

## Artwrite 50

**Creator/Contributor:**

Mendelssohn, Joanna; Ahmad, Imran; Bradshaw, Lydia; Buncel, David; Day, Helen; Dugan, Bronwen; Larenas Fierro, Carolina V.; Schmidt, Tine; Jensen, Haislund; Lewis, Eric; Lien, Julie; McKay, Georgia; Meagher, Toby; Nowell, Liz; Palmer, Amanda; Robinson, Alexander; Shi, Catherine; Shkreli, Lahuta Lumi Lila; Stephenson, Jenny; Stevens, Greta; Mengyin, Sun; Vollmer, Cassandra; Wilson, Erin; Worrall, Sarah; Cheng, Xu

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# Artwrite50

## October

## 2012

# The Future of Australian Art: Reaching the Tipping Point.

## Contributors.

Teaching Staff	Joanna Mendelssohn
Editors-in-Chief	Imran Ahmad Georgia McKay
Editorial	Julie Lien (social media) Erin Wilson
Sub Editors	Helen Day Bronwen Dugan Carolina Larenas Fierro Tine Schmidt Haislund Jensen Eric Lewis Julie Lien Georgia McKay Amanda Palmer Alexander Robinson Catherine Shi Lahuta Lumi Lila Shkreli Jenny Stephenson Mengyin Sun Cassandra Vollmer Erin Wilson Sarah Worrall Cheng Xu
– <i>In a Hundred or Less</i>	Lydia Bradshaw Cassandra Vollmer
– <i>Children’s Pieces</i>	Bronwen Dugan Toby Meagher
– <i>Letters to the Editor</i>	Liz Nowell Jenny Stephenson
Copyright Editor	David Buncel
Designers	Alexander Robinson Greta Stevens

Credits: Joanna Mendelssohn, Imran Ahmad, Lydia Bradshaw, David Buncel, Helen Day, Bronwen Dugan, Carolina V. Larenas Fierro, Tine Schmidt Haislund Jensen, Eric Lewis, Julie Lien, Georgia McKay, Toby Meagher, Liz Nowell, Amanda Palmer, Alexander Robinson, Catherine Shi, Lahuta Lumi Lila Shkreli, Jenny Stephenson, Greta Stevens, Sun Mengyin, Cassandra Vollmer, Erin Wilson, Sarah Worrall, Xu Cheng.

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Editorial.

by Julie Lien and Erin Wilson

In 1992, the first issue of Artwrite was produced on Word 5 and distributed as a stapled photocopy brochure.

The issues that followed have taken many forms, engaging with two decades worth of exhibitions, books, artists, ideas and issues concerning art in Australia.

Twenty years on, the 50th issue of *Artwrite: The Future of Australian Art: Reaching the Tipping Point* will live on as a blog in the annals of the internet, distributed electronically as PDFs and shared amongst followers on social media channels.

As Artwrite has evolved, so too has its content.

This issue is concerned with themes of change and the future of art in Australia. Letters to the editor have highlighted current contentious issues, including the controversial future of the Museum of Old and New Art (MONA), the uncertain future of art history at La Trobe University and the yet to be seen impact of major leadership changes in the art sector.

The exhibition reviews share a common link, showcasing major international art talent on show in Australia in 2012. Reviews of artworks by Liu Zhuoquan in the 18th Biennale of Sydney, *Portrait of Spain: Masterpieces from the Prado* at Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art (QAGOMA), *What the Birds Knew* at 4A Contemporary Asian Art and *Eugène Atget: Old Paris* at the Art Gallery of NSW foreground the increasing international presence of art in Australia, and the

vibrancy this presence adds to the Australian art sector.

This issue of *Artwrite* also returns to themes discussed by students in years past, casting new light on topics as a new group of students bring their knowledge and perspectives to continuing issues. This re-engagement raises further questions that may again be re-visited in future issues:

- Will we stand for a government that stalls upon our own National Cultural Policy?
- Are our laws able to catch up to the new progressive view of graffiti art?
- Will the arts sector be able to secure necessary funding in uncertain economic times?
- How will the institutional shift in focus to a broader range of audiences affect the perceived role of the art museum?
- As gay marriage becomes increasingly accepted in mainstream society, will the role of queer art change?

*Artwrite* is part of an ongoing conversation regarding issues of art in Australia. It is an indication of the prevailing themes of the day and the responses to it by emerging writers. As we reach the tipping point, we must both mourn what has come to pass as well as what awaits us in the next twenty years: a new era of Australian art.

# Letters to the editor.

## Woman on top, for now

*by Bronwen Dugan*

Whilst it's good news that Suhanya Raffel has been appointed acting director of the Queensland Art Gallery, it remains to be seen who will be Tony Ellwood's permanent replacement ('Art Gallery gets new head', SMH, 23 July).

It seems appropriate that the Board of Trustees consider her for the role, given that the Arts Minister Ros Bates has acknowledged that Suhanya Raffel's 'credentials are impeccable'.

Who knows? The most suitable candidate might be right under their nose.

## Why the MONAing?

*by Eric Lewis*

I don't know why anyone is worried about Hobart's Museum of Old and New Art possibly closing ('Support floods in for MONA founder in tax row', SMH, 25 July). Mr Walsh is backing himself in his case against the ATO and he seems to have a pretty good record for betting on winners.

## The beginning of the end...

*by Labuta Lumi Lila Shkreli*

La Trobe might as well use TNT to blow up every art gallery and museum in Australia and be done with it! We are witnessing the rug being pulled from under Australia's art sector. This is an injustice. The dean of humanities at La Trobe has a disregard for art history and is trying to obliterate culture from Australia's future. "Students have been telling us for years that traditional arts degrees are no longer sufficiently enticing and relevant." Please Tim, this disdain from such an authority warrants no excuse.

## The Social dimension of Contemporary Art

*by Carolina Larenas Fierro*

The article 'The New Realism' written by Christian Viveros-Faune touched me deeply.

I have always thought that the human being is political by nature since we are born, grow up and live in polis. In these terms art expresses a political point of view. Aesthetic is displaced by the message.

In the globalised world that we have today, where news spreads in real time, art arise as an effective communication media to denounce 'a host of global challenges ranging from political repression to economic crisis to endemic poverty and human rights violations'. The goal is to shift the collective's conscience in this new reality – The New Realism. Artists encourage social changes.

In the article there are several good examples of artists who are working in this way around the world. 'The new esthetic-political ethos shared by these and many other artist centers on the belief that artworks should be part of a larger social or moral terrain'. Despite a country's social and cultural characteristics, freedom and justice are universal concepts.

## Somebody has to ask the questions!

*by Tine Schmidt Haistund Jensen*

One can only watch in horror as La Trobe plans on cutting art history from its programs. Humanism has no correct answers and no final results; it always demands that we try harder and ask more questions. Is that not the very essence of study? Art is a reflection of time, a way of communicating through history. Studying the history of art is studying the history of society and it forces us to keep asking questions, to keep trying to understand the essence of being human. The moment we stop studying art we simply stop questioning our society, our values and ourselves.

## Dead or alive: it is up to you

*by Mengyin Sun*

How can the cultural institutions of Detroit survive without support from government? The Detroit Institute of Arts has been trying to become financially independent for several years, but the results of their efforts are infinitesimal. Some of its galleries, despite having cut their budget and staff, may close down if unable to raise money.

If America values the long-term wellbeing of people from Detroit, maybe it is time for one of the many philanthropists to step in and help.

# In one hundred words or less.

## Murakami’s *My Lonesome Cowboy*

By Lydia Bradshaw

Murakami’s iconic sculptural work, *My Lonesome Cowboy* (1998) takes its name from Andy Warhol’s homoerotic film, and is representative of the layered and complex relations between Japanese and American culture after World War II. In it we see the iconic American symbol of masculinity adapted and reproduced in the form of Japanese Otaku – a kind of popular culture that explores the sexuality of characters in anime. This amalgamation of respective cultures and characters is indicative of Murakami’s formative years, characterised by a relatively traditional Japanese upbringing and later exposure to popular western culture.

## The price of war, the pricelessness of peace

By Catherine Shi

The Price of War exhibition held at Chinalink Gallery, 107 Regent St, Redfern aims to promote cultural tolerance and world peace. It features the recent work of nine prominent Australian and Chinese artists, including three Archibald Prize finalists. Bringing together paintings, installations and video art, the exhibition looks closely at the destructive power of war and the suffering it causes. Though the exhibition emphasizes oriental perspectives, it sends to all Australians a searing and urgent message of the artists’ deep sympathy for the past, thought-provoking concern for the future and the pursuit of a mutual recognition for cultural identity.

## Was J.M.W. Turner’s artwork a source of inspiration for Impressionist artists?

By Carolina Larenas Fierro

According to Huge Estenssoro, Monet, who saw Joseph Mallord William Turner’s artwork when visiting London in 1870, did not like the ‘exuberant romanticism’ of the English painter. Despite this, Monet’s *Impression Sunrise* has clear resemblances to Turner’s work, especially *A Town on a River Sunset* (1833) and the watercolours of Venice in 1819. Whether or not Turner’s paintings were inspiration for impression artists, it can be stated that, as John Ruskin said, ‘Turner was the first modern painter, regarding to the use of paint as an aim on itself.’



Marea Gazzard, *Mingarri: The Little Olgas* (1984-1988)  
*Executive Court, Parliament House, Canberra.*

## Marea Gazzard - *Mingarri: The Little Olgas*

By Bronwen Dugan

*Mingarri* is a homage to the enduring nature of mountains in the landscape.

Marea Gazzard draws on her fascination with The Olgas – a monolithic rock formation in central Australia – and on her observations that they appear as small hills when viewed from a distance, but as monumental boulders when nearby. The bronze forms convey the strength of these ancient rocks, which contrasts with the fragility of human life, while their simplicity exemplifies a timelessness characteristic of Marea Gazzard’s sculpture.

*Mingarri* represents a connection to the country’s traditional heart and acknowledges the spiritual significance of the landscape to Aboriginal culture.

Liu Zhuoquan, *Where are you? You know more secrets!* 2012Dianne Jones, *Shearing the Rams*, 2001

## Mabel Pye's use of colour linocut printing

By Helen Day

Mabel Pye was an innovative printmaker working in Melbourne in the 1930s. Her work in the medium of linocut demonstrates bold lines, strong vibrant colours and conveys a sense of calmness and tranquillity. Her primary composition revolved around the domestic sphere and Australian landscape. Pye studied at the National Gallery School in Victoria, working with artists such as Napier Waller.

The early twentieth century Australian printmaking movement marked the transition for printmakers to be regarded as artists in their own right. Although Pye's work was largely forgotten until the 1970s, she is now considered, along with Margaret Preston, Thea Proctor and Ethel Spowers to be one of the significant figures in Australian modernism.

## Liu Zhuoquan: *Where Are You?* (2012)

By Mengyin Sun

The Chinese artist Liu Zhuoquan is a master of *neibua* – a kind of Chinese folk art that was used to decorate the inside of snuff bottles in the 19th century.

The installation in the 18th Biennale of Sydney is made up of a large number of inner painted glass bottles painted with detailed images of a giant coiled black snake. A sense of depression, darkness and mystery is communicated by these intense, but organised daily objects. Liu makes his own way in describing a brand new world with bottles in various sizes and shapes.

## Artist rethinks nation's mythical heroes

By Jenny Stephenson

Photo media artist Dianne Jones creates a space for Australia's National identity to be reconsidered. *Shearing the Rams* (2001) reappropriates Tom Roberts's 1890 painting of the same title, introducing new perspectives on personal and collective identity. The painting represents Jones' memory of the shearing shed that was dominated by her shearer grandfather. By reinstating her grandfather, brother and nephew in Roberts' work, Jones challenges presumptions of what it means to be Aboriginal, Australian, and Nationalistic.

## Identity politics: Roy Kennedy and contemporary Aboriginal art

By Labuta Lumi Lila Shkreli

As part of the Boomalli Aboriginal Artists Cooperative, Roy Kennedy is representative of a growing group that challenges social preconceptions about Aboriginal art. Exploring memory and personal history, Kennedy demonstrates the usually ignored history of mission life in his signature etching style. As a result of this constant shift in Aboriginal art, particularly when dealing with the postcolonial era, it is evident that contemporary Aboriginal art reflects the disenfranchised state of its community, just as Kennedy's *Mission Series 2* depicts. Heti Perkins and Belinda L. Croft lead discourse away from stereotypical ideas of Aboriginal art toward a holistic one.

# Children's pieces.

## An introduction to two contemporary Australian photographers

(for children aged 8-12)

By Cassandra Vollmer

**TRENT PARKE** (b. 1971)

Is there a skeleton in your closet? No, but it is in the kitchen. This is the work of Trent Parke who lives in Adelaide. He started out as a sports photographer for a newspaper and then moved to art photography, documenting Australian life, events and places. In the photograph, 'Skeleton in the Kitchen', Trent Parke shows us his family home and the strange things that happen in his day-to-day life. The domestic photograph of the skeleton does the opposite of what we expect to see. **Do you feel that the bright colours in the kitchen make the image funny or scary?** By using happy colours, interesting places and cheerful lighting, photography can change the way we see objects.



Trent Parke,  
*Skeleton in the kitchen*, 2007



Michael Riley, *Untitled*, 2000

**MICHAEL RILEY** (1960 -2004)

Cows cannot fly. In Michael Riley's world they can, with the help of computers in the photograph 'Untitled' from the series *Cloud*. Michael Riley was one of Australia's most important Indigenous Wiradjuri/Kamilaroi artists from New South Wales. He was also one of the founding members of Boomalli Aboriginal Artist Cooperative that is still active today. His art is about Indigenous history, traditional cultures and land rights being ignored. This photograph uses the blue cloudy sky to add the idea of loss to Michael Riley's dream-like images.

