15 February 2005

To: the families of Australia-New Zealand-Cook Islands Art Seminar participants

Hello. I am writing to you from Melbourne. We met here last week after the midterm break. The kids had ambitious plans for their break. Many of them did considerable travel, and they seem to have made the most of their opportunity. I was happy to see them out and seeing things, adding to their experience instead of just hanging around in some tourist centers. But they also had a taste of being responsible for all of their meals, plans etc. Several of them told me it was a bit of a relief to show up for an organized tour as the program resumed. I spent my break meeting my wife and hiking in the bush west of Melbourne. I miss her, so that time with her is important to me.

We spent four nights at Wilson's Promontory, a large National Park at mainland Australia's southern most tip. Normally at this time of the year the group would be taking advantage of hot weather and swimming at Wilson's beautiful beaches. But we hit a patch of cold and rainy weather, so only a few made it into the water. We did have a good time drawing, hiking to various coves to see the scenery, and making one trip to a grassy area where we saw hundreds of kangaroo and a number of emu. It was exciting to see so many of these animals in the wild. This was the students’ first taste of Australia's bush country. The nature here is amazing, and very different from home. We did nightly walks in the campground spotting wombats and possums. In the day we were surrounded by parrots and cockatoos. The trees and plants could not be more different from those that we are used to. When we are in the country we have a biologist with us to teach the kids about Australian flora and fauna, as well as other issues related to ecology, such as the problems of introduced species.

Students are improving in drawing. We draw each other, do portraits, and draw from nature. When we were at Wilson's we had a number of sessions where we looked through each other's sketchbooks, seeing how we are doing as a group. Drawing is challenging and requires a great deal of patience. That is hard for some students, but I can say that all of the students are getting there. It was fun to see the quality of their work rise.

Today and tomorrow we are making use of Melbourne's many museums. We had a private appointment at the print study room of the National Gallery of Victoria, learning about some of Australia's best printmakers. Then we saw an exhibit of historical printmaking. The students got good looks at works by Rembrandt, Durer, Goya, and others. Since they are trying to figure out how to best utilize the processes of printmaking, it was great for them to get such close study of prints by these masters. Over the weekend we will see more museums and galleries, including starting to see work by aboriginal artists.
The place where we are working is called the Australian Print Workshop (APW). It is among the best institutions in the country in regard to publishing art work by aboriginal artists. It is a very good shop, and the walls are filled with prints of high quality. I met the director of the shop years ago at an international print symposium, and I'm glad that our friendship has meant that the students get to finish the printmaking course in a place like Melbourne and at a facility that has high standards.

I think the kids like Melbourne. We might get blasted with some heat, but for now Melbourne is showing its chilly side. The place is known for wide and sudden fluctuations in weather. We have good lodgings in a place that is convenient both to city locations as well as to the studio. Among the pleasures of Melbourne is the Victoria Market, a huge open air food market with food of high quality and good prices. They go to the market, then experiment with cooking in their group apartments.

I will try to write once more as we near the end of our stay at Melbourne. After that we head to Sydney and up north to Queensland. Once we get to Queensland my access to email will drop, and I won't be able to write as much.

Regards--Fred Hagstrom