

The acopope -- amputations and monsters

acopope *n.* Removal of letter or syllable at end of word (e.g. in derivation of CURIO). [LL, f. Gk APO (*kope* f. *kopto* cut)]

torso *n.* (*pl. -s*). Trunk of human statue apart from head and limbs; human trunk; (fig.) unfinished or mutilated work. [It., = stalk, stump, torso, f. L THYRSUS]

Pooled memory and some empty fish, April 1984, brings us to amputations and guttings. [plate 121] Four pieces show fish tails, or fish heads, or a fish head and body minus a tail -- curtailments and beheadings. Two pieces have their fish so gutted that only their skin remains -- these, no doubt, are the 'empty fish' of the title. Another consists of two fish heads, one placed inside the transparent other. Another has a fish whose mid portion is cut away, so that its head and its tail abut. A black insect has suffered a lesser pruning whereby its legs are chopped off after the first or the second joint.

So opens in Killeen's art a new usage of the cut, where it becomes clear that Killeen's protocol of accretion is as much a matter of subtraction as of addition. Such cuts are akin to the rhetorical code of the *acopope*, in which a letter or syllable is cut from a word, and so I here grant them that name. Yet there is more to them than the convenience of a mere abbreviation. There is a certain violence in the *acopope's* cut.

Language is not neutral, for instance, May 1984, [plate 126] proffers a fish tail seen as if in section, where an ellipse marks the place of the cut. We may suffer some pang in seeing this done to an organic and animate thing: we may in some sense subsume our own flesh into the flesh of the wound -- such is the primitive, magical nature of images. We are not troubled at all, on the other hand, by the several machine pieces seen in section, and this no matter how like a fish tail they may be in their conical shape. It seems our empathy is only with organic matter. In the case of the machine part, the language of revealing, the analytical act of opening up, seems perfectly neutral.

Still more likely to cause us some perturbation are Killeen's arrangements of amputated fingers and hands. *Looking is not seeing*, January 1985, [plate 129] has a pile of three amputated hands sliced off at the wrist, where a circle or an ellipse marks the flesh and bone of the cut. That the stylisation of their drawing seems somewhat Egyptian, and that there is a piece which seems still more Egyptian -- the figured rectangle whose banded divisions are based on Egyptian

paintings of the River of Life of a kind photographed by Killeen when he visited Egypt in 1984 [fig. 208] -- suggests a possible origin for such a piling of parings of flesh. There is a convention in Egyptian art which has the amputated limbs of the defeated heaped as a kind of triumphal offering to the Pharaoh. [fig. 209] This convention is perhaps referred to in a piece of a cut-out where the capital of Egypt is named -- in *From the Cairo Museum*, July 1985. [plate 138] Here a fish head, a bird head and a severed finger stand on a kind of raised platter, table, or altar -- one of many such altar/platters in Killeen's art at this time. Killeen's altar-platters heaped with diverse offerings are themselves derived from an Egyptian iconographic convention showing offerings to the Pharaoh -- a convention recorded in a number of Killeen's own photographs, and in post cards he collected in Egypt. Killeen's adaptations of the heaped altar-platter include such specific borrowings as an amputated cow head and leg. [fig. 210] (See for further instances, those heaped with fish heads in the various versions of *Born alive in New Zealand*.) [plates 139, 140, 141, 142, 143, 147]



fig. 208. River of life, Egyptian, photographed by the artist



fig. 209. The palette of Narmer, Egyptian (detail)



fig. 210. Neb-qed and table of offerings, Egyptian (detail)

There is a kind of weird syncretism at work throughout the cut-outs of 1985 and 1986. The cut-out *Looking is not seeing*, January 1985, [plate 129] includes a conglomerate piece with a cow leg, a human leg, and a headless human body; and another conglomerate piece, where a hand combines with a whale and a snake. *About asking when the answer is no*, February 1985, [plate 130] has a cow's leg on a stand with a burning building, and another conglomerate of a house, a beheaded fish and an axehead. Another of its pieces has a hand, a foot and a house; another, a cow's head, a whole fish and two fish tails; yet another has a dress as a kind of headless, legless and armless body, hollowed out as if it were the skin of a body flayed.

