

THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

Richard Lewer



Thank Christ the visitors have gone

by Sheridan Coleman

You Have Much To Be Thankful For

The outer-metropolitan church might just be the most lucid and pungent symbol of suburban living we have: brown brick frames amber windows, a handrail for the elderly, car park weeds, a chattering urn and the unmistakable aroma of freshly opened, already-staling packets of Arnotts' Assorted Creams. Grandparents are wheeled past leaflet noticeboards, pinned with upcoming charitable obligations. Restless siblings are reprimanded. Adults decide on afterschool pick up times. Talk pauses briefly as a milk-sodden teabag is flung straight from a Styrofoam thimble into the bin lid. A Virgin in a plastic display case is fixed above the door with Liquid Nails.

Not Guilty

Elsewhere, painted in gold upon the wall of the long-songless Anglican chapel of Fremantle's historic Prison, is a solemn rendition of the Ten Commandments. Those holy missives which inspired millennia of legal, judicial and penal process read just as you might have memorized long ago, save one detail: the wording of the Sixth, changed at the direction of some gulping public servant from "Thou Shalt Not Kill" to the less morally complicated "Thou Shalt Do No Murder". The prison in fact hung 44 murderers between 1888 and when infamous serial killer and 'secret identity' case Eric Edgar Cooke was executed in '64. Now a museum attraction through which well-attended walking tours click and sip bottled water, the prison tells a compelling narrative of colonial law and corporal punishment.

Thank Christ the Visitors Have Gone

An eager tourist, Richard Lewer re-emerges from Fremantle's seat of convict history to create his own Ten Commandments. His is a small-town, Southern Hemisphere rendition, in which religious rhythm is inseparable from suburban living; whether gathered at the WAFL, or sitting in Mum and Dad's kitchen, we come together always as a kind of parish. In these moments, with their lack of biblical proportions and local feel, it is easy to forget the commandments. Richard's paintings are populated with such fleshy, near-person forms, always in a state of mid-ignorance, mid-bungle. Pressed between open blue skies and overgrown grass these figures test and tangle with the commandments, trying to find the small print that will allow them deeper, uninhibited freedoms. They languish in the presence of even the most necessary and immovable of laws.

My Wife Doesn't Need To Know Everything

While writhing in moral technicality, Richard presses us with a question: What is the difference between a broken commandment that goes unseen and one that is public? A covert adulterer may go unobserved, whereas the bottom lip of a winded and disgraced footballer can be immortalized, cinematically slowed down by a Fox Sports mega lens, just as it pillows into a mouth guard to form that mute, yet unmistakable criminal phrase "JESUS FARKING CHRIST!"

Home Time

Who sees us do what Thou Shalt Not is half the reason not to do it. Often our personal judge and jury are our folks, the Ten C's holstered in their parental utility belt. They are pious people, devotees of the bring-a-plate fundraiser, and Richard paints them floating unaffected above the fiery furnace depicted in the sitting room carpet beneath. Now an ageing couple, they have fused in all things; their height, clothing, and both halves of every sentence locked together in Siamese marital synthesis. But lo! There are two even more perceptive witnesses taking in each obedience and transgression: God of course, but also you, the gallery viewer. Suddenly the barrier of improbability between cardinal sin and my ordinary suburban life seems less watertight than a porous foam slab with extra holes drilled in.

You Have Made Me What I Am

Other cases are black and white; Cooke's grey, stiffened harelip grimaces (perhaps in a state of pre-emptive rigor mortis) from Richard's painting of the 'murder commandment'. Cooke is often credited with single-handedly ending the pre-60s golden age when we slept outside, left homes unlocked and let the children wander. His dispassionate murders forced WA citizens to realise those theatrical commandments could be broken despite the apparent dullness of the suburbs. Turpitude was capable of bursting spontaneously into existence anywhere; the family home, parish, clubroom and luncheonette were not immune. This is something Richard Lewer has always known, that he has envisioned as a throbbing, swelling body leaking from the three-by-two front window, and that follows him now in silhouette, as a murky counterpoint to his otherwise total buoyancy. Richard knows something else, too: those of us with the most freedoms have as many opportunities to disobey as you can count on both your hands.

Oh brother...

Sheridan Coleman is an artist, writer, PhD student and overqualified receptionist living and working in Perth, Western Australia.

YOU
HAVE MADE
ME WHAT I AM.





