

needy beyond relief?

Perhaps another subtitle for John Barbour's newest body of works might be "what we're leaving and where we're going", for what's *here* seems mostly less at issue than what's missing – for all that was or could have or may yet be, and for what will never be. The works are like private notes – reminders, jottings, scribbles; curses, prayers and invocations. Or they appear like student exercises - the fitfully tendered evidence of an effortful and ill-disciplined learning. Notes from an anonymous self to an imaginary other. Stuttered letters, unfinished sentences; surfaces disturbed and suffused by a desperate sense of need. What do they *want*? What do they want from *us*? Praise? Judgement? Love? Charity? Trust? Money? Absolution?

Like the character Karl in Franz Kafka's *America*, these works will, in the world's eyes, perhaps not be quite good enough. Like Karl maybe they'll be found wanting in some essential respect he is incapable of realising - and as wanting quite a lot *for* themselves. And perhaps like poor Karl they're destined just to go on wandering, sometimes despairing, sometimes in good humour – always with good intentions – in search of a sign of grace and promise.

JOHN BARBOUR

The Worm in the Silk and The Nature Theatre

Yuill/Crowley (Sydney) 2005