**What do you feel when you look at the photograph?**

## Danish impressionist artist Anna Ancher

(for children aged 8-12)

By Tine Schmidt Haislund Jensen

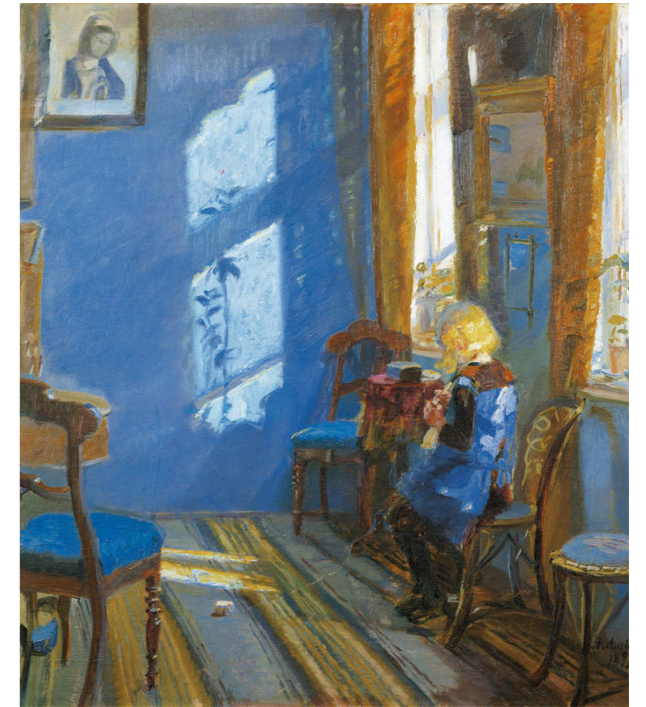
Far away from Australia, in a small country called Denmark, there is a place where they say that the light is magic. This place is called Skagen and it is at the very top of Denmark where two oceans, coming from either side, crash into each other. The force of the two oceans is so powerful that it sounds like thunder.

It was in this little town that Anna Ancher was born in 1859, many years ago. Anna's family owned the town's hotel. It was here that Anna would watch the artists, who had come to the town for its magical light and paint their colourful paintings in the hotel's garden.

Anna also began to paint the nature and the people around her. Unlike other girls at the time, Anna was allowed to go to a real art school to learn how to paint.

Anna's best friend was called Marie Krøyer. Marie was also a painter and they would often go for long walks on the beach. On these walks Anna and Marie would talk about what they wanted to paint next.

When Anna was 19 years old she met another artist,



Anna Ancher, *Solskin i den blå stue* (Sunshine in the Blue Living Room) 1891

a man called Michael Ancher. The two of them fell in love and had a fairy-tale wedding on Anna's 21st birthday.

Together with their friends, Anna and Michael would paint the light in Skagen. In the magical light they could see that the shadows had colours.

**Now the light in Skagen may be magical, but look closely at the shadows around you. Maybe the light around you is also magical! Do the shadows have colours?**



P.S. Krøyer,  
*Sommeraften ved Skagen Sønderstrand med Anna Ancher og Marie Krøyer* (Summer Night at Skagen Southern Beach with Anna Ancher and Marie Krøyer) 1893

Kids activity brochure  
- Retrospective of Peter Upward.

*This Activity Brochure is designed for children aged 5 – 8 years to accompany a retrospective exhibition of Peter Upward’s paintings.*

By Greta Stevens

Peter Upward was an Abstract Expressionist painter in the 1960s. His paintings use bold, large, simple brush strokes that describe how Peter felt when he was painting. Abstract art uses shapes and colours to show feelings, thoughts and actions.

How does this painting make you feel?



Peter Upward, *Roger Says* 1973

Look carefully at the painting titled *New Reality*. Peter was inspired by Japanese Zen Calligraphy. This is the artistic writing of Japanese letters where the brush and ink do not leave the page.

Can you draw a smooth, flowing line without leaving the page?

Draw an ‘angry’ line or an ‘energetic’ line.



Peter Upward, *New Reality* 1961

Peter Upward was inspired by the freedom and improvisation of jazz music. To improvise is to create without preparing. Peter doesn’t know what he is going to paint before he begins.

Close your eyes and imagine the artist in his studio sweeping paint across the floor with a broom. This is how Peter Upward created *June Celebration* in a sweeping dance. Can you dance around like the movements that Peter made in this artwork?

What other movements might Peter have made?



Peter Upward, *June celebration* 1960

# 500.

## A vision to share

By Amanda Palmer

Before he began losing his sight at the age of 18, Duncan Meerding cherished the beauty of the Tasmanian wilderness. The natural curves and lines of organic forms are now the inspiration for his work. The furniture designer and maker recreates what he can remember.

In 2005, Hobart-born Meerding was diagnosed with a degenerative eye condition that left him legally blind within 12 months. He first noticed something was wrong while watching television when his left eye

Fredheim, who was the head of the furniture design studio at the University of Tasmania when Meerding began his studies, says she was hesitant at first about accepting him into the school because she felt his inability to see clearly and draw would impede his designs. Her scepticism soon subsided once she witnessed his passion and determination.

Meerding went to the Vision Australia campus in Melbourne to train to use the power tools he would need to become a furniture designer. Fredheim and a technician soon followed so they could help teach him and future students with vision impairment.

Unlike many Tasmanian furniture designers who use expensive oak, Meerding prefers salvaged timber, making sustainability part of his design. Although he is equipped with a talking tape measure and tactile depth gauge, Meerding relies on his senses of touch and hearing. Meerding has learnt to feel the grain of the timber and listen with care to the sound of his tools, skills the university technicians taught him by blindfolding themselves.

In Tasmania Meerding is known not just for his design work but also as a gifted public speaker on social justice issues. He has presented at the Arts Activated conference and is on his way to India later this year to volunteer for Braille Without Borders.

Meerding's goal is to be seen as a furniture designer with a vision, rather than with a vision impairment. He wants to empower people who are blind or vision-impaired so that they too can learn the skills needed to develop a career in the arts.

started struggling with perspective. He was left with less than 5 per cent vision in the peripheral field in both eyes.

With no central vision, Meerding can barely make out the shapes of the furniture he creates. He describes his design as a form of artistic expression to explain how he sees the world now, as minimalist objects with flowing lines.

A furniture design graduate from the University of Tasmania, Meerding has received several prizes for his designs and exhibits his work worldwide. Linda



Duncan Meerding,  
*Log Lamps*

## Eugène Atget: Old Paris Art Gallery of NSW: Review

By Alexander Robinson

Crediting Eugène Atget as the father of documentary photography is a little naïve, for the work of Atget goes beyond that which is visible in his photographs. The significance of Atget's work is in what he chooses to exclude in his depiction of Paris. The title of the exhibition, *Eugène Atget: Old Paris* refers to Baron Haussmann's development of Paris in the latter half of the 19th Century. As a photographer, Atget attempted to capture and archive a time and a place before it disappeared into the annals of history. Our contemporary notion of documentary photography comes from what Cartier-Bresson called 'the decisive moment'. But Atget's work is not concerned with a decisive moment, as much as it is concerned with temporal transcendence. His photography is closer to poetry than documentary, and it is in this context that it is best perceived.

It is the absence of human subjects that often conveys Eugène Atget's photography as surreal. For this very reason, a group of young Parisian artists in the 1920s were inspired by his work and the very possibilities offered by photography as a surrealist medium. We see the deserted streets of Paris bathed in the luminous glow of dawn. We see disfigured human faces, discombobulated reflections of those who witnessed this wizard's craft. Atget asserts himself as the master of the photographic medium, manipulating the camera to suit his artistic intentions. Even the playfulness with which his own presence is subtly communicated by the leg of the tripod, reflected in the mirror of a bourgeois interior.

Atget was capable of seeing the distinction between reality and its photographic representation; what the late John Szarkowski called the difference between the object and the subject. He was aware of the artistic potential of a medium whose very existence was already the slave of modernism. With infinite technical reproducibility and the creation of smaller cameras and faster films, Atget chose to work with obsolete equipment and printing processes. His aesthetic was more in accordance with photography's founding fathers than the avant-garde. From this comes a certain sense of nostalgia for a time



Eugène Atget, *Rue Hautefeuille, 6th arrondissement, 1898*

and a place lost with the development of modern society. A sense of nostalgia for a type of photography lost with the development of technology.

**'We see disfigured  
human faces,  
discombobulated  
reflections  
of those who  
witnessed this  
wizard's craft.'**

For many visitors, this exhibition will be the discovery of Atget, whose albumen prints are appearing in Australia for the first time. Ansel Adams once described that the charm of Atget was his 'equitable and intimate point of view'. It is this intimacy that makes the work of Atget so appealing: primarily because of the small print size you are invited into the pictures to look closer and examine the details. The significance of the original work of art is particularly pertinent in regard to photography. Furthermore, in the digital age of the 21st century where the photographic print is in decline, we have become accustomed to viewing photography online. How refreshing it is to see the old master in all his glory.

## The Damien Hirst Retrospective Tate Modern: Review

by Sarah Worrall

Damien Hirst has transformed the world of British art through his unapologetic obsession with death. However, there is criticism that he has flogged this concept. When you really only have one thing to say, how many times can you say it before you begin to bore everyone, including yourself, to death?

Tate Modern's retrospective of Hirst's work makes an unquestionable case for the artist's persistent, almost neurotic morbidity. In Room One there is the photograph Hirst had taken of himself next to the decapitated head of a human cadaver in the anatomy department of Leeds University. *Dead Head* (1991), is only the beginning. After that it is much more of the same: death.

The main attraction of Room Two, *A Thousand Years* (1990) has props to be the ultimate Hirst. Here, the cycle of life and death in a microcosm, confined within a vitrine, is exhibited. A cow's severed head lies in a congealed pool of its own blood. Maggots, in a white box, hatch into flies. The flies feed on the cow's blood. An Insect-o-cutor machine regularly zaps them, depositing their black bodies in a stainless steel tray. It was ugly when the exhibition opened; but would only become more grotesque as putrefaction takes place throughout the show's duration.

Then in Room Three there is Hirst's famous *The Physical Impossibility of Death in the Mind of Someone Living* (1991). A grinning tiger shark floats, suspended, in a tank of formaldehyde. Apparently it's not nearly as formidable as the original but mesmerising all the same.

By Room Four, initial excitement wanes. *The Acquired Inability to Escape* (1991), another of Hirst's vitrines, contains nothing more than a table, office chair and ashtray full of cigarette butts. This faces *Dead Ends Died Out, Examined* (1993), in which a few hundred more cigarette butts are mounted like archaeologically recovered remains in a display case. This represents an obvious shift from thinking about death itself to how and why we flirt with death in our habits.

Hirst's great ambition was to portray the terror of death, but he had already done so brilliantly by his late twenties that he left very little room for movement. The accompanying problem is that his message in its simplest form, like a lot of fundamental truths, is completely banal. The deeper the viewer penetrates the exhibition the more the whole experience becomes a bit monotonous. You are confined in a room with a man who constantly repeats himself.

Room Five is dead butterflies; Room Six more dead butterflies.

The entire show is full of spot paintings, the most boring and self-repetitive of all Hirst's creations. How do they relate to his death obsession? Maybe using images

that look like arrangements of pills, another of Hirst's gathered motifs in display cases. Either that, or in being so completely dull, that they create a viewing experience somewhat comparable to the nothingness of death.

From this point on the whole show begins to noticeably decline. The dead animals in vitrines multiply, but with not nearly as much impact. The motifs of pills and cigarettes morph into garish exaggerated bling (diamonds in mirror-glass cabinets and so on). Hirst's self-parody becomes much more brutal. In fact, the abundance of deliberate kitsch running through his later work suggests that he actually wants to flaunt how bad it is.

It is hard to avoid reflecting on just how quickly Hirst went from being utterly brilliant to perfectly crass. In many ways it was a difficult show, and one must remember that the works on display represent a mere fraction of what Hirst has done. However the show does exactly what a retrospective should do, in that it mirrors both the scope and the momentum of Hirst's career – almost like Hirst's own lifecycle vitrine.

**'It is hard to  
avoid reflecting  
on just how  
quickly Hirst  
went from being  
utterly brilliant  
to perfectly crass.'**



Liu Zhuoquan, *Where are you? You know more secrets!* 2012

## One in all, all in one

By Catherine Shi

There are a thousand Hamlets in a thousand people's eyes. So too are there a thousand interpretations of an exhibition and a piece of artwork. The 18th Biennale of Sydney titled 'all our relations' focuses on the connections between human beings and communities. In this biennale, the installation of Chinese artist Liu Zhuoquan at the MCA, titled *Where are you? You know more secrets!* (2012), explains the curators' philosophy of collaboration, conversation and compassion in the story of his bottles.

Due to glass fragments that have been left inside his body, the inspiration for the collection and the making of these bottles becomes a part of expressing Liu Zhuoquan's childhood memory and a part of his life experiences, not just for the sake of art itself. The bottles are used as a language and as vehicles to accumulate energy – they contain as many memories as he has. At the same time, he uses an ancient painting technique

– 'Neihua' to release his feelings of inner struggle and explosion of his desire.

Liu Zhuoquan has created a fascinating world of snakes. This attractive, massive installation is made up of hundreds of glass bottles in various shapes and sizes, each painted with a segment of a giant coiled black snake, while every single bottle itself is an amazing component. Little by little, the bottles touch each other to compose an integrated snake revealing a subtle relationship amongst these elements: they rely on each other and are independent of each other as well. The vessels are displayed at different levels – it appears as if there are multiple snakes writhing, twisting and curling around themselves and each other.

