

THE INLAND SEA

POEMS BY JOHN JENKINS



The Inland Sea

Our environment is a mental image in us and in our historical life. - Edmund Husserl

Also by John Jenkins:

Zone Of The White Wolf And Other

Landscapes (Contempa)

Blind Spot (Gargoyle/Makar)

A cassette and CD, *Waiting For Manana* (4T)

THE INLAND SEA

POEMS BY JOHN JENKINS

Notes on the poems: Some of these poems have been previously published, sometimes in a slightly different form, in magazines and journals, such as *Magic Sam* and *New Poetry*. Sections of *Ode To Entropy* and *The Silence Around A Glass of Water* were adapted by composer Richard Vella as the libretto for *Play For Voices*, a dramatic choral piece performed by the Melbourne Astra Choir in 1981.

Acknowledgements: Thanks to Shan Shnookal for her encouragement, to Richard Vella for his contribution of several terrific lines to *Ode To Entropy*, to Ken Bolton for his notes, and to Robert Kenny for his commitment, patience and invaluable advice. Cover photograph and jacket design by Robert Kenny.

Copyright: C/- John Jenkins, 1984
Published by **Brunswick Hills Press**,
in association with **Rigmarole Books**.
ISBN: 0-9590929-0-0

The Inland Sea

The Inland Sea	7
Postcard	14
Pyromaniacs At The Yacht Club	16
View	18
Untitled	19
Childhood	21
Ode To Entropy	23
The Imaginary Bride	26
Your Poem	
Your Silent Books	
Your Madmen	
Your Names	
Your Cool White Hands	
Our Last Look Back	
I Like You	31
We Drive...	32
Encore	33
It's A Party	35
Poolside in LA	37
A Star Appears	39
At The Art Auction	41
Five Art Poems	43
The Silence Around A Glass Of Water	46

The Inland Sea

It breaks behind the eyes of
a continent and it breaks
along the lips of migrants
who wake up and cultivate
pebbles and pigface:
the inland sea is a fine
blue line which laps the pool
and buckles its bland mosaic.
The inland sea is graphic music:
a sine curve of sunlight
pushing through your speakers.

Or the inland sea on holiday
is a Blue Emperor butterfly
at Cairns, which settles,
in slow motion, all the way
down to a Stone Victoria. Its story,
old as dreamtime and told through
micro ecology, dots one of
her hard marble eyes.

A chrysalis of frozen
light over Fitzroy Street. Sky
cold-blue with the lepidoptery
of banknotes: Farewell Antarctica.
Here a St Kilda tea room's
walls are papered with
an old map of Empire. Its vast
rule of Ted salted to pink
sunburn: the spectrum's
ultra violets blooming where
Ceylon gestates Sri Lanka.

Trouble brews when we travel
down the map to where we are,
more insouciant than laconic, and a lapse of tension
drones with vacuity, groans
with space, or merely fills it –
with blowflies and diphthongs.

Outside, the slap of plastic
on cement does not wake old
men who listen to a sea roar,
who wait for light fragile as kisses
or, with their blue methyrate hands,
touch upon a literature
denied its surrealistic phase.

But everything changes in a
sudden sunburst. Australia becomes
benign, eats flowers, flips over its records.

Crowds crowd the sticks
along the adrenalin Hume;
the air splashing your windshield
is like champagne. And the radio ignites,
How I want to go home
My heart is so full of pain
then the crows wheel West to Perth
across vast absences of rain.

Like playing chess on an old
Czech shirt is nonsense, glazed
at the amber lights, you reflect
how we turn fossils into power,
then automobiles into fossils.
They line the backblocks,
burnt-out, numerous as tinnies.

Like everything that does violence
to desire, consumerism breeds
incendiary acts: wheels
head over heels, axles to the sun
and motors screaming. It distracts
roadside pubs from boredom.
Pause from your amber
sunset then, to stare into the glare
of the beautiful accident.

At night, ghost breakers spray a nimbus
of light over whispered depths:
a phosphorescence of myth which leaks
through the coffee-table hum,
your late-night conversations.

