



Art Gallery of South Australia
28 February - 30 May 2004

Education Pack

ABOUT THE 2004 ADELAIDE BIENNIAL OF AUSTRALIAN ART

Since its inception in 1990, the Adelaide Biennial has developed and sustained a role as the nation's pre-eminent survey of contemporary Australian art. Presented every two years in conjunction with the Adelaide Festival of Arts, the Adelaide Biennial highlights new and exciting trends in contemporary visual art and is the Festival's premier visual arts event.

The hottest thing in contemporary art right now is photography and some of the most outstanding, stimulating and challenging recent photo-media work by leading Australian artists will be on display in the 2004 Adelaide Biennial. Most of the works will be displayed here for the first time.

The 2004 Biennial exhibition will present outstanding cutting-edge works in contemporary 'photo-media' – works embracing photographic practice in its broadest form, including two-dimensional and installations works, cutting across photography, digital imagery and new media. Such works may embrace conceptual approaches, performance art, political/cultural concerns, issues of gender and identity, and minimalist/formalist aesthetics.

The exhibition include works by about thirty artists from all over Australia, including works by indigenous artists, young emerging artists and some established artists. Ensuring the Biennial's reputation for showcasing up-to-the-minute art, works in the show will be created between 2002 until February 2004.

Artists participating: **Destiny Deacon, Adam Geczy & Peter Sculthorpe, James Geurts, David Haines, Bill Henson, Derek Kreckler, Rosemary Laing, Liu Xiao Xian, Tracey Moffatt, Deborah Paauwe, Mike Parr, Patricia Piccinini, David Rosetzky, Darren Siwes, Silvia Vélez, Linda Wallace, Craig Walsh, Justene Williams and Bronwyn Wright.**

Background briefing

The exhibition is curated by Julie Robinson, Curator of Prints, Drawings and Photographs, the Art Gallery of South Australia. The following background notes incorporate key points from the Curator's catalogue essay.

Video and photo-based works in contemporary art.

Photography and video are not new forms of modern and contemporary practice. Within Australian contemporary art photography was extensively used and explored in the 1980s. Video came to prominence in the mid 1990s.

Video and photo-media works appear regularly in all major contemporary art exhibitions. Photography and video have been impacted upon by the 'digital age'.

The particular interest has been in the ability of technologies particularly computer-based, to create powerful images of reality.

Today artists use a wide diversity of means to explore possibilities; applications which allows the source image to be manipulated extensively, traditional prints from negatives or transparencies and a wide variety of digital printing processes (e.g. light-jet and lambda prints).

Application of these processes can be in association with; manipulating 'found' images, creating narratives, exploring ideas related to human perception or thought processes, recording aspects of real life, analyzing film, video or photographic conventions and traditions, creating immersive experiences, making socially-critical statements.

The exhibition has no stated theme. The selection does not represent a comprehensive 'all inclusive' representation of contemporary [practice in this field of work.

The common element for the Curator was that fact that she saw each work has having some anchor or connection with 'reality'.

This anchoring in reality offers a challenge for most people conditioned by day to day routines and information to be able to respond to situations.

Groupings

While each artist works in a distinctive way with individually formulated sets of ideas it is possible to explore and possibly review this exhibition on the basis of certain artists sharing some common ground. The catalogue essay suggest some possible groupings

Social/political comment

Silvia Velez, Linda Wallace – work related to global tension/terrorism issues and community response

Mike Parr – use of performance to re-present situations related to Australian's response to treatment of refugees.

Destiny Deacon – Indigenous and personal perspectives on cultural identity as negotiated between black and white Australians

Australian landscape – as physical/symbolic space

Rosemary Laing – European emblems of occupancy and cultural values up in flames

Bronwyn Wright – human and natural dramas acted out in a clay swamp

James Guerts – tidal zones as metaphors for the arrival of refugees in Australian waters

David Haines – Nature torn apart and rebuilt

Derek Kreckler – beachscapes as sites for consideration of the relationship between two-dimensional and three-dimensional reality.