At first glance, these black creatures frightened me, as though its representation of the natural world. After a moment of meditation, I realised it expressed the

composition of the China, past and present, and its sentiment of struggle, revealing how human beings strive in society with fear, hazards and other negative effects hidden in the dim recess of their mind. His work is affected by the oriental culture of Tibetan Buddhism and is like a spiritual laboratory, with miniaturized 'experimental material' relating to nature, biology, and human societies.

The symbol of the snake and its form shifts our awareness and shows that human beings are undoubtedly social animals. This work bridges the gap between generative thinking and inclusionary practices, acting as a therapy for trauma of his generation. It opens a space to express

how things connect – how we relate to each other and to the world we inhabit; it releases the anxiety of the connection between people and social networks. It asks audiences to touch, to listen and to feel the essence by their heart.

**'This work bridges the gap between generative thinking and inclusionary practices, acting as a therapy for trauma of his generation.'**

The relationship between why he started to use bottles to create the artwork and its meaning to this biennale are rooted in each other with endless connecting. It becomes much more than an art exhibition by telling us a story that we are all related not only in blood, but by broader cultures because it was the decisions and choices of our ancestors that have led

us to the places we inhabit today and the opportunities with which we are presented, to make our own decisions and choices that will lay the way for our progeny.



Geoff Todd,  
*Mother & Child,*  
*no. 11, Red*  
2002

### Does the medium matter?

By Julie Lien

Geoff Todd believes that ‘the obligation of the artist [is] to reflect on or respond to the times’ (Walton, 2004). How the artist chooses to present this response, however, can take over the artwork, leaving the viewer much to see, but little to understand. It is Todd’s belief that too often the method of the artwork takes over the message and so he attempts to address this problem – not by limiting his outputs, but by being innovative with them.

When Todd was an artist-in-residence at the Victorian College of the Arts, he first questioned the role of the medium. His 1980 exhibition *The Book Sculptures* posed the question: at what point did a book become a sculpture? What separated the two if they were both

made from ink and paper? By presenting an everyday item and questioning its purpose, Todd invites the viewer to do the same with his art. In his series *Blood Paintings*, Todd protests war and its consequences. The title of *Blood Paintings* not only represents the bond between families broken by conflict, nor its representation of mortality and lives forfeited so easily, but literally the source of paint used to make the artwork – his own blood. Many eyes would be drawn to its controversy, but it also serves the purpose of the artwork which is that the blood spilt in war should not be ignored.

Todd continues this theme of war in *Floral Tributes*, by firing bullets into his paintings. He makes a clear decision

### Tony Oursler – Face to Face

By Tine Schmidt Haislund Jensen

ARoS Kunstmuseum, Denmark  
3 March – 29 July 2012

What defines genius, and what is madness? In *Face to Face*, Tony Oursler challenges our understanding of the human mind and its capability to transform from one extreme to another. Working with film media since the 1970s, Oursler distorts the frame and form by projecting his films onto sculptures, puppets and water, creating abnormal faces and creatures that talk to the audience.

Oursler’s use of untraditional forms and materials as background settings for his films is clearly demonstrated in *Face to Face*. *Cyc*, a sculptural canvas shaped by two balls set on top of each other, is a great example of how Oursler communicates with his audience. The top part shows one of the artists’ eyes wearing thick blue make-up, while the bottom part is the artists’ mouth kissing us. Although primitive in form, the idea of a face is created. The soundtrack is Oursler’s voice, letting us know how much he loves us.

Through these talking forms and fractions of faces, a sense of being bombarded with emotions is inevitable, and that is just what Oursler wants. Some of the faces want to talk to us and engage in a conversation with us, while a comet is complaining about heat. Others are shy and get nervous around us. This constant communication, that is forced to be one-way, creates a claustrophobic atmosphere and a sense of unease. Oursler manages to create a universe that borders on schizophrenia and

madness, but at the same time establishes meaningful and lovable characters.

A particularly disturbing emotion is created in Oursler’s *Eyes*. In a dark room Oursler has placed small screens hanging from the ceiling, each of them showing a film of an eye. A feeling of being watched from all sides creates an unsettling emotion, but after a closer look, none of the eyes are actually looking straight at you. This forces the question: Who is looking at whom?

Tony Oursler is famous for these mind-twisting characters, and for his challenging attitude towards film, form and space. Oursler is a well-established artist and his works can be seen around the world. Although each work represents itself powerfully enough, it is spectacular to be allowed to experience such a large collection of his works in one exhibition. The curators have managed to let Oursler’s works explain their reasons for being, by allowing the visitor to walk through a stream of conversations with the artworks themselves. This ongoing conversation, with such a large amount of artworks, naturally creates an understanding not only the artworks, but of Oursler himself.

The combination of hysteria, humour, schizophrenia and madness is beautifully entwined and allows us to become part of each emotion. We are allowed to test our own borderline emotions in a safe, but absolutely mad environment.

to use bullets shot from rifles belonging to each of the opposing sides so as not to appear to be taking a side – both are accountable in his opinion. In this instance, however, the holes left by the bullets are quite small, it is only upon closer inspection that they are identified. Here we see Todd challenging the approach of painting as art produced only on a surface, but also as an object that can be pierced by violence, much like its subjects.

Geoff Todd understands that it is far too easy to concentrate only on the form of an artwork, rather than the reason behind it. He realises that the medium can draw our eyes to a piece of artwork, but in the end it is the emotion created within the viewer that has the lasting impact. From broad brushstrokes of blood, to

the memory of bullets left by a rifle, Todd continues to ask the question first posed in *The Book Sculptures* catalogue: ‘does the medium matter?’ (Todd, 1980). No, says Todd, as long as the message is received loud and clear.

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*Ken + Julia Yonetani:  
What the Birds Knew*

By Cheng Xu

4A Centre for Contemporary Asian Art  
3 August – 3 November 2012

Beautiful and dangerous...but I'm not talking about a Bond girl. A fluorescent green chandelier floats in the 4A lobby, reminiscent of a haunted mansion. A giant ant peers into your eyes as you enter the upstairs gallery, but the idea behind these Uranium glass bead sculptures is far more sinister.

The title of Ken and Julia Yonetani's exhibition at 4A, *What the Birds Knew*, refers to Akira Kurosawa's 1955 post-war film, *I Live in Fear*, a story foreshadowing the threat of nuclear radiation in Japan. The protagonist fails to convince his family to move to Brazil and claims that the birds would escape if they were aware of any environmental dangers [1]. The seemingly abstract nature of these sculptural installations allow them to be accessible as a response to not only the recent tragedy at Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant, but also Chernobyl, Three Mile Island, Sellafield, Hiroshima or Nagasaki.

For these Australian artists, the threat of nuclear radiation hits a little closer to home. Australia's history of nuclear mining began in 1970, when a rich deposit of Uranium was discovered at Nabarlek in the



Northern Territory. It borders the Aboriginal site, Gabo Djang, also known as Green Ant Dreaming (maybe not so abstract after all). The Kuwinjku people on the land believed 'misfortune follows disturbance of the site not only for the transgressors, but for all people'. The six-metre long ant, made of Uranium glass beads and lit up with UV lights, unifies the Aboriginal and Japanese people and instills a sense of fear which transcends beyond the barriers of language[2].

The chandelier, *USA*, is part of *Crystal Palace: The Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of all Nuclear Nations*, comprising of a series of chandeliers, each representing one of the twenty-one countries currently operating nuclear power plants. *USA* is the largest and visible to the public at all times of the day,

Ken + Julia Yonetani, *USA* from *Crystal Palace: The Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of All, Nuclear Nations*, 2012.  
(Image credit: 4A Centre for Contemporary Asian Art.  
Photographer: Zan Wimberley)

giving a physical presence to the otherwise invisible threat of nuclear radiation[3].

The exhibition also has something for the thrill seeker. The usual, 'Don't Touch the Artwork' warning is more for the benefit of the audience than the artwork, although the Uranium glass is not sufficiently radioactive to pose a health hazard to those viewing the artwork. The Uranium glass featured in the work contains depleted Uranium, which is a by-product of the Uranium enrichment process. Recycling radioactive waste? Problem solved[4].

These mesmerising sculptures portray Uranium to the public in a more 'favourable light' and become a catalyst for conversations regarding the safety of Uranium as a source of electricity. I left the exhibition fearing not only the over-arching feelers of the giant green ant, but also the consequences of Uranium mining in Australia.

(See <http://blogs.cofa.unsw.edu.au/artwrite/> for references.)

# Prevention to preservation... and prosecution?

By Erin Wilson

An analysis of the City of Sydney's MURALS, STREET ART AND GRAFFITI AS HERITAGE ITEMS proposal.

The streets of Sydney are covered with street art, or graffiti, that was created in defiance of official regulations of good taste. While in the past it seemed the City of Sydney Council abhorred these works, the recent release of a graffiti register proposal has revealed a new, progressive view of these works... or has it?

While the proposed register addresses many key issues regarding the identification, documentation and preservation of 'socially valuable' street art, there are also many it neglects. However, many issues that seem to be washed over or neglected entirely in the new policy, are likely mentioned in the City's 'other' graffiti policy—the current Graffiti Management policy. While this policy may now be superseded by the new approach, it makes mention of a key element that the graffiti register proposal has neglected: the creator of the work.

As a result, to gain a full understanding of the City of Sydney's new approach to graffiti and/or street art, it is necessary to consider both documents alongside one another. In doing so it becomes clear, before the end of the first paragraph, that contradictions will arise. For instance, according to graffiti register policy, street art and some graffiti 'make a valuable contribution to the City's identity and social cohesion. Such artworks are associated with innovation and creativity, as well as adding to the richness and diversity of the City's cultural life'. However, according to the graffiti management policy, 'Unsightly graffiti adds to an atmosphere of neglect and urban decay, and distorts perceptions about the actual level of crime and safety'. While few people will argue that all graffiti does either of these things, what is most problematic with these conflicting views is a lack of clarity concerning exactly who will decide

which graffiti is 'valuable' and which is 'unsightly'.

Having acknowledged the social and economic benefits of (some) street art, the proposed policy then outlines a series of procedures for identifying, documenting and maintaining works deemed to be socially significant. Work that falls into the 'valuable' or 'socially significant' category is to be determined collaboratively, through community and council consultation. However, it is unclear whether new works that may be deemed to have social value by the city and local community will have the chance to be considered. As the City of Sydney has a quick removal policy, patrolling identified 'priority zones' as frequently as once every 24 hours, and 'routine zones' every five days, it is not unreasonable to question whether works that have potential value to the community will survive long enough to resonate, or even be seen. Further, in regard to community consultation, the public exhibition of the planning proposal is a key point in determining at what level decisions of significance will be made. Accepting and encouraging community consultation as a key step in the process suggests the community will have an active voice in determining what is significant. While the notion of community consultation is seemingly progressive, the graffiti register proposal still neglects to mention another key group concerned – the creators of the socially valuable works.

While the graffiti register policy makes no mention of these creators, the graffiti management policy does. As well as asserting the prosecution of offenders as a deterrent strategy, this policy states 'Illegal graffiti artists will be deprived of the reward/satisfaction of recognition', this apparently applies regardless of the recognised social significance of the work. While the graffiti management policy that employs this strategy deals primarily with the 'bad' type of graffiti, the absence of discussion of graffiti artists in the graffiti register policy suggests this strategy may be applied to creators of

'good' graffiti too. This raises the question, is a graffiti artist whose work is deemed worthy of heritage listing to be denied recognition as a punishment for illegally adding to the social value of the city?

The current graffiti management policy states 'the success of the City's graffiti removal program is due to its sensitivity to the distinction between creative expression from the community and unacceptable visual pollution by graffiti'. Essentially, the City of Sydney recognises that the term 'graffiti' covers both the socially valuable creative expressions valued by the community, or 'good' graffiti, and the unwanted, visually displeasing vandalism abhorred by the community, or 'bad' graffiti. While a culmination of the two policies provides strategies for dealing with both types of graffiti, there is only vague allusion at most to how graffiti will be defined as one or

**'what is most problematic with these conflicting views is a lack of clarity concerning exactly who will decide which graffiti is 'valuable' and which is 'unsightly'.'**

**'graffiti artists in Melbourne were willing to work alongside the council in formulating policies that present a balanced approach to graffiti issues, however as in the Sydney policy, these collaborations become obsolete.'**

the other, and who will make this decision.

While the treatment of what is valuable graffiti is vague in both policies, the major contradiction between the two policies is the attitude applied to illegal graffiti. While the graffiti management policy engages with a deterrence policy, the graffiti register policy states, 'These art forms, expressed within the shared arena of the public domain, are often controversial when being established, but add to the vibrancy of the city'. The controversy referred to, in actuality, involves the potential prosecution of the creator, the attempted removal of the work as soon as is possible, and the

policy of allowing no public attribution to the creator of the work.

Under the Summary Offences Act 1998, the penalty in NSW for 'willful damage or defacement of property by means of spray paint without reasonable excuse' is a fine of \$2200 or 6 months in prison for 'serious or persistent offenders'. Across Australia, the penalty for creating, or the intention to create, graffiti ranges from having no specified law to a term of seven years imprisonment for repeat offenders. In prosecuting graffiti artists, consistent acts of graffiti rather than intention, scale or location of the work is listed as the factor most likely to result in a prison term being served. While the graffiti register policy suggests a new, progressive approach to graffiti, these laws have received no mention, and as a result, it can be assumed they will continue to operate in the same way as they have been, despite the new appreciation Sydney

has for (some) graffiti works. Simply put, the City of Sydney discourages and penalises illegal graffiti practices, with the exception of the (still undefined) 'good' graffiti. While the graffiti register policy recognises some graffiti, though created illegally, may too become worthy of heritage status, no attempt has been made to alter the approach taken to illegal graffiti from the time of its conception. If a graffiti artist risks association with their work resulting in prosecution when the work is deemed to be 'visual pollution', surely they should receive public recognition for their contribution to society if the work is deemed valuable to the point of heritage listing.