You
have much
TO BE
Thankful for

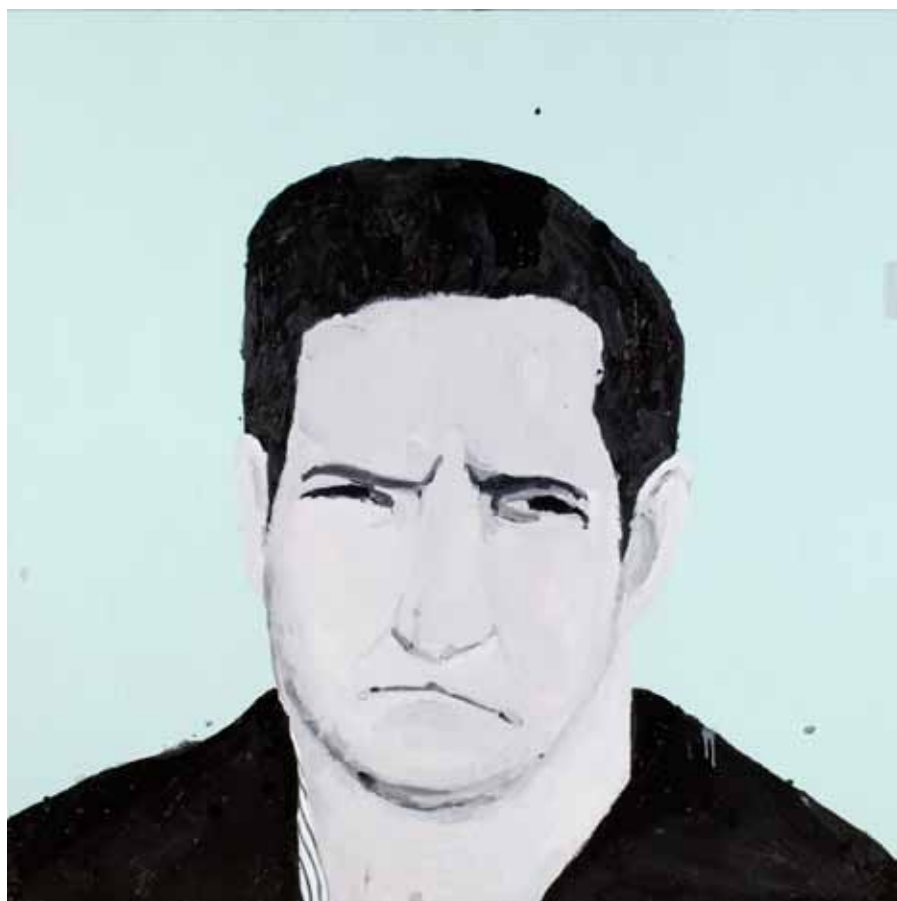
Shame
on
you

Let
US
PRAY

Here
Today Gone
Tomorrow.