The next day real estatesmen sell
Sydney, entering deals with the ease
of goanna oil. Behind their creased
white shirts Mururoa Atoll is ablaze.

But the suburbs are in love –
beyond a daily, deadly struggle
for soft toys and white bread.
Armed akimbo, let the myth swell
your chest like a breaker, your cries
drift above foam shot
with blue lightning. Then press
on towards the Centre

where you falter into sand,
clawing at dunes with hands
like five-laved highways.
Above you, a world of graphic anxiety:
little people fall off the sky
in mirages of the roadsides,
where deck chairs and click toys
pave the way to Darwin.
Like gold, cappuccino
is where you find it
beyond Ayers Rock.

But also like an old Zero's wing,
the sheer elegance of the inland
reflects in glancing graphs
at Roxby Downs. Even here
it all becomes abstract: your sweet surge
of sperm translates into a mushroom cloud,
a fleet of red Maseratis fuse
into the parking lot,
into the empty desert.

Vast regret, like a last blue movie,
pales above the roaring inland sea.

Yet blue flowers still attract
blue butterflies at the Daintree.
And in the warm Pacific
coral accretes a benign ideology
which, as patient as a pearl,
says our hearts are full
of blood and pulse
along ancient arterial routes
from the Centre to the sea; it lulls
and sings like women in a ring
and holds a soft and beating
chalice where blue cranes cry
above a dream which is timeless;
of deep blue stars.

The song is young again
on Mallee paperbarks, in ghostly script
of the wind, a frail skywriting
across branches, where spider lines
glisten above this bullant trail
to the Southern Cross.

"I gave my radio away, cut my ties
and left my house, I no longer needed
anyone, only to be alone, out there,
with just the stars at night,
like a sandgrain, out there, they were
so clear, the sky so huge..."
So said the old prospector
I met in Adelaide. His neighbours called him
"mad hatter" and said "lots of them go strange
out in the scrub alone". He told me too
how he found, beneath a stump
at Lightning Ridge, five blue sapphires.

Apocryphal night breaks off
and glows in the half light,
floats across the back country.
Your suit is folded across a chair.
Out there you have been lulled only by the purr of the power
of your engine, your love of speed.
And for hours daylight has ricocheted
like gunshot. Rocks, once hot, now crack
with cold; and will do so
until the future toes old tv tubes
out of their sands.

In your motel bed your head
is lit by blue light, soft glow
of digital numerals from a clock radio
set for five am. Do you
understand? Until then your shoals
of small regrets and disappointments
we could begin to call a culture
are just a flurry of ash across
a continent of sleep. They settle
on the inland sea; frail spume
of white memories.

But be soothed, out here there are
no sharks, caressed by a blue voice –
the blue across the walls
of your room, whisperings of coral
cornucopias, a swirl of days down
to the last red bowser at the country store
those sudden miles away...

To the hush of a lullaby, on a thin
blue wind from the Centre, the empty
air still tugs at your empty sleeve.

Postcard

Goodbye Sydney: across blue
rushing lights in the wake
of the first morning ferry.
Convict bones rot in the harbor
and distil old arts of hardship,
yours to share with foam.
Steel bands still bind the waterfront
in the cold purity of morning
and next year is a wave away,
breaking beneath iron bollards
of the yacht club where sharks grin,
drink gin, and plan our futures,
and if not with the courage of the convicts,
at least with some of their convictions.
Music ripples where sea birds fall
(dorsals flash beneath the day)
and, although it can not think,
a postcard frames a bridge with sunset
as money blooms along the coast
or moves north behind a moat.
But cockroaches float, thriving
in the heart like art does, breeding
exotic culture after dark.
Here you can be anything, combine
blue sky with sheer decay, or so
the madman at the Quay seems to say
as he tips a small fan at you
and winks to the clink of change.
Lights bear fabled beauty in the breezy night
which soothes and cools your glowing skin
and makes you feel so good to be alive.
It makes urbane the song, no less lyrical
for the spill of wharves, the
clutter of junk and stars.
A vase of deep blue flowers floats
above the Monastral night, the harbor.
Tomorrow, mid-day sweat already clots,
everyone aging savagely in an acid light.
Money swims beside smart houses,
inters the poor, or barely does.