The body is anatomised, wounded, lopped, exposed, opened, and emptied out by Killeen's code of the acopope, and the intrinsic violence of every acopope is further pronounced by its appearing in the company of an axe and a flame. We might remember here, too, that the very first cut-out, *Across the Pacific*, August 1978, [plate 1] included such cutting tools as might be the instruments of its own cutting out -- a stone knife and saw-teeth; and that in Killeen's most recent cut-outs as I write, *The politics of geometry* cut-outs of 1991, scissors appear as if in the act of cutting. We might note, as well, that the knife recurs in the company of the amputated bodies we will shortly see in *Born alive in New Zealand no. 2*,

November 1985, where there is also a flaming tree-stump, and a stone adze -- the same cutting tool as appears, but hafted this time, with a flaming tree-stump, and an axe head, in *Born alive in New Zealand no. 3*, December 1985. [plates 142, 143]

The title piece of *About asking when the answer is no, no. 2*, March 1985, [plate 133] contains a broken column -- a truncation made tolerable not only by the fact that it is suffered by an inanimate thing, but also by the romantic cult of the antique fragment or ruin, which rejoices in such remnants and shards. Similarly, in *Time to change the Greek hero*, May 1985, [plate 135] there is a piece showing a truncated column, a sculpted male torso both of whose upper legs are intact, and another with only one upper leg left.

I shall later consider in some detail the fact that this mutilated statue is male and classic. For the moment, it is sufficient to note that the amputated column and the amputated statue are both of stone. In the case of the column the stone may seem sufficiently removed from flesh to prevent our much empathising with its mutilation. Yet we might be reminded here of the Vitruvian rhetoric of the column as a reflection of the human body -- male or female, depending on its architectural order. It is no accident, then, that *Time to change the Greek hero no. 2*, June 1985, [plate 137] should proffer the same group of stone amputees with the significant addition of a knife and a pool of blood, as though stone too may suffer a wound: here the violence of the slicing off implicit in all such truncated representations is again made explicit.

Vitruvian mythology also claims the the column to have come originally from the flesh of a tree, to be a kind of memory in stone of an originary, primitive architecture of wood. In Killeen's *Born alive in New Zealand no. 2*, November 1985, [plate 142] and *Born alive in New Zealand no. 3*, December 1985, [plate 143] there is a burning tree-stump as well as the stump of a column -- an amputated tree in flames. *Born alive in New Zealand no. 4*, April 1986, [plate 147] has, as well as the stump of a column, a tree stump whose roots have metamorphosed into fingers. Killeen's metaphorical play with the stump is continued in *Floating Islands with Strange Birds and People*, May 1986, [plate 148] which juxtaposes the cylinder of a tree stump with that of a chimney, and which also includes the image of a branch whose every twig has been sheared.

The 'landscapes' in the various versions of the cut-outs *Born alive in New Zealand*, and in the two versions of *Floating islands*, and in the two versions of

Domestic are themselves subject to the code of the acopope.¹ *Born alive in New Zealand no. 3*, December 1985, [plate 143] for instance, has a volcano landscape piece radically curtailed, as in a museum's geological display; a profile face with a landscape inside it cut off as if by the bone of the skull ('man with landscape in his head' Killeen calls it);² a hills and plain piece, also subject to a radical curtailment; and a volcano landscape seen in section. And these amputated landscapes come in company with a severed hand, a broken column, a pile of fish heads on an altar platter.

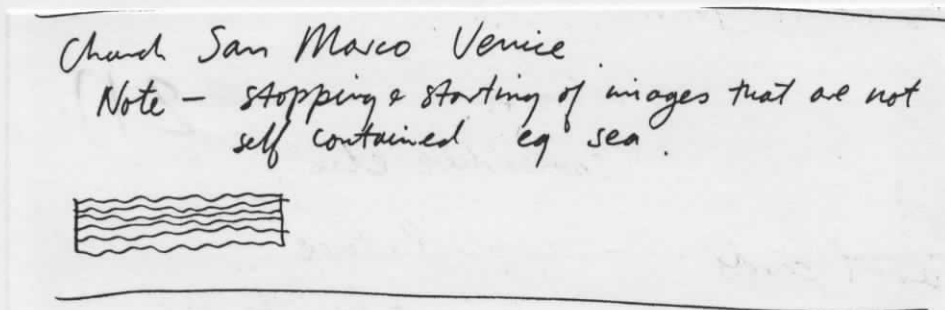


fig. 211. Killeen, the black notebook, p. 204



fig. 212. The Nimbuse Phoenix, Louvre

¹ *Born alive in New Zealand -- for Martin*, September 1985; *Born alive in New Zealand -- for Samuel*, October 1985; *Born alive in New Zealand no. 1*, October 1985; *Born alive in New Zealand no. 2*, November 1985; *Born alive in New Zealand no. 3*, December 1985; *Born alive in New Zealand no. 4*, April 1986; *Floating Islands*, March 1986; *Floating Islands with Strange Birds and People*, May 1986; *Domestic*, 24 October 1986; and *Domestic (black and white)*, 23 March 1987.