get out
of my
Dreams





OH
Brother

EYE
FOR AN
EYE

Nobody
CAN SAY
I havent
tried



It's me
Against
the World

Not
Guilty



Do I
have to do
everything



She
Talks And
Talks And
TALKS

Pull
Your head
IN

MY
Wife doesn't
need to know
Everything

MENTAL
ILLNESS
RUINS IN THE
FAMILY

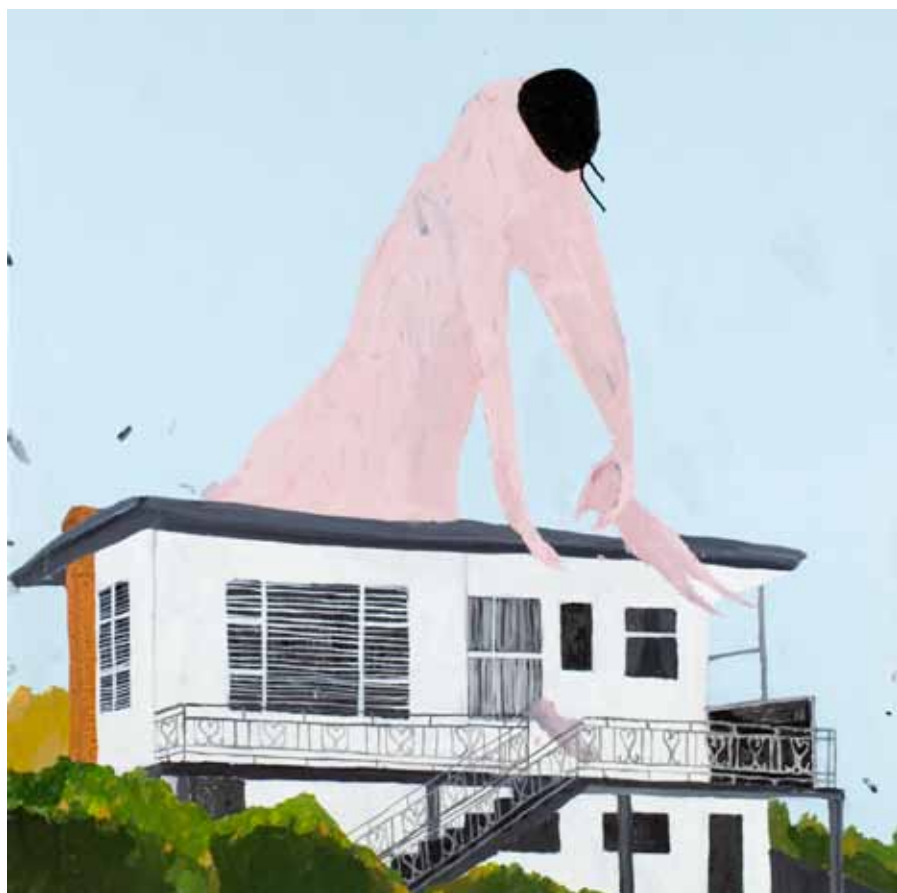


Image Titles



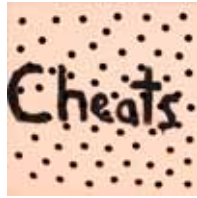
Mummy
500mm x 500mm
Acrylic on foam,
2013



Get out of my dreams
400mm x 400mm
Acrylic on foam,
2013



*Her hair reminds me
of a waterfall* 500mm
x 500mm Acrylic on
foam, 2013



Cheats
400mm x 400mm
Acrylic on foam,
2013



*She talks and talks
and talks*
500mm x 500mm
Acrylic on foam,
2013



*Visiting hours
are over*
400mm x 400mm
Acrylic on foam,
2013



Eye for an eye
500mm x 500mm
Acrylic on foam,
2013



*It's me against
the world*
400mm x 400mm
Acrylic on foam,
2013



Lord can't you help me
570mm x 400mm
Acrylic on foam,
2013



Fail
500mm x 450mm
Acrylic on foam,
2013

Image Titles



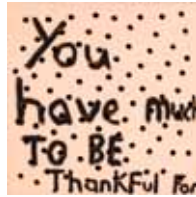
You have made me what I am
500mm x 500mm
Acrylic on foam,
2013



I am always worrying
550mm x 420mm
Acrylic on foam,
2013



Not guilty
500mm x 500mm
Acrylic on foam,
2013



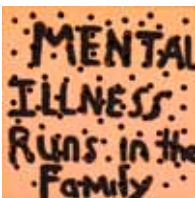
You have much to be thankful for
500mm x 500mm
Acrylic on foam,
2013



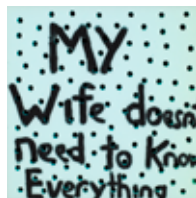
Unhappy endings
400mm x 400mm
Acrylic on foam,
2013



Home time
500mm x 500mm
Acrylic on foam,
2013



Mental illness runs in the family
400mm x 400mm
Acrylic on foam,
2013



My wife doesn't need to know everything
500mm x 500mm
Acrylic on foam,
2013



Here today gone tomorrow
560mm x 400mm
Acrylic on foam,
2013

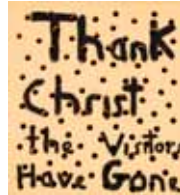


Pull your head in
400mm x 400mm
Acrylic on foam,
2013

Image Titles



*You have let us
all down*
500mm x 500mm
Acrylic on foam,
2013



*Thank Christ the
visitors have gone*
500mm x 500mm
Acrylic on foam,
2013



Let us pray
500mm x 500mm
Acrylic on foam,
2013



*Nobody can say I
haven't tried*
500mm x 500mm
Acrylic on foam,
2013



Oh brother
500mm x 500mm
Acrylic on foam,
2013



*Do I have to do
everything*
500mm x 500mm
Acrylic on foam,
2013



Shame on you
500mm x 500mm
Acrylic on foam,
2013



No one likes a know all
500mm x 500mm
Acrylic on foam,
2013

Image Titles



Thou shalt have no other gods but me.



Thou shalt not make to thyself any graven image, nor the likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or in the earth beneath, or in the water under the earth. Thou shalt not bow down to them nor worship them: for I the Lord thy God am a jealous God, and visit the sins of the fathers upon the children, unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me, and shew mercy onto thousands in them that love me, and keep my commandments.



Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain: for the Lord will not hold him guiltless, that taketh his name in vain.



Remember that thou keep holy the sabbath-day. Six days shalt thou labour, and do all that thou hast to do; but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord thy God. In it thou shalt do no manner of work, thou, and thy son, and thy daughter, thy man-servant, and thy maid-servant, thy cattle, and the stranger that is within thy gates. For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the Lord blessed the seventh day, and hallowed it.



Honour thy father and thy mother; that thy days may be long in the land, which the Lord thy God giveth thee.



Thou shalt do no murder.



Thou shalt not commit adultery.



Thou shalt not steal.



Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour.



Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's wife, nor his servant, nor his maid, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor any thing that is his.

Exhibition dates

14 November to 14 December

Opening night

Thursday 14 November
from 6 to 8pm

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