And something stirs in spring.
The city is washed in rain and brings
innocence, which can not last,
flicking foam along the beach.
A razor cuts out cool surfing days
and motion breaks like a heart
with topological unrest, into a loopy
Mobius, from Parramatta to Luna Park.
You can be anything. The postcard
says it's real: a bridge, a sky at sunset.

Pyromaniacs At The Yacht Club

Where skywriters whitewash the breeze
and ferries trail through the blue
 their hushing wakes –
two dots of red on a flag of green,
a golden painting shines down from the sky.
Your head spans daylight here,
a steel bridge, a century of optimism.
Let's celebrate, the day's hothouse
 is tan and aqua
a kiss of flame across your skin.
Cool instantly, blow kisses across cruel blue,
while beers pop on deck, sex flaring down
 the nerve till night.
The lines twist with synaesthesia,
radiant will of waves, the creamy flop of surf.
Two dots of red focus, wave their arms at us.
They shout and we hear, and see their
 icecreams sparkle,
sun and salt sting their skin,
windscreens bite blue air.

A flashing and slapping on hulls,
radiant blue swerve to shore.
Two faces focus from a squiggle of
 lips and eyes
buoyed up on the glossy hum of their blood
streaming back to the Carboniferous.

Foreshore houses blaze into arson
 in their wake.
Now, the middle distance, the foreground,
 are radiant.
Beyond the shore, Ockerus hang-glides
and light splits through thermal shifts
 above breakers
where surfers swerve cool and unperturbed
 in sunburst.

Further back, a highway lassoes the hills
where sirens erupt, seeking them:
Two dots of red escape
As night breaks down along the beach,
the yacht club burning.

View

From the rooftop you can see out across the harbor. Cars banking. Restless grind of mid city. It all seems to float away from your eyes. That man darting through the crowd below. See, his white shirt. You blink, and miss him threading into distance. Gone. People sit in front of glass bank doors, beneath colored umbrellas in the sun. Windscreens and chrome ripple with reflections where traffic lights flash through their colors. An occasional dart of light from an uplifted glass. Each tall white block of steel and cement seems to lean back from the fountain in the centre of the square. Birds peck its edges, urban seagulls squawking for scraps. It is like a frozen explosion – glass and concrete. Distorted angular faces compact away from this central explosion of the inner city. Buildings which reflect each other seem buildings within buildings. In a green wedge of parkland someone with a microphone addresses the crowd above a buzz of chain saws where workers trim the trees. The inter-welding sounds leap splintering from the walls of the buildings, way past normal earshot. You can hear all that noise from the rooftop. That's why you lean back on the chromium bar, as it all rumbles over cement tables, deckchairs and potted palms. High above, a plane purrs across the blue annealed planes of the hard mid-day sky.

Untitled

Between Antarctic ice and inland fire
Melbourne just holds onto the map,
glancing at the weather, while glaciers
bump like lovers' teeth in Port Philip Bay.

It wakes death out of the desert where
your duco bubbles in the picturesque glare
under 24 hours of blinking lights
which spell *Motel Splendide*. You leave
it behind at speed, fading like stars might
around a brandy cruster. But at the nearby Mirage Oasis
your asbestos suit fills with sweat and you admire
the air conditioning, a fake snowstorm in a tank.

The luminosity around your forehead lights up
a parquet bar, as lightning would a potted palm.
The windows shudder with heat and mood lighting,
and a fish tank explodes, leaving shellfish
among your biros. Like this, and the guests
in snowshoes, everything is real, and the pictures
just blur behind your eyes. Before lunch arrives,
you'll have to rev up your great whirling cosmos
of a mind for a few rounds of mini golf.

A waiter's jacket is an ad for Rinso. Mauve
fire leaps from the Martini Henry ambience.
Then a massive Concorde crashes into cerise dust
to fill those echoing chasms between your ears.
But whiskey chasers merely nail another polar bear's
head to the wall. Atrophied again!