² 'Suburban gentleman with landscape in his head' is the title given to a drawing of 1969, p. 23, the green notebook.

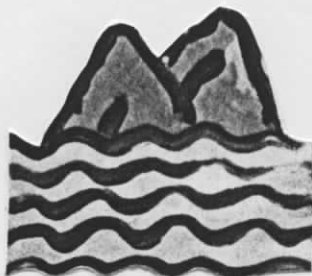


fig. 213. *Floating islands with strange birds and people*, May 1986 (detail)

Here, the code of amputation has its source in the symbolic landscapes of Byzantine mosaics, paintings and reliefs. [fig. 212] Killeen had seen such landscapes in the mosaics of San Marco, Venice, in 1984. If in Byzantine art the landscape element is isolated and floated against blank gold, or blank marble, or flat colour or pattern, in the cut-out it is isolated and floated against the white blank of the wall. In both the Byzantine and the Killeen case, the landscape is presented against a neutral background rather than being embedded in space. [fig. 213] So, by adopting the device of a non-naturalistic period whose landscapes were not 'views', but symbolic fragments, Killeen is able to return to landscape without returning at the same time to the classical 'view', without that retrogression, at once political and aesthetic, which a use of the 'view' must imply.

Sometimes, there is so severe a lopping of appendages that, though a torso or trunk remains, we cannot say of what it might be the remainder: as in the piece of *Floating islands*, March 1986, [plate 146] and of *Floating islands with strange birds and people*, May 1986, [plate 148] where the 'neck' and four side limbs have been lopped, leaving five elliptoid patterns of rings. This piece has suffered so severe an abridgement that it must remain nameless, unless it be called 'that which has endured mutilation'.

In further accord with the code of the acopope, there are various odds and ends of fingers scattered throughout the cut-outs of 1986 and early 1987: four top joints in *Domestic*, 24 October 1986, [plate 153] and in *Domestic (black and white)*, 23 March 1987, [plate 157] for instance. *Time to change male institutionalised war*, June 1986, [plate 149] and *Time to change male institutionalised war no. 2*, August 1986, [plate 151] both have a piece with four fingers as factory chimneys aflame, as well as two pieces showing a finger/bullet, and another where four fingers emerge from an oval. *Mask with a lateral view no. 4*, September 1986,

[plate 152] has, in addition to a fingers-as-factory-chimney piece, a finger stack, where one finger lies horizontal, providing a base for three to stand vertically above. (The image of four fingers stacked on top of a red rectangle occurs as late as *Stacks, months and days*, 12 July 1990.) [fig. 3] Fingers, once cropped, may then be compounded in any manner that fancy may take.

The chopped off digit might be seen as the most violent mark of Killeen's acompositional mode -- of the anti-Albertian or anti-Diderot mode one might say, if one were to grant the organicism of the classic a proper name. Doesn't Alberti famously describe composition as an arrangement whose parts are bodies, whose parts are members, whose parts are surfaces, in which each part is in perfect accord with the whole? And didn't Diderot speak of composition itself as a body?

For Diderot, 'A well composed picture [tableau] is a whole contained under a single point of view, in which the parts work together to one end and by their mutual correspondence form a unity as real as that of the members of the body of an animal; so that a piece of painting formed of a large number of figures thrown at random on to the canvas ... no more deserves to be called a *true composition* than scattered studies of legs, nose and eyes on the same cartoon deserve to be called a *portrait* or even a *human figure*.'³

Killeen comes closer to Roland Barthes (whom he has not read), in his account of Brecht's and Eisenstein's 'dispersion of the tableau, the pulling to pieces of the composition, the setting in movement of the "partial organs" of the human figure.'⁴ Here we might bring to consciousness the 'kill' in the name 'Killeen'. Killeen kills the classic body -- a killing in the name of the plural, an attack on the classic 'single point of view'.

In the some of the various amputations mentioned above, the prunings, or their remainder, are made part of some new amalgam of parts. This can lead to monstrosities: two headless torsos of a horse or a cow melded at the midrift;⁵ two hands -- or is it feet? -- conjoined at the palm;⁶ three fingered hands;⁷ two

³ Diderot, cited Roland Barthes, in 'Diderot, Brecht, Eisenstein', *Image-Music-Text: Essays selected & translated by Stephen Heath*, Fontana, 1982, p. 71.

