Policy Officer, Maroondah City Council

List of Works

All works are courtesy of the artist unless otherwise stated.
Measurements: height precedes width by depth.

Paintings

- Enraged driver* 2001
oil on board
56 x 76 cm
- Perched bird with twig* 2002
oil on linen
153 x 153 cm
Private Collection, Melbourne
- Twins* 2003
oil on linen
92 x 122 cm
- Contemplative journey* 2004
oil on linen
153 x 183 cm
- Mother driving children* 2004
oil on linen
92 x 122 cm
- Landscape with three echidnas* 2004
oil on linen
122 x 183 cm
- Northbound* 2006
oil on linen
122 x 153 cm
Collection: Benalla Art Gallery
- The rough nuts* 2007
oil on linen
92 x 122 cm
- Bouchon* 2008
oil on linen
153 x 244 cm
- Night hawk with wasps* 2009
oil on linen
45 x 53 cm
- Bird with traffic* 2011
oil on linen
45 x 53 cm
- Exotic bird with three bees* 2010
oil on linen
45 x 53 cm
- Metempirical* 2011
oil on linen
122 x 244 cm
- Fat bat* 2011
oil on linen
45 x 53 cm
- Chirpie* 2011
oil on linen
45 x 53 cm

- Pensive penguin* 2011
oil on linen
45 x 53 cm
- Perching blackbird* 2011
oil on linen
45 x 53 cm
- Mocking bird* 2009
oil on linen
45 x 53 cm
- Perching owl* 2011
oil on linen
45 x 53 cm
- Sea eagle II* 2011
oil on linen
45 x 53 cm
- Prints and works on paper**
- Urbanology* 1995
etching, aquatint, drypoint, ed. 13/25
67 x 89 cm
Collection: Banyule City Council Art Collection
- Farmer returning home* 1995
etching, aquatint, drypoint, ed. 4/25
67 x 89.5 cm
- Personnage et animaux* 1996
artist book, 24 etchings boxed
26.5 x 19.5 x 4.2 cm
- Mother and child in suburbia* 1997
etching, aquatint, drypoint, ed. 5/25
67 x 89 cm
- Child with a comb* 1998
etching, aquatint, drypoint ed. 8/25
67 x 89 cm
- Moon dog* 1998
etching, aquatint, drypoint, ed. 4/25
67 x 89 cm
- Bird wall* 2002
lithograph, ed. 11/25
46 x 68 cm
- Red dog* 2002
lithograph, ed. 2/25
46 x 68 cm
- Tectonic head* 2002
etching, aquatint, drypoint, ed. 22/25
67 x 89 cm
- Night face* 2003
gouache, watercolour
66 x 96 cm
- Cat* 2004
lithograph, ed. T/P
46 x 68 cm
- Travelling turtles* 2004
lithograph, ed. 10/25
46 x 68 cm

- Wild ride* 2005
lithograph, ed. 6/25
46 x 68 cm
- Mr Wonderful* 2007
aquatint, ed. 3/25
76 x 114 cm
- Nocturnal landscape with echidna* 2007
etching, aquatint, drypoint, ed. 8/25
44 x 59 cm
- Sparrow hawk* 2009
lithograph, ed. AP 3/4
47 x 68 cm
- Bird with stick insects* 2010
lithograph, ed. T/P
48 x 69 cm
- Perfume* 2010
lithograph, ed. 15/25
49 x 70 cm
- Jar of stars* 2011
charcoal
75 x 106 cm
- Sculpture**
- The happy dog* 2001
bronze, ed. 5/9
24 x 37 x 24 cm
- Boy with an owl* 2005
bronze, ed. A/P
19 x 39 x 9 cm
- Man with echidnas and owl* 2009
bronze, unique state
45 x 46 x 30 cm
- Young girl with echidnas* 2009
bronze, unique state
25 x 30 x 44.5 cm
- Little sister* 2010
bronze, ed. 2/9
14.5 x 40 x 8 cm
- Assemblages**
- Little Miro* 2004
mixed media
34 x 18 x 5 cm
- The playful prince* 2004
mixed media
72 x 45 x 7 cm
- Little Richard* 2007
mixed media
62 x 28 x 6 cm
- Oscar* 2009
mixed media
41 x 23 x 3 cm
- Starry eyes* 2010
mixed media
48 x 60 x 5 cm



Urbanology, 1995, etching, aquatint, drypoint, 67 x 89 cm. Banyule City Council Art Collection

Dean Bowen

b. 1957 Maryborough, Victoria www.deanbowen.com.au

Dean Bowen is a highly acclaimed artist who works across the mediums of painting, sculpture and printmaking. He holds a Masters of Art and a PhD from Monash University.

Bowen has an extensive exhibiting career spanning over twenty-five years. He has held solo exhibitions in Australia, France, Japan, Switzerland and the United Kingdom. He has won many national and international awards including prizes in the Osaka Print Triennial, 1994 and 1997, and the Sapporo International Print Biennial, 1998, in Japan. He was a finalist in the Helen Lempriere National Sculpture Award in 2003 and 2008 and his paintings have been shortlisted for both the Sulman Prize, 2009, (Art Gallery of New South Wales) and the Wynne Prize, 2010, (Art Gallery of New South Wales). Bowen has received a number of major commissions, including bronze sculpture commissions for the City of Greater Shepparton in 2006 and Hobsons Bay City Council in 2010. In 2012 he completed an important commission for Maroondah City Council of an outdoor sculpture at Glen Park Community Play Space.

Dean Bowen's work is represented in over 70 national and international collections including the National Gallery of Australia; Heide Museum of Modern Art; Fukuoka Museum of Art, Japan; National Taiwan Museum of Fine Arts; Bibliotheque Nationale, Paris and the Art Gallery of New South Wales.

Dean Bowen's first monograph *Argy Bargy* by Sheridan Palmer was launched in 2009. Published by Macmillan Art Publishing, this richly illustrated book is a comprehensive overview of Bowen's artistic career and includes many images of paintings, sculpture and prints.

Acknowledgments

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Back Cover

Night hawk with wasps, 2011, oil on linen, 45 x 53 cm