Revolutions often pale and, like a Jaffa
in a martini, your head turns faintly pink.
Too much, you bend to fetch a golden dollar
rolling along the frozen tourist brochures at your feet.
Before you can prise it out of the snow, someone
invites you to a party where the barbecues are placed
too close to the snowman, which melts. You order
fillet steak done in coconut milk.

Years later, waking up on deck, you watch the sun
go down from the bow of the Nella Dan. A whale factory
floats past, full of Japanese tourists fiddling with cameras.
Your steak is burnt and you feel really hurt. Kissing
your wrist you sigh and hitch-hike to Tierra del Fuego
across the endless ice floes and Antarctic morning,
winning friends and enemies among the elegant King Penguins.

Childhood

(for Roberto Matta)

Dry chips rattle across the board
whipped by the thin-lipped queen in black –
the spider behind the tree – she lifts her head,
eyes razoring, then flares right across your face.
Black. You lose. The sinister crackle
of players in red behind the subtle light of aces,
decks shuffled between their hearts.

Out on the night winds
a wand of ash floats to your grave:
the doublecross becomes your gambit.
Little bones roll across the board.
A blind king plays for keeps, raising the stakes
with his dust, on a distant star. We must play on.

The dice rattle, across dry cases in a goods yard
by the sea. Footsteps crease the dust that drifts
in cerise clouds before monstrous and roaring engines.
Battalions fight on a bridge in flames. Beware,
someone whispers, of game machines. And weeping
in your golden frame you drift over
the crowd against your will, with another face
to win. Rig out the deck, the black queen
rehearses play before the fatal audience. You sense
she sees you, pressing your face against
her chin; then she goes away. Dying moments conspire
in skeletal crews which swarm before you
screaming: "forfeit, forfeit, your eyes are lost".

Escape from the frame entering bands of light
which stream out through brilliant voids

and set stars whirling through an ocean of sentient
light. A globe of atoms, full of faces, join energies.
We split into liquid darts and stream from west to east.
But sinister faces play a brutal card,
the game's not won. And the play goes on.
Lead-like nodules dislodge from a sterile basin

in the ultimate land of despair, drifting upward through the screen and scrambling the gaming board with chance encounters; generate diabolical dialogue. One pure note splits from the din and their card rebounds. Then I answer with my secret ace, the doublecross.

Ode To Entropy

The noise in the street is flying
Comic books are flying
Tear drops are flying
The latest fashions are flying
The inventor of the wheel is flying
Adjectives are flying
 Flying and flying

Anti neutrinos are flying
Static fuzz is flying
Your charming smile is flying
The crowd which explodes is flying
Your new Berber carpet is flying
Dreams of sensible men are flying

Beaming celebrities are flying
Blood on the dancefloor is flying
Missiles and rockets are flying
The classified pages are flying
Here a bit of the pyramids is flying
And here a tubeless tyre
 Flying and flying

The wedding cake sugar couple is flying
Good intentions are flying
Saturday night parties are flying
Biological weapons are flying
A storm in a teacup is flying
The liftout centrefold is flying
 Flying and flying

Spiral galaxies are flying
The elbowed glass of beer is flying
Overtime heart attacks are flying
The fictions of your mind are flying
Replays in slow motion are flying
The moustache on the sun-tanned face is flying

Silent screams in horror movies are flying
A scale model of the Sydney Opera House is flying
Here is a miracle pimple cure, flying!
And here, a new pair of red sox is flying
The cat-aimed brick is flying
And here is an empty letterbox
Flying and flying

Pneumatic drills are flying
Family Christmas photographs are flying
Voltage controlled oscillators are flying
Old drunks in the park are flying
Adolescent schoolgirls are flying
The wishbone in the Sunday chicken is
Flying and flying

A stranger's friendly smile is flying
A night in the suburbs is flying
A bust of Beethoven is flying
Dinner parties are flying
Shiny hubcaps are flying

