

RHYS KNIGHT

Highly Commended: Contemporary Art Awards 2018

Eliminating the Ego

By Di Erlichman

Melbourne artist, Rhys Knight (b. 1991), received a highly commended in the Contemporary Art Awards 2018 for his painting *Self (Body-World) 3* (2017). The work depicts a nude, fragmented, headless figure, against a formless background. It has a strong textural under-paint application and uses a single source of light.

Rhys cites Caravaggio, Francis Bacon, and Ken Currie as influences. This is evident in the way he captures the dualism of mind and body through the underpainting, the translucent dripping textures, the stark lighting of the figure, and in the elimination of the ego through the destruction and absence of the figure's face.

Through this work, Rhys explores Descartes' theory of Dualism where one experiences the dichotomy of, and alienation between, the mind (spirit) and body (matter) and the alienation from one's mortality as a result. René

Descartes (d. February 1650), a renowned French philosopher and physicist, argued in his thesis that mind and body are fundamentally distinct; that the mind can exist outside of the body, and that the body cannot think.

Rhys' expressive abstract approach, with its use of a translucent underpainting, faceless forms, and fragmentation of limbs, is also a powerful and effective means of referencing the practice of Dzogchen within Tibetan Buddhism and the concept of "having no head", as developed by the British mystic Douglas Harding. Harding's book *On Having No Head* (1961) addresses the theory that one's central identity, or innermost

being, is immediately accessible through direct experience; the 'headless' reality at our centre.

Displaying an interest in the aesthetic of horror through heavy metal music, alternative literature and cinema, Rhys was drawn to painting in oils as an immersive medium, using dry painting and fluid brush strokes (dripping paint over the canvas) to explore subjects that centre on the macabre. Initially exploring philosophy and art to better understand himself, Rhys began utilising philosophy as the basis for the conceptual and methodological framework of his work. Through his technique, Rhys' work questions ideas on humanity, mortality and the human psyche.

In 2015, Rhys graduated with a Bachelor of Visual and Media Arts at Monash University, Gippsland. Rhys has exhibited in both solo and group shows since 2014, and his work has appeared in a number of publications, including *La Ragazza Di Greenville* (2016), and *Clayton Creed* (2015) by Pietro Gandolfi, and *Morgan E IL Buio* (2016) by Danilo Arona. Rhys Knight is represented by Macabre Gallery.

On this page, *Self (Body-World) 3* (2017), oil on canvas, 90 x 80cm.

Image courtesy of the artist

Rhys Knight's artwork can be viewed at: <http://www.contemporaryartawards/finalist-exhibition-2018.com>

