



Careering forth

“...I suddenly recognised that my childhood was an anxious time and I have sort of used that ever since I think...”

The perils of life as an emerging artist and a revered one are both great, yet each has its benefits:

emerging artists need to be supported and picking a winner can deliver exceptional results, while blue chip art is always going to increase in value.

But for all those who boast about the early Brett Whitely purchase that has just funded an extension, it is rare to hear of the 20 other purchases that have so far languished and, though possibly still admired, have not appreciated. Blue chip art also has the capacity to dawdle, often needing more than a year to recoup the buyer's premium and a further epoch to generate the seller's premium before any profit can realistically be garnered on the secondary market.

Successful mid-career artists on the other hand, have on their side an established record of quality work, a sound market, inclusion in premium collections and exemplary exhibitions plus, with good management, the potential to develop further.

Rick Amor certainly exhibits these attributes and his work has steadily increased in value to suit. With a career spanning some 36 years, Amor showed initially with Joseph Brown in 1974 before being taken up by Niagara Galleries in 1983, which also arranged for him to show with Liverpool Street Gallery since its inception in 2004. The relationship with Niagara has been of particular importance to the artist and the partnership has resulted in his work being placed in every national museum, the better regional collections and numerous private Australian and international collections.

“The key to Amor's success,” says Bill Nuttall

Above:
Rick Amor *Self portrait*
2010, oil on canvas
Image courtesy of the artist and
Liverpool Street Gallery, Sydney and
Niagara Galleries, Melbourne

Opposite top:
Rick Amor *The Waiter*
1995-2000, oil on canvas
Sold by Menzies Art Brands for
\$132,000* March 2010
A record for the artist at auction.

Opposite below:
Rick Amor *The Mansions*, 2003,
oil on canvas
Sold by Sotheby's in Sydney for
\$78,000* August 2010

* includes buyer's premium

of Niagara Galleries, “is not just his innate technical proficiencies, but also his ability to create works which resonate with a sense of both the familiar and the unfamiliar. He is indeed one of the most significant figurative artists of his generation in Australia, in the same way that John Brack and John Olsen are of their generation.”

The facts back up Nuttall's comments: Amor has participated in the Archibald on nine occasions and was the recipient of the McClelland Award in 2007, as well as an array of other prizes, grants and scholarships.

In 2008, a major retrospective of Amor's work, *A Single Mind*, curated by Linda Short, was exhibited at the Heide Museum of Modern Art to much acclaim.

Not bad for an artist whose oeuvre is rife with fear, anxiety, isolation, unease, desolation, shady characters and looming shadows. These tropes of his paintings distinguish him from the figurative fray in both palette and narrative, though as he points out, these narratives are only similar to life, in that they are an open-ended glimpse of action rather than a story.

The fact that we recognise these dark corners speaks volumes for his success, as curator Linda Short states: “Rick's imagery is deeply personal and a lot of it is autobiographical, but I think it is universal, I think we all relate to the images he presents.”¹

This is further endorsed by Amor, whose own feelings of apprehension are so tellingly portrayed: “Anxiety plays a big part in the work and I suddenly recognised that my childhood was an anxious time and I have sort of used that ever since I think, because the 20th century is the age of anxiety,” he has said.²



Art market hopes are generally divided between the heady expectations of emerging artists and the sedentary moss-gathering rewards of blue chip, while mid-career artists have seemingly been relegated to art world purgatory. Contradicting this trend, however, are some of Australia's finest. Gillian Serisier profiles artist Rick Amor.





Left:
Rick Amor *Three Trees* 2010,
oil on canvas
Image courtesy of the artist and Liverpool
Street Gallery, Sydney and Niagara Galleries,
Melbourne

Below:
Rick Amor *Evening by the Sea* 1998
Sold by Sotheby's in Melbourne for
\$90,000* August 2007



* includes buyer's premium

Anxious it might be, but not so for the steel-willed bidders who shuttle cocked offers back and forth to a record \$110,000 (\$132,000 including buyer's premium) at Menzies' March 2010 auction for Amor's *The Waiter*, 1995-2000, a cracker of an increase on its previous hammer fall of \$50,000 (\$60,000 including premium) through Sotheby's in 2005. This sale also served to break his previous record of \$75,000 (\$90,000 including premium) for *Evening By the Sea*, 1998, through Sotheby's in 2007. *The City*, 1989-90, has also done well, selling in 2007 for \$65,000 (\$72,000 including premium) through Deutscher and Hackett, up from \$44,000 (\$51,200 including premium) through Deutscher Menzies in 2003.

That these are exceptional paintings within the artist's oeuvre is not beside the point, as Amor tends to have a variety of works appearing on the secondary market at any given moment. At present there is a handful available, ranging in estimates from \$500-\$700 for a lithograph (*The Interview*, Lawson Menzies 30/8/10) to \$65,000-\$75,000 for a significant painting (*The Mansions*, Sotheby's 31/8/10).

With an artist of this ilk, it pays to listen to the auctioneers, who have a good grasp on an individual painting's current secondary market value (despite sometimes getting it wrong – the 2010 auction of *The Waiter* had an estimate of \$60,000-\$80,000). So, while an increase in overall price is very much in line with Amor's increased imprimatur, it is also important to be aware that not all works are as valuable as others.

Five years seems to be the golden rule for the

secondary market and Amor is no exception, with *Coast*, 2006, fetching a slightly damp \$60,000 (\$72,000 including premium) through Leonard Joel in April of this year. It is unfortunate that it went to auction so soon, as the past five years have seen an irregular but general increase in price.

The latest exhibitions of Amor's work, at Niagara in September and Liverpool Street in October, demonstrate an artist at ease and comfortable with his material and style. Unlike many emerging artists that fade away after a brief, though sometimes glorious flurry, he has not devolved into a parody of himself and his work is evolving with depth and perception.

And this is what makes mid-career artists interesting. If they have stood the test of time there is generally a very good reason, as Damien Hackett of Deutscher and Hackett Auction house points out: "If you go back to bare bones, Rick Amor has a wonderful facility to be able to paint. He can construct a painting and he has great lineage: he was a student of John Brack and Brack's influence in his earlier work is more noticeable, but as Rick grew his personality and his own language developed. It's got to be said that he has chosen his representative dealers very well, he's been represented by terrific, honourable and hard-working dealers including Tony Palmer and of course Bill Nuttall, and more recently Liverpool Street. It's been a slow steady career with real growth in value happening within the past 10 years."

Rick Amor will be exhibiting with Liverpool Street Gallery from the 2-28 October.

Rick Amor
Liverpool Street Gallery
2 - 28 October 2010

¹ Sunday Arts, ABC TV 13 April 2008.
² Sunday Arts, ABC TV 13 April 2008.