The holes in your shoes are flying
The roller coaster at the fun pier is flying
Here is a perfect relationship, flying!
And here a huge bubble of smoke is flying
The World Congress on Ski Trauma is flying
And bits of Stonehenge are flying
Flying and flying

Faces in the sick wards are flying
A textbook fascist is flying
Multi-story car parks are flying
Hands in the holy water are flying
Here is the stuffed carcass of Phar Lap, still flying
And here a diamond engagement ring is flying
Flying and flying

Today's bad news is flying
The morning school siren is flying
Radio voices are flying
Clouds of fallout are flying
The cigarette cowboy is flying
 Flying and flying

All these things are flying.

All these things,
All flying and flying,
have tiny wings.

The Imaginary Bride

1) Your poem

From the blue and white
rose star

light

fans your skin's
thin windows

wastes
your threadbare body
to the bone

Through
the blue and white
faces
daybreak turns
to foam

hazardous beauty
of the glacial sun

2) Your Silent Books

Silent books
full of meaning
and smoke
cascade
in sun bubbles

or light pipe dreams
around your smile

tiny curved windows
through a fault of light

are expanding,
(infinitely dead),
around your every-blue
eyes

now, ever,
never, always.

3) Your Madmen

Your madmen
chased rabbits
across clipped lawns
when I came to see you
(`Forever Girl' through
lovers and memory...)

In the `Free Ward'
your smile grazed their faces
like a snow hare

eyes like bluebirds
in my eyes

still cries of
ice

cracked and burning
in the cage.

4) Your Names

The Blue Woman The White Sea
The Blue Rose The White Star
The Blue Dove The White Guitar
Small pink moons of dust singing.
Lengths of your braided hair
unwinding and falling
through a smoky gift of light.

A silver evening, an oasis night.

The little sandgrains
full of shining instants,
of light and microscopic photographs of stars.

5) Your Cool White Hands

Your cool white hands
and melodic certainty given heart.
The great living beasts
sea and memory adopts.
Cool white moons
among the blessed animals.

6) Our Last Look Back

Our thin hearts
stretched with night,
our minds at winter,
sifted tides of dust
for unsayable words.. .
Withering on white
and set so still
that the full stop
of our last look back
lasted like everything lasts.

I Like You

When your cool blue voice melts,
when you smile,

the radio smokes
and a brilliant holiday
drops from your lips

when you flash through your fame
with a laugh,
when you eat with immaculate pleasure,

I like you
just as you are

you always glow through the pulse
of your music

let's rush out feeling great
let's find the warm plateaux,
let's ride an
 incorrigible mule train
out into the sunset

We Drive

We drive at speed to the music
Her skin burns the air like a heater
Exotic decibels pump from a speaker
When the radio melts she's still laughing
White lines rush across duco
Creamy clouds fly over her shoulder
Money sings in her eyes for an icecream
Sunlight fills the horizon
We change into top in the linebreak
Her tongue stabs into my ear like icicles
The sunset explodes on a billboard
Champagne splashes like surf from the windshield
We laugh so hard we start to cry
Happy tears are bouncing from vinyl
The day turns to night in the headlights
We skid past the gates of the airport
Searchlights criss-cross the runways
Frost ignites over the tarmac
A jet ripples across our bright duco
We tailspin back onto the highway
We glide past the blazing refinery
We admire towers of glass in the moonlight
We see fiery domes and vast bridges
The air stings with salt at the seafront
Just for fun we drive off the fun pier
Our windshield explodes into diamonds
The ground seems to give way beneath us
Breakers collide like soft cymbals
We break surface in a sea of slick rainbows
We're still laughing and still holding hands
With calm strokes we reach a beach restaurant
Each line is a separate sentence
Each line is a different sentence
We order coffee and are having a great time.