While the new graffiti register policy has raised a variety of issues and contradictions, they are not unique to Sydney. In her article 'Negotiated consent or zero tolerance?' Alison Young, a criminologist and socio-legal researcher, outlines her designated task in 2004: to develop a new, progressive graffiti policy for Melbourne. Despite Young's policy receiving widespread support, it was never adopted by the City of Melbourne, who instead opted for a 'zero tolerance' policy. An examination of Young's policy provides insight into a balanced, considered and progressive approach to graffiti in major cities. Young first refers

to the concept of 'negotiated consent', a key element of this being the implementation of 'zones of tolerance', essentially designated spaces for legal graffiti, as are seen in several areas of Sydney already. Young proposed that three zones be developed: zones of zero tolerance, zones of limited tolerance (in which property owners make decisions on what is removed or preserved, with council intervention only occurring if necessary in the case of disagreement between individuals), and finally designated zones. Like several similar zones in Sydney, work in designated zones would not face council removal and would be self-regulated and maintained by the contributing creators.

A major element addressed in Young's proposed policy was one neglected in Sydney's new policy – recognition of the role of the creators of the works in question. Young's proposal suggested a re-definition of the term 'stakeholder' in order to approach the issue of graffiti in a more inclusive, considered way. Young notes that the term stakeholder is primarily, if not exclusively, applied to those in opposition to graffiti, and as a result seeks to include graffitiists and supporters of graffiti within this term. She suggests that redefining the term stakeholder to include all individuals concerned with the works will help protect and promote the rights of the creators, and those who reside in areas discussed, that appreciate the social or aesthetic value of the works in question.

Despite Young's call to consider graffitiists and pro-graffitists, the adopted zero tolerance policy, as in Sydney's policy, acknowledged the value of certain graffiti works while managing to make no mention of their creators or their fate. This is particularly interesting, as in her research Young found graffiti artists in Melbourne were willing to work alongside the council in formulating policies that present a balanced approach to graffiti issues, however as in the Sydney policy, these collaborations become obsolete. While the Sydney graffiti register is seemingly a progressive approach, engaging to an extent with the idea of negotiated consent, the lack of amendment to current graffiti laws that engage with a 'zero-tolerance' approach suggests the graffiti register policy is at best a vague attempt at progressive views, with a major neglect of relevant concerned stakeholders.

Ultimately, Young's attempt at a fair, balanced and inclusive graffiti policy highlights what is possible when all parties are considered and consulted. However, what becomes clear is the still conflicting, undefined view of graffiti. While Sydney Council has followed Melbourne in its attempt to take a progressive approach to graffiti, an overriding conflict seems to exist regarding when graffiti is good and when it is bad, when it is art and when it is vandalism, as well as neglecting to consider

the creators in the first capacity, only in the second as criminals.

What an analysis of the graffiti register proposal and the graffiti management policy reveals is that neither should be consulted in isolation. Each contains information that contradicts the other and each fills in the blanks where the other is vague. What is further established are the problems that arise when a fairly vague policy is developed on the basis of subjective, undefined opinions. While the City of Sydney has taken a step in the right direction by recognising the potential of graffiti art, it cannot be as simple as categorising some graffiti as 'good' and some as 'bad'. Even a brief examination of current academic literature in the field of street art reveals a plethora of issues seemingly neglected in the current policies. Issues including recognition and anonymity, audience participation or a 'street dialogue', commodification of graffiti art, graffitiists' role in the construction of place identity and fluid notions of public space are only a few of the issues that are essentially ignored by these new policies.

While it is true that we have to start somewhere, and the graffiti register is a step in the right direction for street art in Sydney, it is fair to say it is only a step. To move leaps and bounds the City of Sydney must consider the need for a progression of laws to coincide with progressive conceptions of the role of graffiti. The classification of graffiti as either art (good) or vandalism (bad) must be recognised as subjective and there must be more formal guidelines in place for the classification of graffiti. Finally, it is a necessity that the creators of the socially valuable works discussed in the graffiti register policy are provided recognition. While the graffiti management policy acknowledges creators, although through discussion of their prosecution, the graffiti register policy seems to treat street art as though it simply appears. If an individual can be identified and prosecuted for their 'visual pollution' surely they should be identified and praised for their addition to the 'richness and diversity of the City's cultural life'.

1. City of Sydney Environment and Heritage Committee, Murals, Street Art and Graffiti as Heritage Items.
2. City of Sydney Graffiti Management Policy.
3. Alison Young (2010): Negotiated consent or zero tolerance? Responding to graffiti and street art in Melbourne, City: analysis of urban trends, culture, theory, policy, action, 14:1-2, 99-114

# The tipping point – is queer art still relevant now?

By Eric Lewis

The concept of queer in relation to visual and performing arts developed in the 1980s and '90s. Loosely defined, queer can be summarised as 'the other'; encapsulating all that is non-heterosexual, and questioning of divisive gender binaries.

Queer sprang from a time when gay people were still marginalised and discriminated against. As late as 1997, homosexual acts between consenting males were illegal in Tasmania. Change in recent years has been swift and now Tasmania may be the first state to develop state based legislation on same-sex marriage. If queer has been largely absorbed into mainstream where does that leave queer art?

Australian born Leigh Bowery was a queer performance artist, amongst various other roles including fashion designer and model for Lucian Freud. From an upbringing in the Melbourne suburb of Sunshine, he became a legendary figure in the London and New York



nightclub scenes where he thrived on shocking people 'in an intelligent way – in an original way' (Als, 1998). His imposing figure – 6 feet 2 tall and weighing up to 17 stone – was always a major part of his look and performances. 'He used his physical appearance to blur the lines between maleness and femaleness, entertainment and artistic expression, power and vulnerability.' This is especially true of the performance piece where he 'gave birth'. After starting off singing and walking around the stage with a particularly large bump, he would then start moaning, climb onto a table where a figure would emerge from between his legs. The figure, a nude adult woman, came out covered in fake blood and sausage links and Bowery would carry her off stage. The crowd would be both astonished and horrified.

In 1988 Bowery held a one-week performance at the Anthony d'Offray Gallery in London. Each day from 4 to 6pm he would pose in a different costume in front of a one-way mirror so he could see only his reflection while visitors watched his performance. Apart from this gallery show, most of Bowery's performances were in gay nightclubs and he was mostly a subculture figure while still alive. His influence can be seen in the work of fashion designers including Alexander McQueen, Vivienne Westwood and Walter Van Beirendonck. Even today we see his aesthetic borrowed by Lady Gaga in mainstream popular culture. The influence of Bowery is acknowledged and evident in a variety of her looks. Sue Tilley met Bowery in 1982 and became one of his closest friends and was the author of *Leigh Bowery: The Life and Times of an Icon*. She wrote that 'Leigh would have loved Lady Gaga and would have so wished that he had invented the meat dress'. Lady Gaga has said that she wants people to think of her as 'fashion, pop culture, avant-garde, fearless – the girl who brought the straight boys into the gay club.' That toned down versions of Bowery's creations are popularised now, nearly 18 years after his death aged 33, must truly define him as avant-garde and shows that his legacy is still relevant.

Luke Roberts's early performances at Brisbane parties were often looked down upon by the 'art establishment as nightclub-party ephemera' (Mudie Cunningham, 2012 [<http://www.ima.org.au/pages/publishing.php>]). He first created the performance persona Pope Alice in 1979 at Brisbane's Swish Ball. Subsequently at various parties, openings and events, Pope Alice would appear to bless the crowds, kiss the bitumen and offer advice such as 'Heterosexuality is curable.' Roberts had been taught

first by the Sisters of St Joseph at the convent school in the small town of Alpha, in central Queensland. Later he left Alpha to attend the Christian Brothers boarding school, St Brendan's College in Yeppoon. He uses the knowledge of Catholicism that he gained to make Pope Alice plausible in terms of costume and ritual. The exhibition *v*, which was curated by Christine Morrow in 1997 as part of the Brisbane Festival, presented the work of artists who had a connection with Roman Catholicism and included Pope Alice.

The inspiration for Pope Alice came partly from his personal experience of Catholic repression as a child. It was also to 'counter the disgust and embarrassment he felt during Joh Bjelke-Petersen's white bread reign Queensland Premier from 1968 to 1987'. She speaks for all those who are not embraced by Rome. Shirleene Robinson argues that the Bjelke-Petersen government was the most homophobic of all Australian governments of the era as he formed close links with fundamentalist Christian groups and used homophobic policies as political strategy. Only in Queensland was there a serious debate suggesting, for the sake of equality, to criminalise lesbianism, and the introduction of legislation (not passed) forbidding congregation of homosexuals in licensed premises (Robinson, 2010).

Many of the laws that discriminated against homosexuals have since been amended. Although religious leaders have not become any more accepting, it seems that increasingly society has become sceptical of them or tuned out altogether. According to Australian Bureau of Statistics the past decade has seen the proportion of the population reporting an affiliation to a Christian religion decrease from 68% in 2001 to 61% in 2011. Meanwhile, the number of people reporting 'No Religion' increased, from 15% of the population in 2001 to 22% in 2011. This is most evident amongst younger people, with 28% of people aged 15-34 reporting they had no religious affiliation. Pope Alice seeks to provide solace for those who have been rejected from traditional religions.

Liam Benson is an artist from Western Sydney whose work can be seen to follow that of Bowery and Roberts, forming a continuum of queer artists (Mudie Cunningham, 2009 [http://www.artaustralia.com/article.asp?issue\\_id=187&article\\_id=180](http://www.artaustralia.com/article.asp?issue_id=187&article_id=180)).

In photographic self-portraits such as *Try Hard Indian* (2006) or *Glitterface* (2010), Benson seems to benefit from Bowery's early 'Paki from Outer Space' look.

*Ned and Fatima* (2006), a collaboration between Benson and Manize Abedin which pairs Ned Kelly and a contemporary Islamic woman, could follow the Roberts's series of works *1+1=8* which included the photographs *Ned+Nun*, and *Kelly+Kahlo*.

Benson's work goes further though as it blends pop culture with the established queer performance aesthetic and plays with perceptions of cultural identity. *I Believe in You* (2007) is a video piece in which Benson chants the Kylie Minogue song of the same name. An artificially tanned Benson is shown with a temporary glitter tattoo curved around his neck to mimic that of Bra Boy surfer Koby Abberton's 'My Brother's Keeper'

**'Benson considers how gender is 'changing in this contemporary age – how we're letting it evolve and how we're not letting it evolve as well. We're at that place where its either going to leap over the boundary or its going to stagnate'**

tattoo. The effect of Benson's tongue-in-cheek parody is like that of a carnival mirror, putting reality in question. The work was commissioned by Hazelhurst Regional Gallery & Arts Centre as part of a project called *Our Lucky Country* in which sixteen artists responded to concepts of national identity a year on from the Cronulla riots.

More recently Benson has continued to look at patriotism and gender. His performance *Threshold*, [<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yD-2DQgMmes>] 2012 was held at the Darlinghurst nightclub Oxford Art Factory and looked at how men communicate within masculine sub-cultures. Benson considers how gender is 'changing in this contemporary age – how we're letting it evolve and how we're not letting it evolve as well. We're at that place where its either going to leap over the boundary or its going to stagnate and whether that's okay and whether that's going to be a functional thing for men and masculinity or whether it does need to be pushed over, in the way that femininity did for women.' Violence related to masculine sub-cultures is being reported with alarming regularity; gang shootings in Western Sydney, soccer fans brawling, violent protests in Sydney's business district. Benson's consideration of masculinity and stereotypes is not only relevant to contemporary society, but could start a necessary discussion.

Drew Pettifer grew up in North Central Victoria but now lives and works as an artist in Melbourne. He says 'I never met an openly gay person until I was 16. It took me two more years to come out to anyone and another year after that before I first kissed a man.' That isolated experience is shared by many gay teens across Australia and continues to be self-perpetuated because when they get older many choose to leave regional areas and move to the city, seeking greater acceptance. Facing homophobia and bullying can result in poor emotional well-being and for too many this becomes untenable, with around 30% attempting suicide (Suicide Prevention Australia <http://suicidepreventionaustralia.org/>). In rural areas there is even greater levels of perceived stigma attached and a lack of support services combined with the accessibility of firearms contributes to lethality of suicide attempts.

In his 2010 exhibition *Hold on to your friends*, Pettifer reclaimed the oppressive rural spaces of his youth. In photographs and a multi-screen video installation, young men recreate poses appropriated from amateur pornographic images, combining homosexuality with a traditional heterosexual male gaze (deVietri, 2010). Set in the country near his childhood family home, the staged images put Pettifer in control of his heterosexual subjects. It succeeds as a re-imagining of his youth and of country conservatism. William Yang, himself an established queer artist using photography and performance, said of Pettifer: 'his style of photography, while embracing queer themes, is quite relaxed, which suits the times, which are arguably more accepting.'