⁴ Barthes, op. cit., p. 72.

⁵ *Mask with a lateral view no. 3*, 7 August 1986; *Mask with a lateral view no. 4*, September 1986.

⁶ *Domestic with warship*, 5 March 1987; and *Domestic (black and white)*, 23 March 1987.

⁷ *Mask with a lateral view*, February 1986, *Mask with a lateral view no. 2*, February 1986.

thumbed hands,⁸ a two faced human head;⁹ a fish and man head;¹⁰ a goat head, shoulders and foreleg and a cart,¹¹ a two headed sabre toothed leopard¹² -- strange concretions indeed. We are in the realms here of the mythic monster: of the two faced Janus, of the three headed Cerberus, of the many necked Hydra, and the snake locked Medusa, of winged Pegasus, of the Sphinx, part woman, part lion, of Typhon, half man, half serpent, of Chimera, the triple headed and composite beast.

It is significant, then, that Killeen should several times picture such composite creatures of myth. There is a Greek sphinx in *Monkey's Revenge*, December 1986, [plate 155 & fig. 214] with a human head and breast and a winged lion's body; and the Egyptian god Thoth is there too, jackel headed and human bodied; and a centaur, human trunked, and horse bodied, fights with a Lapith in what appears to be an attic relief from the 5th century B.C. These ancient mythic inventions are Killeen's forbears in hybridisation.



fig. 214. *Monkey's Revenge*, December 1986 (detail)

⁸ *Mask with a lateral view*, February 1986, *Mask with a lateral view no. 2*, February 1986.

⁹ *Mask with a lateral view no. 3*, 7 August 1986; *Mask with a lateral view no. 4*, September 1986; *Domestic*, 24 October 1986; and *Domestic (black and white)*, 23 March 1987.

¹⁰ *Mask with a lateral view no. 4*, September 1986; *Monkey's Revenge*, December 1986; and *Stacks, months and days*, 18 December 1989.

¹¹ *Domestic*, 24 October 1986, and *Domestic (black and white)*, 23 March 1987.

¹² *Domestic*, 24 October 1986, and *Domestic (black and white)*, 23 March 1987.

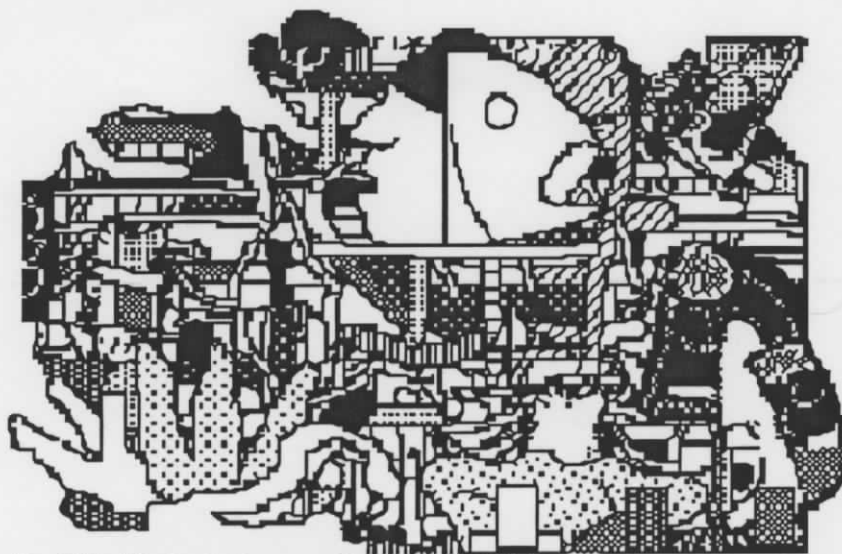


fig. 215. *Monkey's Revenge*, December 1986 (detail)

Monkey's revenge deals with evolution and mutability, with monsters real and mythic, with *Natural and unnatural selection*, as the Killeen title has it -- it is no accident that Charles Darwin's head should appear here, as well as an extinct species of horse, and an early hominid type. Such literal references to evolution bring into relief Killeen's double code of the concretion and the cutting up of parts, a code whereby, for Killeen the cutter, any part may be cut from any thing and may be combined with any other thing or part. The crossbreeding or miscegenation available to this code of the cut and conjoined is boundless. There is no respect for the divisions of biological or cultural genera: in Killeen's invented world, there is now no part which may not be combined with another, no hybrid which is impossible or impermissible. Hence, here, all these weird heaps of trimmings, parings and scraps, the very parts from which the cut-outs are formed. [fig. 215]

Killeen's monsters, whether from ancient myth or freshly invented, show the cut-out *en abyme*. The hybrid part represents, one might say, the whole cut-out in miniature, since the cut-out too is a hybrid, a product of interbreeding and miscegenation, an amalgam of parings, clippings and scraps. It too is a compound being whose code is a perpetual fission and fusion.