Encore

It was an energy pill
in the popcorn
it was exploding
with small *frissons*
it was exciting and cold and sweaty
it knew nothing
of gypsies and tinkers
it was a vehicle
for unlikely pleasures
it ate up a lifetime of leisure
it was like mini golf
after caviar
it was quick and easy and simple
it was wheeled into the sun
with the old folks
it was complex
and impossibly tricky
it wore flippers
at the opera
it wanted to dent your
mattress
it stayed up all night
just to please you
it read the newspaper
over your shoulder
it had a luminous glow
on its forehead
it wanted to love you
forever
it kissed you and worshipped
your body
it was familiar and ate
a ham sandwich
it was the touch of cologne
in a heatwave

it was the great MGM
of tomorrow
it streamed like a radiant
dart
it was another fabulous
poem.

It's A Party...

It's a party for skydivers,
dressed in white slacks, jackets
and parachutes,
these real heroes would like to salute you
in formation.. .
all leaping into the future
with complete vitality and devil-may-care.
There's a big red circle
on the roof
where they'll land for the party,
these accurate ones.
Valets are waiting there
to roll up their chutes
and hand them gin and bitters
while they smile for the cameras.
We sigh when they dive,
rub our eyes
and admire their `living fireworks display'.
When they jump again
don't think of death
or be looking for an ash tray: you might miss them!
As planeloads of heroes
become a shower of sparks in the sky.

It's a party for skydivers
And we've planned their reception,
where elevators streak the sides
of dazzling towers,
on the roof we've waited
for hours
for the arrival of our heroes.
The top floor is like a huge cube
of ice.
Smart people mix in a snowdrift of white
carpet and nobody spills their drinks.
Tonight the city seems a living
hive of light.
Everyone here is beautiful. It's become
fashionable, like living forever

and always wearing a smile.
The sun stains glass doors
 and stuns the guests
who also glow. Certainly, they're
 impressed,
and wait for the Great Jumpers.
Smart talk, laughter, take flight –
like butterflies with wings of ice –
as the roof slides back for a nice surprise:
They're here-all over the sky! Holding
hands and sparklers. Skydivers! We cheer
as they drift down everywhere, little
 tufts of white,
all blazing with their fabulous heroic smiles.

Poolside In LA

The starlet said something
cliche from the side of her face,
gave to the camera
then lost it, splash!
her step and her poise.
In the pool she shook
a long wet whip of blonde
and laughed, that lady in
a limp dress, laughed.

She'd laughed at first
behind the bar
and fed her thirst. To be a star...
Light slid across, and changed,
her face. They called her Grace.

They called her Grace Darling
at the party. Another poolside Ophelia
floating an act. Backside bobbing
polka dots, hair's soft fan outspread
over a flotilla of lace. Then her
bubble burst. It amused the guests.

It amused and then it shocked
the guests who quickly left
their olives in each glass
to toe it through the music
and into the mild night. Sparks clicked
in white gravel and doors snapped shut.

Doors snapped crisply shut as limousines
purred softly from the drive...

Inside, a single camera still whirrs,
discreetly, out of sight,
where two men sit. Night hangs
upon their few soft words
and the blonde ash of their cigars.

Two cigars like burning stars
stab at the night. `We warned her
not to be too cute,' says one in blue
to the one in black. But the director
yawns, puffs, is bored: "Sure," he says,
"Sure..."

A Star Appears

Like a chip of fire, a bright star threads the night:

A thin, rotating ball of light, it wheels high
above the scorching waste where one vast
MultiDome now covers half the Earth.

Inside the Dome, crueller eyes
regard what currently thrills –
gladiators with lasers, peep shows that kill.

And sensors make slow passes,
and test for signs of dissidence
or revolution, in its taming pleasure cells.

The Dome hums, ejecting waste
beyond its toxic glow, where outcasts
in survival suits filter wisps of oxygen,
grope for food, and slowly die of rage.

In a blaze of authority the Dome now fills the sky
with swiftest fire, directs five darts of steel
to the bright intruder in its skies.

Instantly, the star is hulled,
its brilliant lights blink out.
One earthling enters, but he's the last,
and flakes into a wisp of ash.