Cultural significance and identity

Adam Geczy (in association with Peter Sculthorpe) – collective memory examined within a context of Pt Arthur

Liu Xiao Xian - reconciling cultural memories with living in a new land

Craig Walsh – art and art galleries as anchoring points of identity

Humanity and the human condition

Patricia Piccinini – the possibilities of bio-medical science creating new life forms

Bill Henson – exploring the heartland of adolescent identity

Deborah Paauwe – zones between child/girl and adult/womanhood

David Rosetzky - personal identity defined by others

Tracey Moffatt – relationships and identity explored through a filter of Hollywood film romance genre

Darren Siwes –relocating questions of personal and cultural identity

Justene Williams – consumer culture compressed into one small, very hot apartment

Framing questions and investigations

The following considerations or lines of investigation provides useful/relevant context to experiencing/viewing/responding to works in this exhibition. Because of the wide-ranging interest of the artists it will be necessary with many works to approach them with the widest frameworks of enquiry which admit larger social, philosophical, and cultural questions beyond art and its art-historical traditions, language and conventions.

The photographic/video/digital image.

Throughout the twentieth century the photographic image has remained on the fracture lines between what may or may not be considered art. The issues about what's real and what's not real have often been based around the claim that a photograph tells the real truth. Some contemporary artists have made this issue a central part of their practice. The question has come forward again as current and emerging digital technologies have the ability to synthesize very powerful illusions of things that 'look real'. Does this suggest that increasingly, artists may need to rely less on 'finding' subjects from the surrounding physical world and employ clever programs to invent realities. Are computer games the real art forms for a new millennium? Will the World Wide Web eventually become the primary source of all visual images required for daily living? Will it transform art galleries into 21st century folk craft museums?

Social/political comment

What images of the world appear in newscasts? Is there any difference between those appearing in print as opposed to TV or Internet sources? What does the selection, editing and formatting of these images tell you about the intentions of the media? How do people 'consume' or respond to these images? Are people really affected by what they see?

Is it possible for any of these images or programs to become 'art'?

Can artists play an effective role in questioning media processes? Does art change people's social values or responsiveness?

Are any of the strategies used by artists in this exhibition effective? Do any of them introduce new ideas or a fresh way of looking social or political issues?

Australian landscape

Is it possible to describe what the expression 'relationship with the land' actually means? From colonial times to the present, non-Indigenous Australian artists have continued to illustrate or interpret personal responses to particular Australian landscapes. Why has this tradition been sustained? What has it been saying about senses of relationship with land?

Can anything new be added or said?

Can photo-media based practice bring anything new to this tradition?

Is there any common ground between Indigenous and non-Indigenous landscape-related art?

Do any of the works in this exhibition present some new or personally interesting perspectives linked to the idea of relationship with land?

Cultural significance

What does cultural identity mean?

Should people in a new country keep remembering the old or should they concentrate on building a new life?

How has or how can cultural identity be expressed in contemporary art?

What strategies do artists use to explore or communicate about cultural identity?

Does Australia have a cultural identity? What is it? Does everyone share it? Does it have any visual symbols?

Humanity and the human condition

What does being human mean?

How many different applications/meanings do the terms 'human' and 'humanity' have?

Explore the meaning or uses of the expression 'human condition'

Does science pose a threat to humanity?

Can art be effective in exploring ideas related to concepts of humanity?

Can you think of any artwork, which at a personal level has made a difference in terms of changing/shaping social values or attitudes?

Is most contemporary art pessimistic about things and about the 'human condition' in general?

Notes on selected artists / works

SILVIA VELEZ

Not in my name, 2004

Laser prints on coloured paper

This large wall-work is composed of fluorescent 'post-it' notes. The images on each unit are hand-drawn images based on anti-war global street protests

LINDA WALLACE

entanglements, 2004

DVD Duration:10.30 mins

Multiple video streams fed into single frames. The source material is media newscast of the Iraq war, complemented by domestic lounge room interiors (with TVs).

MIKE PARR

Un-Australian, 2003

DVD Duration:19.42 mins

The artist has his lips and face sewn up (a direct reference to traumatized refugees in detention, sewing their lips together. Large photographs of coats hint at conformity and powerlessness within contemporary society.

DESTINY DEACON

Matinee, 2003

DVD Duration 7:30 mins

Images drawing on the artist's large collection of kitsch white-Australian Aboriginal artifacts. Images that have appeared in her art include; domestic scenes, friends, daily life, tombstones, stuffed kangaroos in a souvenir shop, billboards, signs, graffiti, toys and ornaments.

'I try to take pictures that come up with points of view or situations or comments. I want the image to look nice, but I want it to be a teaching image that somebody can look at and first see something and then perhaps look into it and see even more'.

Destiny Deacon

ROSEMARY LAING

Contemporary furniture, encrusted with red earth from the desert is piled up to resemble *Uluru* then burnt. One photograph shows the piled furniture as if *Uluru* caught by cameras on 'Sun Set Strip' (a favourite sundown snap shot location). The other photograph shows the same items alight. The ultimate Aussie BBQ ?