The concept of queer as all-inclusive and embracing of diversity resists definition. That same ambiguity that made it attractive may have seen it lose relevance in relation to current identity politics. As an umbrella term for various artists though, it pushes us to consider the individual rather than the label. While the term queer may be out-dated, the work being produced by queer artists continues to be relevant to contemporary Australia. There are various issues arising locally from hyper masculinity in our culture – from the death of young men taking steroids, to aggressive behaviour and sometimes fatal acts of violence. Perhaps, instead of abandoning queer art now, it is in fact the time we should pay more attention to our queer artists, specifically their questioning of what masculinity involves.

# For love or money?

By Toby Meagher

As the Australian Olympic Team recovers from an underwhelming performance at the London Games, there has been a fevered call for increased funding in order to turn the dismal results around. A very simple equation is presented to the Australian tax-payers: more money = more gold medals.

With ever-increasing regularity, public debate over arts funding has again reared its ugly head. When the economy slows and budgets tighten, the arts sector is often the first head on the chopping block. Unlike the Olympic team, there are no gold medals for a strong arts sector and no world records to judge performance by. The constant demand for tangible results sets up a funding race that is almost impossible for the arts to win. The equation for success in the arts is far more complex and the outcomes are not manifested on a podium every four years.

In a world where the dollar is too often accepted as the only value, the arts have struggled to justify fiscal support for endeavors that lack immediate and tangible results. The relatively new concern for 'key performance indicators' is a clear sign of this demand. The difficulty for the arts has always been justifying funding through poorly fitted economic models. And when the economic arguments dry up, attention usually turns to the intrinsic value of the arts, which invariably ends in catcalls of elitism and exclusivity. The answer has to be a more nuanced and inclusive understanding of both the economic and cultural value of the arts sector.

In recent times the arts sector has become increasingly more adept at measuring and articulating the economic impacts of its contribution. The ability to assert cultural outcomes has not evolved at the same rate. It is no longer good enough for the arts to count on its intrinsic value using the same lofty and highbrow

language it has relied on for decades. The debate needs to shift towards a new understanding of our nation's cultural infrastructure and how best to foster its growth and understand its relevance.

In light of the Queensland and Victorian government's recent arts funding cutbacks, securing ongoing public funding is more important than ever before. In order to secure appropriate funding for the arts, the conversation needs to move away from looking at instantaneous economic impacts and towards using more refined economic evaluation techniques. We need to develop closer links with academics working in the area of cultural economics, to use existing and future studies as best practice guides on the use of economic valuation for the for the cultural sector. We have access to leading cultural economists like David Throsby and expertise like his should be put to much better use. Australia must explore the possibility of developing a multi-criteria analysis for cultural decisions; it is the only way appropriate funding can be secured.

A more nuanced funding model will also elevate the current debate on arts funding and rid it of the unhelpful mythology that currently surrounds it. Misconceptions are rife in the debate surrounding public funding of the arts. The assertion is often touted that the arts are privileged when it comes to funding because of powerful and articulate backers. It is poorly conceived claims like this that seem to assume that the competing lobbyists for education, health and industry are somehow powerless and inarticulate, which is just nonsense. More importantly, arguments like this one couch the arts as both elitist and without wide reaching benefits (economic or otherwise).

The reality is that there are simply less funds to go around. Every dollar should continually be fought for tooth and nail, if only to ensure that each dollar is spent

with the adequate respect that every piece of taxpayer money should be afforded. In light of the changing shape of the global economy and the mounting pressures on government expenditure, the arts sector has to become more creative in the way it secures funding. The onus is on the arts to mobilise support and radically rethink its engagement with the giving public, but this has to be matched by progressive policy solutions that help to engender a culture of giving and guarantee the continuing success of the arts in Australia.

In March of this year, Federal Arts Minister Simon Crean released the Mitchell Review of Private Sector Support for the Arts in Australia. Chaired by marketing

**'Currently, donations in Australia tend to flow to high-profile institutions that already enjoy substantial infrastructure and public support, rather than the struggling small-to-medium sector — let alone the individual artists and performers, who currently get by on the smell of an oily rag.'**

guru and noted philanthropist Harold Mitchell, it 'aimed to identify any barriers or impediments that may exist in Australia with respect to private sector support for the arts'. One of the most heartening findings of the report was that, at least in terms of the overall architecture, the structure of current policy provides an internationally competitive framework. The devil lies in the detail, and Mitchell outlined several strategies that could encourage growth in private support.

Research cited within the Review suggests that only

seven percent of wills in Australia contain a charitable bequest. It is highly likely that the percentage of the bequests directed at arts organisations is much lower. These figures are also indicative of wider attitudes to philanthropy across Australia. Changing this has to happen at two levels; firstly through external change – streamlining administrative infrastructure and rethinking tax policy in order to promote giving. And secondly, through internal change – actively engaging donors and coming up with creative funding solutions.

Government matched funding is one of the core suggestions aimed at wooing potential donors out of the woodwork. Academic evidence suggests this is a winning strategy and a strong tool for creating a culture of giving. Harold Mitchell also suggests a merging of the two major government funded giving bodies in an effort to cut the considerable red tape that currently exists. By uniting Artsupport and Australia Business Art Foundation, the process of bringing together nonprofit organisations and individual artists with those who might support them, will almost certainly be streamlined.

Tweaking the current tax structures around giving has also been looked at in the Mitchell Review. 'Testamentary giving' is a proposal that would allow people to claim an immediate tax deduction to the value of any irrevocable bequest added to their will. This 'give while you live' strategy has been widely advocated by the likes of Bill Gates and Chuck Feeney, for its combination of financial incentive with the ability to see one's own gift put to use.

Whilst these suggestions would almost surely increase current levels of giving, there are problems within the structure of that giving which still need addressing. Currently, donations in Australia tend to flow to

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high-profile institutions that already enjoy substantial infrastructure and public support, rather than the struggling small-to-medium sector—let alone the individual artists and performers, who currently get by on the smell of an oily rag.

The report considers ways in which the average ‘person on the street’ can be motivated to give. The suggestions aimed at harnessing everyday Australians look at capitalising on our love affair with technology. Crowd funding and micro-finance are two such options that seem particularly well aimed at start-up cultural projects and independent and DIY endeavors. The success of these two funding methods lies in their ability to collectively pool funds; combining the power of many small donations to build big support (see the Obama Presidential campaign as proof). It is creative solutions like these that will dominate the future of arts funding. They dramatically shift the demographic of private donors from the old and rich towards a young and active middle class. The results could absolutely change the way the entire sector operates.

The giving of time, one of the most valuable resources in the arts, did not receive enough attention in the Mitchell report. The arts sector relies heavily on the generosity of volunteers in order to function. Government policy should reward this gift of time in the same way it rewards monetary gifts (i.e. through tax incentives). We should be treating volunteer support as a philanthropic

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gesture and we should be working far harder to ensure that this support is ongoing. The implementation of corporate volunteering programs could also allow for the matching of skills to specific roles. There has to be a clear understanding that the hours volunteers invest are in many ways just as critical to the long-term health of the industry as private financial support.

Of course financial accountability is a necessary constraint that must be placed on the arts. But the buck can’t stop there. Funding has to be reflective of the actual value of the arts. The Australian arts sector needs to work harder to ensure a wider understanding of- and appreciation for- our cultural infrastructure; an evaluation beyond the economic that can be understood by all Australians. It is most certainly a more difficult argument to mount, but the pursuit of worthy causes is seldom an easy one.

The future of the arts sector has to rely on more than just government money and the odd generous benefactor. Creative funding models need to operate alongside people and organisations that can mobilise each and every Australian. If the arts sector is indeed locked in a funding race, then it needs to radically rethink the way that race is run and it needs to start training now.

# Gregory Barsamian’s ‘Artifact’ (2010) MONA, Tasmania

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*By David Buncel*

The initial sight is of a colossal human head that seems to have fallen to the ground from a monolithic Egyptian sculpture. Made of bronze, it lies on its side on the mid-level floor of MONA. People gather around and gaze through one of the three relatively small apertures. Your attention is seized too, and the internalized vision displays moving figures, a type of animation. The changes are rapid and breath-taking, like a colourful, psycho-futuristic drama. This sculpture is a real draw-card for MONA! There are two main aspects to Gregory Barsamian’s sculpture, both embodied in *Artifact*: firstly, the source of the imagery is drawn from the artist’s imagination and dreams; secondly, the artwork is reliant on advanced technology, notably rapidly spinning objects on armatures that are seen under strobe-light.

The technical devices used by Barsamian present

morphing forms that evoke dream imagery in a way that would not be possible otherwise. His technique—recalling the nineteenth-century practice of the ‘persistence of vision’—is reliant on the human mind’s tendency to transform discrete, moving objects into one continuous image. Known as ‘zoetrope,’ Barsamian has fixed sculpted objects—representing different figures of his dreams—arranged sequentially to a rapidly spinning tubular mechanism, each with an incrementally varied position. With each flash of strobe-light, the spectator sees the sculpted objects instantaneously poised in a different position, creating the fantastic illusion of motion. This is the same principle that is used in a cinema projector or when viewing a ‘flipbook’ (Johnson, C26). What would be termed ‘anti-vision’ manipulates the visual experience of the spectator because the space between the frames (that are not seen) conjures a continuous image; the discrete images

are conjoined by the mind's eye. This function pivots on 'the magic of our visual-neural hardware,' imbibing gestalts and interpreting what we see. The resulting visual image derives 'partly from hard-wiring and partly from experience' with the processing of vision occupying almost half of the brain's network (Buchan, 294).

Inside *Artifact*, apples fall into green hands where they dissolve into a coloured gel, which then falls into hats arranged in a circle below; on an upper level, yellow birds fly out of womb-like bladders, swoop up and around, then crash into open, old books that close on them; on a lower level, nodding, bald heads move up and down. In these ways, the narrative of a generic dream is being presented to the bemused spectator and by deploying commonplace things Barsamian references dream imagery, since the objects and beings inside *Artifact* are just the things that populate our dreams (Leonardo, 179). However, since the objects inside *Artifact* are spinning on an armature, once the story-cycle is complete, the same narrative is repeated.

The narrative is on an infinite loop and in this way it is distinguished from an actual dream that has a beginning, middle and end. The manner in which the spinning objects of *Artifact* are seen as a continuous image is dependent on how the image is 'constructed' by the spectator's vision. The operation of the zoetrope is such that the eye sees the object instantaneously, then experiences anti-vision, then sees the subsequent object (vision/anti-vision/vision). As a result, the movement is perceived as continuous, with the eye deceiving the mind into believing the construction of a fluid sequence. By making a visual connection to the discrete objects, the eye constructs a logical visual sequence and produces an image that harmoniously matches a desired image of the mind. In other words, the mind perceives an image it has already anticipated. From a psychological perspective, the mind would not accept an illogical visual construction and Barsamian is taking advantage of the perennial tendency of vision to construct. This process

is reliant on the function of 'unconscious inferences' or the notion that visual phenomena are perceived by the eye very quickly and immediately assimilated into a pre-existing vocabulary. Since an image is constructed by vision, one person will see the same thing differently to another and this phenomenon applies with equal measure to the experience of *Artifact*. Consequently, the way in which each individual sees *Artifact* is known as the 'phenomenal' sense, and this is distinguished from the experience of each other individual. This phenomenal way of seeing is based in the fact that the flying birds emerging from the womb-like bladders, for example, do not really exist but are fabricated by the spectator's vision (Hoffman, 4-10).

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**'The element of time that *Artifact* is reliant on is likewise integral to the experience of a dream, to the extent that a dream is both experienced as reality by the person who is dreaming as well as based in time. In place of the stability of conscious experience, the discursive space of our dreams embraces fragmentation and discontinuity.'**

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The presentation of a narrative within *Artifact* necessarily incorporates an element of time that distinguishes the work from 'normal' sculpture, thus entering into the realm of animation. Even normal sculpture has a more complex relationship to the spectator than two-dimensional art

because of its third dimension; the experience of the sculpture involves the element of time that is required to physically walk around the work. By changing position in relation to the sculpture, the spectator modifies their experience by creating her/his own narrative in relation to the inert object; in this way, the spectator has control of the narrative. The strobe-lit sculpture of Barsamian reverses these processes. The spectator experiences the sculpture without moving, while the artist has control of the narrative since he has positioned the objects according to his design. In other words, the experience of the discrete, moving objects requires the element of time, so the spectator can experience the complex inter-related levels of narrative without moving. This factor is underlined by the yellow birds that fly from one level to the next, transgressing the different levels of the narrative; the design of *Artifact* utilizes the helical format that he recently introduced into his ensembles thereby depicting objects moving in the diagonal and enhancing

the complexity of the narrative (Leonardo, 179). The element of time that *Artifact* is reliant on is likewise integral to the experience of a dream, to the extent that a dream is both experienced as reality by the person who is dreaming as well as based in time. The visual experience of the interior of the head induces the spectator to realize that the interior space is not normal; the ensuing illusion establishes the conflict between sensory input and logic that underlines our dream experience. The experience of a dream has its own timeframe that cannot necessarily be charted against the timeframe of everyday existence, even though it is most likely prolonged in relation to an everyday experience. Yet the sensory input is influenced by everyday experience; Freud considered the timeframe of a dream to be elliptical and fragmented (Buchan, 296). The experience of a dream cannot be reproduced in an artwork but it is referenced by *Artifact* with the morphing apple/gel/bird/book alluding to the kind of experience that we can have in a dream, without aiming to fully represent the dream.