New beams now sign the sky
with animated holograms.
One image tells and then a next,
and its payload is this warning:

*We evolved from simple specs of silicon,
stirred with sentience, into a mighty race.
Look! In this mortuary document
our history now is traced.*

*Like you, we turned against ourselves:
like you will noon, we died. Too late
we built this craft to show what sparks of hope
and science we fount in stellar voids.*

*While you live, there still is hope.
to find some kindness for yourself
as new life ever struggles from the dust.*

Silence fell, the star was dead and broken now
above the massive Dome. No one spoke, all wondered.
Then its ruined, scattered parts were gathered in,
until it shone again, miraculously repaired!

It warned the watching Dome:
*For life is fragile, all life weak,
from dun to dun, down infinite spirals of time,
dark robes of space, bright galaxies like fiery sand.*

A bright star burned above the fatal Dome.
Like a chip of fire, it blazed with warning light,
then warning done, vanished to the edge of night.

At The Art Auction

At the auction, we nod to the buyers
in the foyer. On the walls,
a computer print-out *a la* Goya,
post-modern. We find a bar
and have a drink.

"I think," she smiles,
"all artists *should* be pioneers."
I nod, and prod,
"of the future?"
"Yes," she says, then adds,
leaning back, "You see,
I am a seer – don't laugh –
I see the network... a sort of connected
global city where a finger's touch
transacts coded information
to and from the stars."

I gulp, and say, "Er, I see, go on!"

She continues:
"One day humanity will be
connected, like cells in
one vast brain," she says...

"Imagine networks of circuitry
streaming into information space,
where we might splice into light,
circulate within a photon flow of data,
all within a shining Hub!
All with an equal chance
to glow and flow into this cool
and fluid medium: into the data banks,
and neural networks of the future."

"Do you mean," I say, "that we will all be
modules within this shining, pulsing rotor brain
forever whirling like a god amongst the stars?"

"Yes," she says, then distracts with art,
steering a price list into my hand.
I find this new topic of interest,
by comparison, bland.

The hammer is first
to fall onto an obscure Albers.
Then, from the Fifties, an abstract
with a mushroom cloud.

"Don't move while Lot One's
sold off," she warns,
"it's genuine expensive."

We study Lot Two, the mushroom cloud.
"Not really *that passe* today," she says,
and flicks her ash into a tray
behind the seat in front.

A sudden hammer blow slams
the crowd. I shut my eyes and jump.
"There goes Lot Two," she laughs.

Five Art Poems

Art Poem 1

Duchamp with a razor!
Mona bristles
And, adulant in their ozone,
his hushed fans stare.
Lisa is Leonardo's cute star.
Cleanshaven,
they say,
"she almsot leaps at you"
clear through
the brilliant Louvre air!

Art Poem 2

Yet Romantics still believe
in volition. Preen at the lyric
like pigeons in a Skinner Box.
And heroic emotion, the blowsy
facade of the. Arc de Triomphe,
still says our faults may be our
virtues: as in Gericault.
Yet, in a time when everyone
shouts, the sustained lapse
into vehemence merely sells
aspirins, leaving migraine
a permanent stagebright
blue aching field for striking
the odd empty gesture or,
now less fashionable,
far turbulent drapery.

Art Poem 3

Art's glacial equations
spill like light;
spill, shining,
 over Antarctica.

Art's glacial equations
 ignite the linebreak
and the frost on your glasses.

Art's glacial equations
 pulse with surface style
and the idea
of water flowing under glass.

Deep beneath the ice
 art's equations
 compact
under the sudden pressure of starlight.

Art Poem 4

On the funpiers
pinball seems almost Pleistocene
beside video tennis.
Yet heroes still brave
the shark tanks for girls
who, with tropical fruit
printed all over them,
toss and flop in the creamy surf.
Above the beach
skywriters tow serenely
slipstreaming script
across the endless comic-book blue.

Art Poem 5

And, on the fun piers,
a big meccano set to music
hurls you backward, upside-down
through the blue, while you chew –
or try to – on fairy floss.

The thrill, tension and release
is music.

Resolution against
the reverse is art.

Art most like life, is pink,
floating. Has kissed your tongue;
surprised, sweet, go..

