

## **BLOOD IS THICKER THAN WATER**

*Nic Plowman - The Art Vault, Mildura*

*Joel Edmondson, 2011*

*- lifelong friend*

Nic Plowman's latest foray into fraternal portraiture is at once starkly brutal and anaesthetising, its broken heads floating in open space like prison patients in the void. *Blood Is Thicker Than Water* (2011) documents injuries suffered by brothers Nic and Kurt during a drunken stoush with anonymous revellers, but their combatants are notably absent from the plates. In fact, all other contextual information has been erased from the visual field. For Plowman, there is nothing but brothers. The blank expression of these brothers betrays a defiant calm, and the transient physical consequences of allegiance are worn with contempt for any judgments that may befall them. If there are any invisible captors in this void, then we take their place, and quickly learn that the price of our judgment is a failed interrogation of their secret world.

Besides, one thousand years in this void would do little but further cement these blood bonds. Violence and the threat of death are merely accepted, much like the Zen master accepts the brutality of nothingness with smiling indifference. Mortality is a central theme of Nic's work, derived partly from his lifelong waltz with a genetic heart defect and, more recently, months of hospitalisation and convalescence after falling out of a tree house. Although his previous studies are mobilised by a visceral sense of animation and potentiality, *Blood Is Thicker Than Water* is static, like the emanation of something primal. It is the eternal return to a promise born of larrikinism and excess.

Nic's recent experimentation with watercolours is a clear attempt to problematise stereotypical conceptions of masculine aggression. To quote the most parochial of Australian songwriters, John Williamson, the consequences of "standing by your mate, when he's in a fight" is not only broken bones, but also the soft-focus memories of brotherly resilience. Nic has been called to a medium capable of embracing this paradox, a new conceptual ground from which to demonstrate his significant technical prowess as a figurative painter of the highest order.