The morphing of one thing into another recalls the absurd nature of our dreams; indeed, in place of the stability of conscious experience, the discursive space of our dreams embraces fragmentation and discontinuity. To 'morph' is the verb-form of metamorphosis and the practice of morphing has a long tradition in both literature and the visual arts. Ovid's *Metamorphosis* is the canonical work in which he depicts a magical world of men and women that are morphed under the intoxicating influence of love into animals, flowers, trees, stones and stars. Later writers and artists were inspired by him: in Franz Kafka's story bearing the same name (1915), a young man is morphed into a giant insect; in Antonio del Pollaiuolo's painting *Apollo and Daphne* (a representation of one of Ovid's mythical stories, 1480), Daphne is morphed into a laurel; and in Rene Magritte's painting *Le Petite Amie* (1947), a woman's face is morphed into a torso. This is the principle of metamorphosis that is evoked by Barsamian's art: one object or being is morphed into another. In this way, the image that is produced by the mind's eye evokes dream images and connects them to memory. The dream is

a function of the subconscious, and metamorphosis is a realization of both the conscious and subconscious minds that all things of our experience are not how they seem. A dream is the result of the contradictions that consequently pervade our visual experiences. So the absurdity of the dream reveals that the beings of our world have an alternative existence; they transcend our notion of them. When the subconscious mind is influenced by these contradictions it incorporates them into the original object; the original object persists while its characteristics vary (Buchan, 293). Our dreams are a consequence of the subconscious mind processing the daily experiences of the conscious mind; this last is processing an enormous amount of visual information constantly through the day. So much information is processed that it is not possible for the conscious mind to assimilate and process it all; at the same time, it is not possible for the conscious mind to evaluate the validity of every piece of information. The stratification of the different narratives within *Artifact* (falling apples, flying birds, nodding heads) makes an allusion to these phenomena.

*Artifact* is a brilliant evocation of Barsamian's intention to manipulate our vision in order to evoke a dream world; in a general sense, the artwork can be likened to a depiction of a dream. Even though Barsamian primarily works in the realm of sculpture, his work also incorporates animation in order to evoke dream imagery and emphasise the element of time as explained in the foregoing. In this way, *Artifact* opposes Clement Greenberg's declaration that each artistic practice should be based in its unique and discrete realm of experience by using the characteristic means of that practice in order to narrow and 'to entrench it more firmly in its area of competence' (Greenberg, 107). By crossing the boundaries between sculpture and animation, *Artifact* defies Greenberg's modernist stance (that is now so obviously dated) and presents a paradigm shift. Due to its reliance on motion, Barsamian's sculpture is ill suited to photographic representation, thus rendering any pictures herein as unsatisfactory.

Artifact: <http://www.gregorybarsamian.com/>

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*'Artifact is a brilliant evocation of Barsamian's intention to manipulate our vision in order to evoke a dream world'*

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# Where exactly are you from?

By Imran Ahmed

*Imran Ahmad discusses Remaking/Remaking Contemporary Australian Drawing Connection, an exhibition that explored cultural diaspora through contemporary drawing practices at the Blacktown Art Centre 20th July - 1st September 2012.*

Just as the basic element of drawing, a line, is simply a progression from point A to B, similarly the act of migration or a journey is a trajectory with a point of origin and destination. The journey can have stopovers, it can take you to unexpected destinations, the experience can leave you isolated or can be a source of new beginnings. Taking this as a reference point, *Remaking/Remaking* is an exploration of contemporary drawing processes of artists in diaspora in Australia and their varied interpretations of making and marking. The exhibition is multi-layer and showcases works that are complex in nature but diverse at the same time.

When we talk about drawing as a medium, especially in a traditional and conventional sense, the meaning of it still adheres to a 'paper/charcoal on paper' definition

and to the ideas of craftsmanship and skills-based or observational studies. But drawing as a medium and as a process itself has redefined and reinvented many times over in pace with contemporary times. It's not restricted to any medium and the boundaries have blurred. In fact drawing is not as much medium defined now as opposed to process oriented, where elements of mark making or resolving an idea through certain aesthetic decisions has taken the centre-stage. This has led to experimentation with other media, revisiting drawing as a discipline, thus opening up limitless possibilities for exploration in order to create a dialogue. As the title *Remaking/Remaking: Contemporary Australian Drawing Connection* reveals this show, in particular, presents diverse approaches towards drawing but also connects to a much wider audience in terms of its theme and content. It features works from artists who truly celebrate the act of mark making through varied approaches, demonstrating their understanding of where drawing lies in the visual expression.

Drawing has been actively practised and shown in

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*'Remaking/ Remaking presents contemporary Australian drawing in the context of combining the aesthetic and the cultural as a form of expression. The ten participating artists come from varied cultural backgrounds touching upon notions of diversity, absence, presence, cultural displacement, isolation and language barriers.'*

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Australia over the past ten years in form of many international publications and exhibitions. The more recent ones include *Erased: Contemporary Australian Drawing* (NSA, 2011), *Freehand: Recent Australian Drawing* (Heidi, Nov 2010- Mar 2011), *I Walk the Line: New Australian Drawing* (MCA, 2009), to name a few. In addition to these exhibitions, there are numerous national drawing prizes in Australia and together they all have played an active role in keeping drawing active and alive in the Contemporary visual arts practice in Australia. *Remaking/ Remaking* has followed the same path; furthermore, it presents contemporary Australian drawing in the context of combining the aesthetic and the cultural as a form of expression. The ten participating artists come from varied cultural backgrounds and while their work touches upon notions of diversity, absence, presence, cultural displacement, isolation and language barriers. Their formal responses have varied from immaculate craftsmanship to more fluid ink and acrylic marks, from embroidery to video works.

Nicole Barakat is a Sydney-based artist, whose work

examines intersections between textiles, installation, drawing and performance art. In *Al Istemvaar Al La Moutanabi/Infinity*, Barakat attempts to link her heritage and Arabic tradition to her current experiences by means of stitching and embroidery on cloth; she emphasises the act by deconstructing the traditional use of the medium, yet continues to deploy the medium's fragile nature to her advantage.

A similar approach can be seen in Nusra Latif Quershi's work where she uses the three-dimensional space of the gallery to explore her interest in historical images and contemporary issues of changing experiences in a new society. In particular she uses a eucalyptus tree as a symbolic connection between Australia and her home country, Pakistan. The title *Safida*, a species of eucalypt, literally means 'white' in Urdu language. Her miniature paintings *Come From?* capture birds in flight. She uses line to portray the birds as symbols of freedom, referencing her diasporic identity.

For artists Maumer Cajic and Teo Treloar, intimate

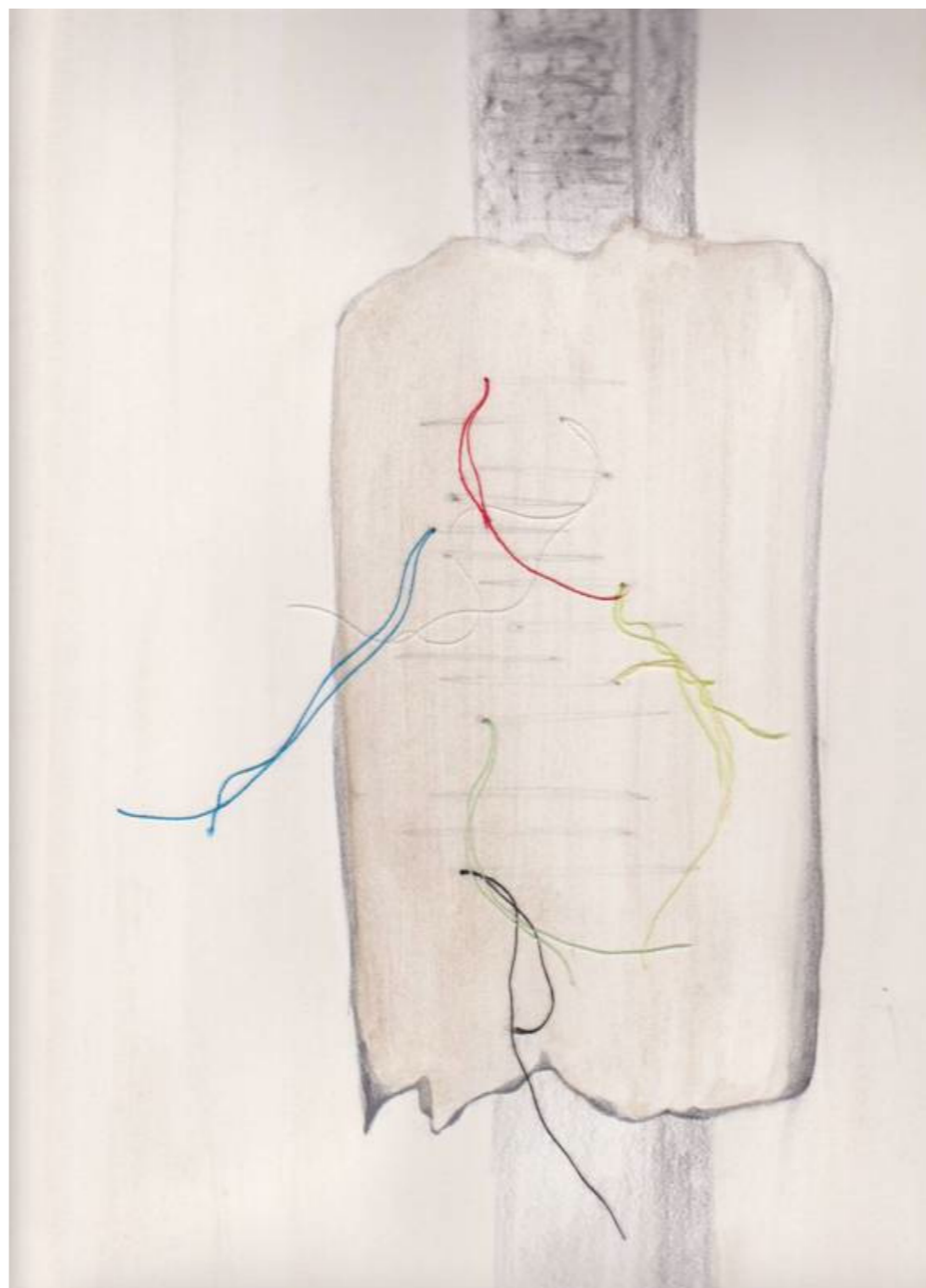
and sensitive marks on paper show a passion for craftsmanship. Maumer's *The Weight of the Body* specifically talks about memory and imagination, about you and me, using shoes to evoke the memory of those who have walked their chosen paths. A parallel method of drawing and ideas relating to identity and memory – both isolation and reconnecting – have been presented in Teo's works. Male figures, being his prime subject matter, appear as scientists clad in crisp white shirts, withdrawing into activities of measuring or constructing, but without purpose. Nick Brown's works are also preoccupied by the other, in this case, both animal and man. His minimal drawings and empty spaces, such as *Small and Wide* and *I Toad*, take you to a world where voices and facial expressions reveal both personal and universal realities.

Some artists have explored the notion of mark making through alternative mediums and tools. Anna Pollak started with a series of drawings on paper inspired by the landscape around her and extended the study of line with film and hand-drawn imagery, adding a sound track by artist Michael Harding. The work *Flux* refers to the idea of transformations. It was inspired by a sound piece, which Anna Pollak translated into an image and then, back to sound. Similar language of repetition, rhythm and displacement has been deployed in Anie Nheu's

collage. *At The Gap*, shows the process of drawing on paper and then cutting it is paradoxical in nature. For the artist this approach is a means of negotiating her memories of migration and displacement, helping her to position herself in another reality.

Denis Beaubois is another artist who defines drawing in an unconventional way through his works *Dust Bricks Line* and *No Longer Adrift*. The former is a collection of dust from his living room carpet. He uses a carpet sweeper as a drawing tool. Beaubois is referring to themes of migration and displacement by playing around with the act of dust collection and discarded fragments. The second work is a digital video investigating the act of removal in drawing.

The series of drawings *Perspective* by Shay Tobin seems to be asking questions, to investigate, as well as reflect upon, the artist's struggle of identity as an Aboriginal Australian. The simplicity of the linear drawings,



torn from a sketchpad, enables the artist to explore complicated issues and realities, which we all encounter in our everyday lives, in a manner that is accessible to viewers.

For Markit Santiago, her ancestral home, the Philippines, and her present home, Australia, both act as sources of inspiration and aid her inquiry into her multicultural background. Her use of wood as a material is unconventional and her imagery is a combination of endless movements of lines, shapes and text.

The exhibition *Remaking/Remarking* presents contemporary Australian approaches to drawing and puts forward some inspiring possibilities for the themes of diaspora in Australia. The medium of drawing has been explored as a tool to present the artists' varied and different explorations. As his most famous statement had it, Klee took a line for a walk. It stretched, twisted, coiled over eventually and turned back on itself as it made its way on a flat surface. But what made this 'simple progression from point A to B', and its

imaginative wandering was the process and its journey. In a similar sense, the process, which is the journey itself, has been explored as the core ingredient for this show. The diverse backgrounds of the artists and their personal experiences, interpreted through the artworks, have made this venture interactive and stimulating. This exhibition aims to open up platforms for discussion and encourages audiences to respond to the works, connect to the processes presented and become a part of it in their own unique way.

*Remarking | Remaking*  
Blacktown Arts Centre  
July 20 - September 1 2012  
[www.artscentre.blacktown.nsw.gov.au](http://www.artscentre.blacktown.nsw.gov.au)

# Tony Albert: Family Man

By Liz Nowell

*Family*, Tony Albert's first commercial exhibition in three years, presents a selection of new works, drawing upon the artist's recent global adventures and his ever-growing family, both in Australia and abroad.