BRONWYN WRIGHT

A series of photographs based on a Darwin location known as 'the swamp' where local youths hoon around and wreck cars. The artist photographs but also modifies the wrecks then waits for the locals to return and rearrange things before taking more photographs. And so the cycle continues.

JAMES GUERTS

This installation emphasizes elements of dislocation and fragility as metaphors for refugees arriving by boat in Australian waters. It includes a video referencing of Max Dupain's *The sunbaker*

DAVID HAINES

Born to be wild: Silver Hill 2003

DVD Duration: 16:9 looped

An Australian pine plantation forest slowly rips itself apart revealing its inner order. Was nature born to be wild?

DEREK KRECKLER

Romantic coastal images. The holes in each work correspond with 'fallen bits' – spheres carrying the missing imagery. A jigsaw completion exercise with implications concerning the realism of 2D versus 3D.

ADAM GECZY and PETER SCULTHORPE

From a Remote, Lonely Place (Port Arthur Elegy), 2003

DVD installation: 10:40 / 12 minutes

Port Arthur Australia's largest ruin has been the site for the imprisonment of convicts and more recently a massacre. A memorial piece, which uses expressionist images to build a mood, raising questions related to collective memory (or lack of) in Australia.

LIU XIAO XIAN

Home – London, 2002 - 03

A Chinese family is photographed in front of the 'Forbidden City' in Beijing, in front Buckingham Palace. A digital collage, which brings together sites of equivalent significance for new arrivals and raises questions about the way migrants find ways to both retain the past and embrace the future.

CRAIG WALSH

Cross –reference, 2004

site-specific projection

The artist has an interest in what we see and what we say.

A video is rear-projected onto an opening – an architectural feature – in the gallery. It creates a reversal of roles in which the viewer becomes the artwork and the artwork 'observes' the audience.

PATRICIA PICCININI

Plasmid Region, 2003

DVD Duration: 16:9

The beginning of future life forms are suggested in this animation of pulsing amorphous cells.

BILL HENSON

Henson works within traditional photographic practices, taking studio shots and using darkroom techniques to create powerful, moody images. The figures in this series are adolescents caught in a twilight zone of conflicting emotions and uncertainty – even threat.

DEBORAH PAAUWE

Close-ups of figures, girls dressed in elaborate clothing and faces painted into forbidding masks. As in all Paauwe's work there is a sense of adulthood within a child's body.

Dress ups and grown ups collide.

DAVID ROSETZKY

Untouchable, 2003

3 screen digital video installation. Duration : 18:38 min

This work explores the way our sense of identity is defined by our relationship with others. Different speakers deliver monologues in the style of 'Big Brother' confessions. Then the same dialogue is swapped between the participants leading to initial confusion then perhaps a realization of how different people often say much the same thing.

TRACEY MOFFATT and GARY HILLBERG

Love, 2003

DVD Duration: 21 mins

Extracts from 50s and 60s film sequences featuring romantic interludes and domestic dramas, which leads from 'true love' to a downward spiral of tension and violence. A work, which draws on a common familiarity with the Hollywood love film to expose stereotypical constructions of human relationships

DARREN SIWES

This series is partly concerned with representation. The ghostly figure of the artist is like an accusation. It may represent the hidden presence of Aboriginal people in histories of nation and local places. It can also be taken as a half-presence, a sort of acknowledgment that Aboriginal people are 'around' but they never become reality. The irony is that these images are based on overseas travel and locations (Cambridge and Ireland). Siwes in response to the experience of being anonymous and no longer being seen as Indigenous (as in Australia) felt free to investigate another society and its own social exclusions, based on class.

JUSTENE WILLIAMS

Bag lady series, 2003

7 type C photographs mounted on aluminium

Trapped in a small Japanese apartment in the middle of a heat wave from which there was no escape, the artist seized on a dramatic way to comment on the madness of consumerism by wrapping herself in plastic shopping bags.

Access and research notes:

The exhibition contains both still photographs and DVD presentations. The duration of the DVDs is shown in the above list. For this reason it is recommended that additional time be allowed where possible, for viewing and evaluating.

The exhibition catalogue is an excellent resource. All works are illustrated and supported with critical commentaries. Available Art Gallery Bookshop (contact this site) \$24.95 (less 10% schools)

Admission to the exhibition is free.

A limited number of Education Officer floor talks are available.

Schools intending to visit are required to book through Education Services (Tel 82077033) , Fax 82077070 or email agsa.education@saugov.sa.gov.au