

Self-Portrait As Son And Father is one of the most moving and authentic pictures in Jimmy Ong's exhibition.

The play of life

Art

**JIMMY ONG —
DRAWINGS**
Goethe-Institut Gallery
Weekdays: 10.30 am -
7.30 pm
Saturday: Noon - 6 pm
On till Aug 31

T. Sasitharan

AS HIS current solo exhibition, Jimmy Ong — Drawings, demonstrates, Ong is remarkably adept at his preferred mode of expression.

If at all possible, attempt to see his 16 charcoal and Conte works just after the lunch hour.

For at that time, the Goethe-Institut Gallery is almost empty of people and swathed in the soothing silence of the space, you might, if you are lucky, see aspects of your own soul stretched across the picture surface.

They are mesmerising, these pictures. In his intricate and subtle balance between light and darkness, in

his gnarled and knotty groups of muscle and bone, in his cheerless, deadpan faces, and his skewered perspectives, Ong manages to plumb and momentarily connect with a deep and abiding truth which is part of all human life.

Almost to a fault, every picture sings the sombre, mournful melody of the human condition.

Ong is concerned with capturing the ordinary and the commonplace in human experience — people sleeping, crying, sitting, looking out a window or engaged in a surreptitious act of love. In short, people engaged in a myriad of intimate and private activities which constitute living.

Through the artist's relentless eye, the quotidian is made extraordinary and the ordinary, spectacular.

Despite the brooding, even forbidding, darkness of Ong's pictorial world, the pictures are never simply nihilistic. In Ong's hands, the line is made flesh, and the viewer is always aware of the vulnerability of flesh. Yet, mingled with this woe-ful weakness of man are intimations of his wondrous

nobility.

Untitled (toilet), depicts an act of homosexual love in a public toilet. The viewer looks into the scene from the top. It is a disturbing picture, squalid and full of foreshortened fittings and dark, threatening spaces.

And yet, once the eye focuses on the reality of the two central figures, cribbed in by the walls of the cabin and entwined in ecstasy over a latrine, the viewer becomes aware only of the desperation of the act.

As soon as he can sympathise with their need, the apparent squalor of the scene evaporates and all that remains is a sense of pathetic courage in the face of an undeniable human need. At that very moment, the figures achieve a sublime nobility.

Self-Portrait As Son And Father is one of the most moving and authentic pictures in the exhibition.

The picture consists of two male figures posing in the nude. The older man, rotund and flaccid, is squatting. The boy, with his body taut but relaxed, strikes a confident pose beside the former. Both gaze out at the

viewer with a steady, sullen expression, and the older man is the very picture of the stern, yet benign, disciplinarian.

This rather pleasing, well-executed figure group takes on added piquancy with the realisation that both figures represent the artist himself. It is a portrait of the artist, as son in the past, and as father in the future.

With brutal, masochistic honesty, Ong depicts the ravages of time on the human body. The spring of hope in the picture, however, is to be found in the figure of the father.

Massive and Buddha-like he squats, steady as rock with a face wizened by the passing of time. His left hand rests lightly on the boy's shoulder, a gesture of compassion and love. There is something permanent and reassuring in his presence.

All of Ong's figures exude a real and at times dramatic presence. Indeed, Jimmy Ong — Drawings could be seen as a visual representation of the play of life, and in it, the artist succeeds in rendering the tragic truth behind living.

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