Since 2009, Queensland born artist Tony Albert has been building an international profile, completing large-scale commissions and exhibiting overseas. During this time Albert's family has grown to include artists and friends reaching across the globe. These new additions are not necessarily bound by blood, borders or even language but by an authentic and unique connection to the artist. Traces of Albert's family can be found throughout the exhibition in every work; biological and adopted, they are collaborators, mentors, cousins and friends. By drawing upon his connection to the people closest to him, Albert conveys a sense of positivity and optimism throughout his work despite the adversity he and members of his family often face.

The exhibition begins with an impressive installation

of oil-on-velvet paintings. Depicting Aboriginal Australians as belonging to a primitive and extinct people, these velvets in their original context reinforce the notion of the 'noble savage' and induce cultural cringe. Oil-on-velvets have long been sold as paint-by-number kits for the tourist market, its origins stemming from the nineteenth century. Often paired with images of native flora and fauna, these representations of Aboriginal people enforce a formulaic archetype, disregarding the

diversity in languages, culture and experience amongst Indigenous Australia. Albert has been reclaiming velvet paintings since adolescence. As a young man the artist was fascinated with, if not thrilled, to see images of his family depicted in

mainstream culture. 'When I saw these images of black people, mostly in second hand shops, I really related. Only later did I appreciate them on a political level'. What started out as an innocent hobby shortly turned into an obsession with Albert accumulating thousands of kitsch objects, which he dubs 'Aboriginalia'. *Rearranging Our History* is an ambitious installation of many of the velvets Albert collected between 2002 and 2011. As

the title suggests, the installation reclaims each of these paintings and rightfully returns the voices to those men, women and children whom history has disregarded and dispossessed. Albert achieves this by overlaying the images with witty quips, motifs and aphorisms in red and white paint. As a member of the internet literate and knowledge hungry Generation Y, Albert borrows text from popular culture, political discourse, world leaders and social media, effectively giving these unknown faces a twenty-first century voice. This recalls earlier work by Albert, such as his 2007 photograph *Hey ya! (Shake it like a Polaroid picture)* which quotes American hip-hop duo OutKast. Also quoted in *Rearranging our History*, Albert recontextualises these lyrics to convey a much deeper message about the portrayal of Aboriginal people in colonial images.

On the wall opposite *Rearranging Our History* hangs a large four metre long rust, black and white ochre painting. So at odds with the rest of the exhibition, at first glance it appears to be an accidental inclusion. Upon further investigation I learn that the work is part of a monumental collaboration between Albert and the late Aurukun artist Arthur Pambejan Jr. Albert met Pambejan Jr in 2002 when he was working at the Queensland Art Gallery. The gallery was presenting a significant exhibition called *Story Place: Indigenous Art of Cape York and the Rainforest* (26 July – 9 November 2003), which presented historical and contemporary

art and objects by people from the Cape York region in a fine art context for the first time. Pambejan Jr was called in to the gallery to repair some of the objects on display and it was here that he first met Albert. The two men developed instant rapport and Pambejan Jr entrusted the restoration of these sacred objects to Albert. This initial meeting soon grew into a close bond and both Pambejan Jr and the Aurukun community adopted Albert soon after. Shortly before his passing in 2010 Pambejan Jr began work on this important collaboration that would tell both his and Albert's stories across 22 large-scale canvases. Albert is due to complete 11 of the panels over the coming year and the inclusion of *Ngamp yptam ma kee antan (Working together to achieve a common goal)* in this exhibition reaffirms Albert's commitment to his family. In this particular case, Pambejan Jr is an important member of Albert's adopted family bound by trust, respect and connection rather than genealogy.

To the right is a brightly wallpapered installation of Albert's *Be Deadly* posters with two similar framed works layered over the top. The *Be Deadly* project was launched at the 2011 Cairns Indigenous Art Fair (CIAF). Albert designed the posters as a community initiative, with all proceeds from the sale of posters going directly to the Cathy Freeman Foundation. Mimicking the graphic political posters of Redback Graphix and incorporating the colours closely associated with Aboriginal Australia,

the poster features three young Aboriginal girls (Albert's cousins) framed within a golden sun and placed under the words 'Be Deadly'. In Aboriginal culture the term 'deadly' communicates a positive sentiment used to describe anything that is impressive. Albert's message is clear; be strong, be healthy, be proud and be happy. The artist's cousins are literally the poster girls for the next generation of educated, empowered and proud Aboriginal people.

However, despite this positive message *Be Deadly* highlights a more sobering truth. At the opening of Family and CIAF respectively, the limited edition posters were available for the general public to purchase – \$5 to Aboriginal people and \$10 for non-Aboriginal people. These two different rates reflect the economic, social and health disparities between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australia, or put more bluntly, the extreme disadvantage experienced by Indigenous Australians. This ongoing project is an example of how Albert tackles contentious issues in a positive and constructive light.

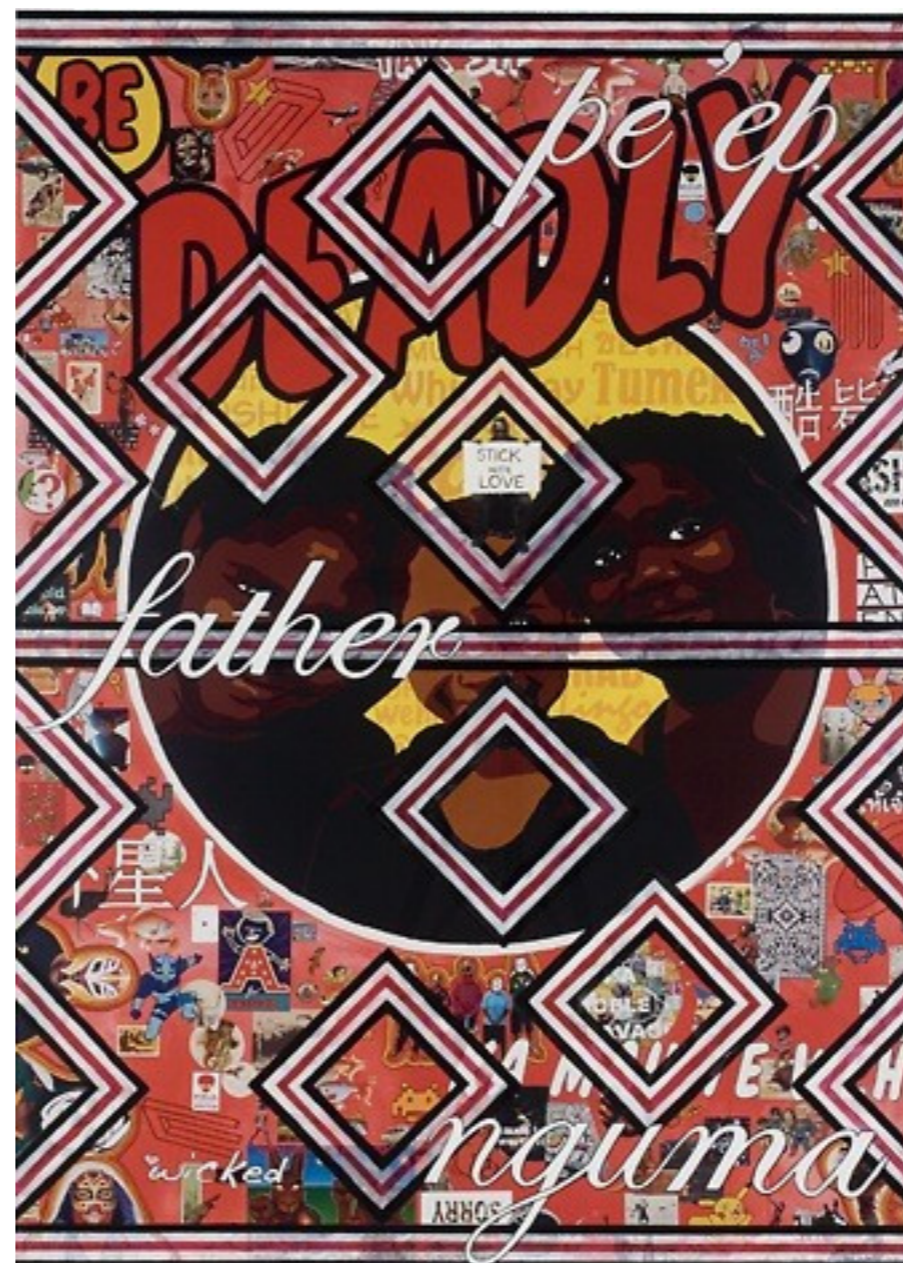
As an extension of the *Be Deadly* posters Albert began working on a series of customised posters and two of them are exhibited here. In these works Albert has enlarged the poster and collaged over the original design with stickers, photos, paint, symbols and text. The incorporation of other languages in these works emphasises Albert's interest in communicating to an international audience.

In addition to the *Be Deadly* works 15 smaller collages are also on display. Each piece takes on an almost sculptural form as Albert overlays the collaged surfaces with modular structures fashioned from vintage playing cards. It is these works that reveal Albert's many influences; here we see alien beings, Gordon Hookey and Richard Bell's work, Albert's family members and cartoon super heroes. The admiration for Tibetan artist Gonkar Gyatso, of whom Albert counts amongst his friends, is also evident in both the collaging of found images and use of stickers. However where Gyatso's work often tells a very Tibetan story, Albert strives to present a universal viewpoint that just so happens to be informed by an Aboriginal perspective.

What is most refreshing about Albert's work is that it is inherently positive, despite the often-bleak subject

matter. More seasoned Aboriginal artists have long confessed to feeling angry about the position of Aboriginal Australians and whilst Albert is also in this camp (and rightly so) he is able to engage in this discourse in an affirmative manner. The *Be Deadly* project, and subsequent companion works reflect the optimism of Albert's spirit, which is imbued with a sense of hope and idealism.

The final work exhibited in *Family* pays tribute to one of Albert's great inspirations – artist Gordon Bennett. In this earnest homage Albert has framed fan mail he wrote to Bennett in 2010. Hanging beside is a small watercolour depicting a young girl in her lounge room arranging toy blocks and spelling out the words 'black cunt'. Set against the backdrop of the Southern Cross, the young blonde-hair, blue-eyed girl looks on to her father whose back is turned away from the viewer to seek approval. On a plinth in front of these two works are the same toy blocks featured in the painting. As Albert explains in his letter, this work is a revised version of Bennett's *Daddy's Little Girl 2* (1994). Albert goes on to write that he was inspired to carry on the message in Bennett's original painting after reading a newspaper article which described how a prominent football coach 'casually' referred to one of his players as a 'black cunt'. In some respects *Daddy's Little Girl (after Gordon Bennett)* links in to the exhibition through the connection of family. Although we read that Albert has never met Bennett, he considers him a mentor. In the context of a global, fluid notion of family, Bennett can be seen as a symbolic member of Albert's extended family – more so in spirit than physical presence. Like *Daddy's Little Girl 2* the work highlights the engrained racism in the Australian psyche and the way in which it is passed down almost by process of osmosis, from generation to generation. Like many of the other works in this show *Daddy's Little Girl (after Gordon Bennett)* demonstrates Albert's uncanny ability



Tony Albert,  
*Be Deadly - Nguma/Father*, 2011  
(image courtesy of the artist and  
Sullivan & Strumpf Fine Art)

to engage the viewer in a critical discourse through the use of playful, graphic and colourful images.

In *Family* Albert generously shares his own stories and those of his family with the onlooker. Despite the personal nature of much of this work Albert's message resonates universally, cutting across culture, language and religion. Although Albert is incredibly proud of his Aboriginal heritage he is adamant that his work is not solely read within this context. First and foremost, as *Family* asserts, Albert is a global citizen and contemporary artist whom also happens to be an Aboriginal man.

On this planet, there exists so many institutional definitions, labels, and categories that try to pigeonhole who I am and what I do. I am a human being, an Aboriginal man, and a contemporary artist. I am me!

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# FraserStudios

By Georgia McKay

Imagine a large warehouse space near the centre of Sydney CBD where artists from an array of disciplines could develop their practice, in tandem, rent-free. This 'utopian' vision became a reality after an unlikely friendship was forged between a multi-national developer, Frasers Property and a small artist run initiative, Queen Street Studio.

Frasers Property acquired 5.8 hectares of land in Chippendale in 2007 to develop the site into 'Central Park' – a \$2 billion joint venture with Sekisui House of Japan, featuring 11 buildings, 2000 apartments, shops, a hotel, restaurants, cafes and office towers. Upon finding themselves with three vacant but dilapidated warehouses on Kensington Street, Frasers Property canvassed several options for making temporary use of the space, including housing for homeless people, but they abandoned this idea due to the building's state of disrepair. Had they sought to rent the space out, they would have needed to inject a considerable amount to bring the properties up to code for commercial use. Instead, at the suggestion of Kiersten Fishburn, Manager, Culture and Libraries at City of Sydney, Frasers Property met with the co-directors and founders of Queen Street Studio, Sam Chester and James Winter.

From September 2008 to June 2012, the heritage-listed former site of the old Kent Brewery was transformed into a multi disciplinary art space housing more than 200 artists, who completed residences lasting between three to six months. Initially proposed as a twelve-month experiment, the initiative ultimately lasted for four years and was the first of its kind in Australia. Never before had a property developer allowed an artist-run-initiative interim access to their vacant space for creative use before the site was developed.

There was a perception within the local community that a small arts organisation and a multinational property

developer made strange bedfellows. Indeed, Queen Street Studio's co-director, Sam Chester acknowledged they were 'understandably hesitant' initially and concerned about a power imbalance in the relationship. In Sam Chester's words, 'It was a little bit like David and Goliath to begin with, but once Frasers understood the extent of what we were prepared to do to fully realise our vision for activating the space...we learnt from one another about the actualisation of space and its potential to enliven and enrich a community.'