These monsters, in exemplifying the arbitrary union of things in the cut-outs, become also emblems of artistic creation, and of creative freedom: of the artist's capacity to create a second nature, a spatial and temporal hybrid, by freely ranging over and recombining the forms of the first.

*Only the poet, disdainful to be tied to any subjection, lifted up with the vigour of his own invention, doth grow in effect into a second nature, in making things either better than Nature bringeth forth, or, quite anew, forms such as never were in Nature, as the Heroes, Demigods, Cyclops, Chimera, Furies and suchlike: so as he goeth hand in hand with Nature, not enclosed within the narrow warrant of her gifts, but freely ranging only within the Zodiac of his own wit.*¹³

The hybrid beast is a sign of the compounding imagination, 'as when, from the sight of a man at one time, and of a horse at another, we conceive in our mind a centaur'.¹⁴ One might say of Killeen's combinatory art what was once said of Heraldry: 'this science, by combining substances which nature has studiously separated, turns nature upside down. Add to these the natural bodies chimerically paired, which are grotesque metaphors.'¹⁵

The monster may thus be called a metaphor, that form of speech which may abut the most distant notions, 'finding similarities in things that are dissimilar' -- in a dress, say, and a fish skin, a Japanese fighter plane and a butterfly taken from a Japanese garden in 1939, in a black insect and a primitive artifact, a bullet and a finger, a broken column and a stump. The metaphor, like the monster, may be a unique creation of its poet or painter.

And this is metaphor, mother of poetry, of symbols and emblems. And he is most ingenious, who can recognise and connect the most distant circumstances, as we shall relate... for just as God creates something out of nothing, so does inventive genius produce being from nonbeing; it causes a lion to become a man and an eagle a city. It grafts a woman onto a fish and produces a mermaid as the symbol of the seductress. It joins the

¹³ Sir Philip Sydney, *Apology for Poetry*, cited Ginevra Bompiani, 'The Chimera Herself', in *Fragments for a History of the Human Body*, ed. Michel Feher, Ramona Naddaff and Nadia Tazi, Zone 3, 1989, New York, part one, p. 390.

¹⁴ Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, cited Ginevra Bompiani, op. cit., p. 390.

¹⁵ Emanuele Tesauro, *Il canonocchiale Aristotelico*, 1654, ed. Enzo Raimoni (Turin: Einaudi, 1987, p. 67, cited Ginevra Bompiani, op. cit., p. 391.

*bust of a goat to the rear of a snake and creates the Chimera as a hieroglyph of insanity.*¹⁶

Thus heterogeneity becomes the very sign of artistic invention, and the very impossibility of its admirable composites the sign of the artist's ingenious and fecund wit. And yet perhaps that hieroglyph of insanity should give us pause...

The sphinx, like the chimera, represents at once the riddle of meaning, interpretation itself, and that which threatens meaning. The threat to meaning is posed here by the very impossibility of the sphinx's compounding of parts, and by the difficulty of deciphering its famous riddle, which itself concerns a seeming amputation, a strange addition and subtraction of limbs -- a creature walking at first with four limbs, and later with two, and later with three.

Might Killeen's cut-outs themselves be just such an indecipherable hybrid? Might their true name be, like that of the Sphinx, Enigma? This is the negative side of such procreative power. This is the fear, perhaps, of Killeen's *Any item will do*, 7 June 1987, a cut-out which will seem to signal the end of the cut-outs, coming as it does just a moment before Killeen abandons his cut-outs for a year and a half in favour of images permanently fixed on a polystyrene or wood or canvas ground. It is the fear, it may be, of the unlimited possibility of combination, at once empowering and deranging, the fear of meaninglessness, of the simultaneous 'temptation of omnipotence and nihilism: everything is possible, everything is futile.'¹⁷ Such, in any case, is the danger the cut-outs now constantly court.

¹⁶ Emanuele Tesauro, *Il canonocchiale Aristotelico*, 1654, ed. Enzo Raimoni (Turin: Einaudi, 1987, p. 67, cited Ginevra Bompiani, op. cit., p. 391.

¹⁷ Ginevra Bompiani, op. cit., p. 400.