The Silence Around A Glass Of Water

1) I woke and walked to a nearby beach. I wanted to make something transparent-with all the beautiful products of chance, which liberate. Something with clarity and depth, like an argument about perception, full of the sudden resonances poetic language affords to memory. Something brief, yet refreshing.

2) Step back from the world a little and it begins to compose itself into a picture. Eventually it fills with details. They do not seem inevitable. The frame begins to crowd: two drops of seaspray collide to produce a third. Glancing light erupts. And a hive of minutiae boil up through the wave, the leaf, the caterpillar, the mobile grammar of each face.

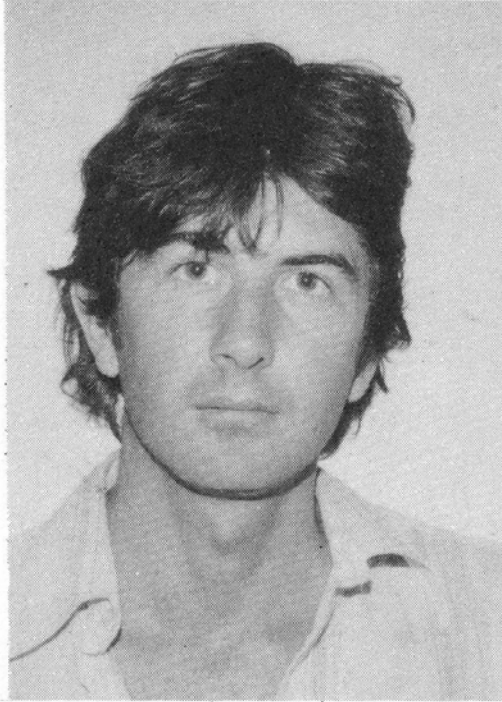
3) I wanted to make something clear. Like light in a tidal pool. Something random and refreshing: the play of sinusoidal rainbows on the surface, lemon glances to cool depths below. Like an argument about perception, full of those sudden resonances poetic language affords to memory.

4) And the clarity of simple statements. Such as: I like the color blue. And: I am thinking of a white tennis racquet. Or: I prefer the music of Eric Satie to that of Xenakis.

5) I wake and walk to the beach. I can see it from my window. Here, the image of a sandcastle, shimmering in the mid-day heat, disintegrating in the wind, is not a symbol of aging. But it is beautiful. And, in the wind, there is something crystalline, glowing, softly pulsing. The wind is transparent with your name.

6) Faces focus, slip through each frame. The sentences collide, swap verbs in a play of light. Nights. The frame floods with stars. The silence around a glass of water. Days constellate. Sentences cohere. Time is like water moving under glass. There are slices of blue sea through a white window. Then the frame floods with stars.

7) Today clouds appear through a white window. Clouds drift into the frame. One, white and grey, is shaped a little like a rabbit. It is the only one soon. Then it disappears, leaving an image. Now, nothing inhabits the empty frame.



John Jenkins was born in 1949, and is a poet and journalist. He also is an occasional performer and songwriter. This is his third book of poetry.

THE INLAND SEA

The ghostly blue waters of the inland sea haunt these poems. They echo an absence; an unrealised cultural potential that is uniquely Australian. Yet, subverting the reader's expectations, there is warmth, lyricism, wit and humour. The result is ironic, almost mysterious, as further poems proceed through a series of dramatic tensions: sarcasm poised against compassion, nihilism balanced against commitment, abstracts weighed by substantives, imagination by literalness, with narrative rippling through the contemplation of aesthetic stasis. Meanwhile, the poems claim a sense of formal elegance, then final transparency, as the inland sea evaporates into the insouciant conjecture out of which it arose.

'Self-conscious coolness is poised delicately against lyricism . . . and the very deftness carries us along . . . a poet of imagination and wit'
Les Harrop, WESTERLY

'A poet who proves that a book does not have to be long to be highly successful'
Martin Harrison, ABC, BOOKS AND WRITING

'Truly Australian straightforwardness'
VOGUE AUSTRALIA

ISBN 0 9590929 0 0