A book titled, *I, 386 days at FraserStudios*, was compiled based on the artists and organisers' shared experiences of FraserStudios, in which Lisa McCutcheon, Group

**'It's clear that FraserStudios will have a lasting legacy as a template for future partnerships between developers and arts producers, proving the point that this type of temporary activation is possible, mutually beneficial and extraordinarily rewarding.'**

Marketing Manager at Frasers Property shares a similar view to Sam Chester. She states, 'although Frasers and Queen Street Studio are very different organisations they both whole-heartedly see the potential of space. We share the same agenda about revitalisation and activation: for Queen Street Studio it's the arts, for Frasers – and our joint venture partner – Sekisui House – it's Chippendale.'

One of the benefits the relationship offered Queen Street Studio was the ability to demonstrate their professionalism as a credible arts organisation. In the book, Sam Chester said, 'We wanted to try and demystify this idea that if you give something to artists,

they're not going to do it properly or transparently.'

'Our occupancy of FraserStudios was somewhat utopic – we'll never get that square meterage again in the middle of the city – but it has affirmed to us that, as an organisation, we can both aim to move into a permanent space as well as temporarily use empty spaces in the meanwhile.'

One of the greatest challenges for Frasers Property was in managing expectations about duration. Frasers Property never planned to gift the building in perpetuity and from July 1 2012, they began converting the warehouse and Kensington Street into shops and offices. In delivering such a popular space, they risked creating a sense of permanent entitlement and attracting a negative backlash once the project closed. Queen Street Studio proposed a short-term residency structure to ameliorate this risk and planned a series of public events to celebrate the conclusion of the project.

There was also a perception amongst some circles within the arts community that Queen Street Studio had 'sold out' or lost its independence by virtue of its relationship with Frasers Property. Although Sam Chester admits it was difficult to market themselves as an independent arts organisation with Frasers' name on the building, she strongly refutes allegations of censoring artists, stating 'there was no censorship by Frasers, we ran the space pretty much as we did our original studio on Queen Street.'

Sam Chester admits she can understand why some people might be sceptical. 'When you put a small arts organisation with a multinational you are always going to get questions.' However, what people didn't appreciate was the sheer amount of work that Queen Street Studio put into making the initiative so successful. The co-directors calculated that they spent approximately 6,000 volunteer hours just to get the space up and running, with no remuneration from Frasers.

'Some people mistakenly thought Queen Street Studio was funded by Frasers, but we weren't. We received project funding from the City of Sydney and Arts NSW as well as receiving an annual cash donation from Frasers of \$10,000, but the rest was funded by the revenue raised by Queen Street Studio', Sam Chester says.

'Even though the gift was fantastic, it was also a liability and took a lot of effort. People expected a lot from us because they thought that Frasers was paying our wages, but that was not the case. We carried the burden of the cash flow.'

The project was run on a formal annual renewable lease, although Queen Street Studio paid no rent, service charges or water (the rent free space of 1,300 square metres was valued at \$130,000 per annum). Queen Street Studio paid for public liability, electricity and theft insurance for the whole building, while Frasers Property took out their own public liability for the visual arts residents. Queen Street Studio contributed more than \$124,000 in staff labour and funding from studio hire, workshop fees and membership fees, and paid for all outgoings like rubbish removal, general consumables, some work on the building to make it viable and all artist fees and wages. Frasers Property looked after the development application and heritage application for the FraserStudios use of the heritage-listed warehouse. The residencies were open to professional artists, individuals and groups (emerging and established) across a diverse range of disciplines for the purpose of artistic and professional development.

Before FraserStudios opened, there was no model for this type of partnership. The collaboration was seen to be so successful that it's been lauded as model for other city revitalisation projects. In fact, before the official closure of FraserStudios to make way for the development of the site in July 2012, Queen

Street Studios secured another three-year, temporary use site from the City of Sydney at Heffron Hall in Darlinghurst.

In an interview with *The Australian Financial Review*, City of Sydney Design Director, Bridget Smyth says art is ‘not an afterthought, it’s absolutely essential to the city’s revitalisation’ (*AFR*, 14 June 2012). City of Sydney has since applied the idea to other parts of the city, putting artists into vacant premises it owns in Oxford Street, William Street and The Rocks. Mary Darwell, the Executive Director, Arts NSW also says, ‘the success of the model shows how business and arts organisations can work together to enrich the arts in Sydney and NSW’ (*AFR*, 14 June 2012).

For their part, Frasers Property sees the pilot project as whetting their appetite for future sites and similar partnerships. Lisa McCutchin reflects, ‘It’s clear that FraserStudios will have a lasting legacy as a template for future partnerships between developers and arts producers, proving the point that this type of temporary activation is possible, mutually beneficial and extraordinarily rewarding.’

Some commentators have suggested that Frasers Property’s alignment with the arts community has afforded Central Park ‘cultural cachet’ with prospective buyers looking to move into the up-and-coming suburb. This association (combined with close proximity to CBD) is exactly what makes areas like Chippendale attractive to live. This scenario is highlighted by the Lord Mayor of City of Sydney, who says ‘Organisations like Queen Street Studio are essential to the culture

and creativity of Sydney. They make our city a place people want to live in, work in and visit’ (*1,386 days at FraserStudios*).

This is definitely something co-directors Sam Chester and James Winter considered before entering into the partnership. ‘We went into the relationship with our eyes open. We always knew what it was about – it was a marketing exercise.’ But having said that, Sam firmly believes that Frasers Property, and their CEO Dr Stanley Quek in particular, is very supportive of the arts. ‘They supported us 100% in what we were doing.’

Allowing Queen Street Studio to take over the space also placated local community concerns about the far-reaching development of the site. Lisa McCutcheon said, ‘We knew from our community consultations that the arts were valued here yet space for art-making was being lost to development’ (*1,386 days at FraserStudios*).

Nicky Ginsberg, Director of NG Art Gallery (one of the earliest commercial galleries to open in Chippendale) is one beneficiary of the development who testifies that Frasers Property has played a vital role in contributing to the arts community in Chippendale. She is also quick to praise Dr Stanley Quek, the CEO of Frasers Property, who is himself an avid collector and arts benefactor. ‘The people at the top of Frasers Property were truly honourable – there was a lot of integrity in my opinion. They were, and still are, very committed to the arts in Chippendale,’ she says.

Nicky Ginsberg is also the President of the Chippendale Creative Precinct, an incorporated association that she set up two years ago to promote the area as a creative, sustainable community and a diverse and unique cultural meeting place. There are now eight galleries in Chippendale, including White Rabbit, Serial Space, Galerie Pompom and others. Dr Stanley Quek has just given the association \$100,000 to put towards the inaugural ‘New World Art Prize’, set to launch in March 2013.

Dr Stanley Quek has also given Nicky Ginsberg a rent-free, pop-up shop on Broadway, which forms part of Central Park display pavilion, where she continually exhibits local artists. Every six weeks when a new exhibition opens, Dr Quek purchases an artwork which goes into the Frasers collection. ‘It’s another opportunity for people to engage in the arts and for artists to have much bigger exposure. Personally, I think he is an extraordinary man and we are very lucky to have such a strong association with him.’

Ginsberg says that Dr Quek shares her vision for Chippendale, which is to turn the suburb into Sydney’s gallery destination. To this end, she has just been awarded a City of Sydney grant for \$73,990 to develop Chippendale into the ‘next Chelsea of New York’. ‘We are changing the face of Chippendale,’ she says. ‘Dr Quek is hoping to pedestrianise Kensington Lane, where FraserStudios formerly stood, and turn the workers’ cottages into lots of little galleries and bars.’

The unfortunate irony is that one of reasons the warehouse space was so attractive to Queen Street

Studio in the first place was because of the struggle arts organisations continually face in finding the cash to rent a space in which to exhibit or perform works. FraserStudios provided cheap studio and rehearsal areas for local artists at a time when space was at a premium, owing to a prohibitively expensive rental market. This difficult reality was voiced by two-person art collective, Soda\_Jerk in *1,386 days at FraserStudios*, who said that in the absence of Frasers Studio, ‘given the brutality of Sydney’s real estate there was no way we could afford to rent a studio.’

However, Nicky Ginsberg is philosophical about the impact of the Chippendale’s gentrification on up-and-coming artist run initiatives looking for spaces with cheap rent. ‘It happens with any development. Whenever you go into a new suburb and you start to make changes, it’s going raise property prices as they become more sought after.’

‘It’s just progress,’ she says. ‘It’s something we have to celebrate and artists will always find somewhere new to go to.’

# Peter Upward: Overrated or Undervalued?

By Greta Stevens

Large and imposing, at the same time heavy and light, instantaneous and deliberate, Peter Upward's 1960s painting *June Celebration* hangs boldly at the National Gallery of Australia as a part of the current exhibition titled *Abstract Expressionism*. These are the movements of a masterful artist whose importance has often fallen short of public appraisal. Or is this undervalued contribution accurately justified?

Standing before the three panelled *June Celebration*, it is hard to focus your eyes and steady your feet as the bold energy of the painting transpires. The black paint, thick and tactile is applied with urgent immediacy and calligraphic precision to a white canvas stippled with grey wash. It is this measured balance, strength of composition and unique style that saw Upward impact the fleeting abstraction movement in Australia in the 1960s and impart a legacy that is valued by many and considered overrated by some.

Upward was born in Melbourne in 1932 where he studied art at the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology in 1951. Later that year he moved to Sydney in the hope of escaping the figurative expressionists and social realism dominating the Melbourne art scene. From 1951 – 1955, he studied at the Julian Ashton Art School under John Passmore where he began exploring abstraction as a viable alternative to realism. Upward's first significant series reflected Passmore's interest with the semi-figurative abstraction and the earthy tones of the Australian landscape seen in *Untitled* (1958).

In 1955 Upward moved back to Melbourne where he married Joan Russel and had two children. Returning

to Sydney in 1960, Upward worked closely with fellow artists John Olsen and Clement Meadmore, rapidly developing an iconic abstract style with confidence and originality.

Upward had no direct contact with the emerging Abstract Expressionist movement in America and Europe although its influence can be seen in many of his works. Curator of the 2007 retrospective *Frozen Gestures: The Art of Peter Upward*, Christopher Dean, argues that 'Upward invented a highly individual visual language that reacted against, rather than conformed to, American abstract expressionism' (Dean 2007). There is a sense of restraint in Upward's works that would not easily

classify him as an Abstract Expressionist, despite being exhibited in *Abstract Expressionism in Australia* at the Ivan Dougherty Gallery, Sydney in 1980 and the *Abstract Expressionism*, at the National Gallery of Australia (2012). Upward's 'frozen gestures' embody the energy, movement and action of the artist. The all-encompassing oversized canvases depict form, colour and stroke over emotionally charged representations of self or feeling setting him apart from traditional abstract expressionists. Rather, Upward's limited colour palette and considered movements bridge the gap between expressive abstraction and minimal art with an immediate emphasis on process over representation. It was this unique approach that predicted the emergence of colour field and hard edge painting that would infiltrate Sydney and Melbourne in the 1960s and 1970s.

Upward was strongly influenced by Jazz music and the

principles of Zen including the book by Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki titled *Studies in Zen*. Here Upward encountered the 'Zen Paradox' whereby actions are connected to reactions like the transformation of water to ice. *June Celebration* explores the unique transformative qualities of the paint medium while capturing the energetic gesture that goes into its production. Inspired by this study of Zen, Upward's paintings echo the smooth lines, symbols and expressive characters of Chinese and Japanese calligraphy. This saw his artworks chosen to be included in the 1976 exhibition *The Calligraphic Image* with Brett Whitely and Royston Harpur at the Art Gallery of New South Wales.

In 1962 Upward moved to London where he seemingly abandoned what was proving to be a successful painting formula. During this time gestural painting became a therapeutic exercise where he could explore different ideas, mediums and boundaries – a process he attempted to enhance with the assistance of large quantities of drugs that would have long term affects on this physical and psychological health. In 1971 Upward returned to Australia in a compromised financial and physical state. Despite entering an art scene where he was largely forgotten, Upward continued his art making producing a series of brightly coloured resin works on circular canvases. Although his works were reviewed with support and admiration, they were commercially unsuccessful.

Towards the end of the 1970s Upward began teaching at East Sydney Technical College where he was greatly admired by his students. With improved health, he began building a home north of Sydney in the bushland of Wollombi. He married Julie Harris in 1979, and in 1982 they had daughter, Asia. Upward was in

the process of moving to the new property when he suffered a fatal heart attack while walking near Sydney's Balmoral Beach.

Peter Upward explored his career as an artist, student and teacher with bold dynamism as evidenced in the legacy of his paintings, friendships and students. At times life proved difficult but he continued to face his trials with optimism and perseverance as artist, John Olsen fondly recalls: 'he refused to be bored and everything about him was based on spontaneity and improvisation' (Olsen, 1984).

Many art critics and historians, including Sydney Morning Herald's John McDonald, argue there is simply not enough evidence of his contribution to make a persuasive case for Upward's importance. However, others including Christopher Dean and Christine France will continue to defend the complex and valuable contribution of this innovative and remarkable pure abstractionist to the development of minimalism and contemporary Australian art as we see it today. Others still will simply stand before these magnificent works of art and be moved by their emphatic intensity and vivid liveliness.

i. Christopher Dean in conversation with Julie Harris, 20 October 2004.

Upward, Peter & Dean, Christopher & Penrith Regional Gallery & The Lewers Bequest (2007). *Frozen gestures: the art of Peter Upward*. p.19

# Artwrite50

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# The Future of Australian Art: Reaching the Tipping Point.