



Recent Work by Diana Boyer at aGOG

Art

australian Girl's Own Gallery

*Prints & Sculptures by Jackie Gorrington
& Recent Work by Diana Boyer, aGOG,
1-20 August.*

Reviewed by Anne O'Hehir

Last month aGOG had shows of work by two women who live on properties in NSW. There have been a number of shows at aGOG where a theme of nature and how it relates to us and how we relate to it has emerged.

Jackie Gorrington lives near Nimmitabel. The imagery in her prints and sculptures come from reflections of her everyday life and events in it — walking in the turnips, snake killing and the people around her — given to us with a sharpness of wit but also with compassionate empathy for the foibles of human nature. She uses a variety of printmaking techniques, woodcuts and polystyrene cuts, and linocuts in some of which she achieves interesting textures by etching the lino with caustic soda. Her style has a directness and vigour accessed through the use of folk art conventions of patterning and flattening of space and a sometimes somewhat deliberately awkward and broad delivery. The humour comes to the fore I thought in the sculptures in which found objects are assembled into pieces where turnips fight and wombat skulls are used as decoration.

Somewhat more ominous and dark are the oil paintings, gouache and pencil drawings by Diana Boyer. Boyer's work has been shown at aGOG before and here a continuing engagement with environmental concerns is evident. On the farm near Binalong she is involved in a long term project monitoring the salination of the soil and the level of the water table. Her works speak eloquently of the arid and stark nature of the land, though the starkness is shown to have a certain beauty — certainly the colours and textures are sensual. She uses shadows and figures cropped by the frame and in strange scale relationships — figures that are usually shown isolated and featureless — to impart a sombre mood. Black humour though is also employed, as in the juxtaposition of the swinging cows and the skipping child. ■

Anne O'Hehir is a freelance writer with an art history background and an interest in photography and other things.

Art

Anti-aphrodisiac & Text-Tiles

*By Shane Breynard & Catherine K,
Canberra Contemporary Art Space,
Gorman House,
16 August - 14 September.*

Reviewed by Anne O'Hehir

To begin by stating the obvious, I don't think that Shane Breynard's work will act as a dampener of sexual desire. He has admitted that partly he borrowed the American minimalist artist, Dan Flavin's expression as a funky name to induce the public to come and see art which is visually quite austere. Well it is a tough world and an artist must do what an artist must do.

It is pertinent though that Breynard is thinking about what gets a person through the door because his work is engaged in exploring what we see in an art gallery or museum and get from the visit. By photographing materials found in build-

ings of the recent past that were hip in their day, Breynard explores thoughts around why something will be deemed worthy of preservation and perhaps removed to a museum environment, or, be judged to have been of little historical value and scrapped. And certainly by employing the stark language of minimalism Breynard makes you very aware of your own presence in the gallery — how it is affecting you and how you may be affecting the space. Because when there is not that much to look at — and certainly nothing representational — panic and uneasiness may get the better of you but if you can hang in there it does make you start to think about what your expectations usually are. And it may be that you do perceive art as an aphrodisiac — in the sense that it is something that is going to 'get' you on an emotional or sensual level. There is often the hope that you may get to experience something sublime, that the artist may create something of a parallel world away from the boring tedium of the everyday.

Breynard implies the possibility of a private response by the choice of the frosted glass in the screen with its texture and a possibility of concealment. And yet he simultaneously questions the immediacy of this experience through the use of a screen and the clear glass. Clear glass gives us a view of something but no access. And the screen may afford some cover but it is very much going to regulate how we move around the space. It suggests that there are certain restrictions imposed when viewing art — especially in a public space.

You are very aware in the show of the materiality of the art object and the way it displaces space. Breynard is a photomedia student at the Canberra School of Art and integral to his exploration of the process of viewing art are issues of photography and how we react to it. By referencing minimalism with its reduction of art to its bones by the complete annihilation of illusionism, Breynard evokes essential characteristics of the photograph. The photographs in the exhibition may strongly suggest the materiality of the concretes that he has shot and yet they can only ever offer a retelling of the story, one that in its immediacy cannot compete with the physical here and nowness of the screen. And unlike the screen it cannot not play the game of illusion: it is a recording of the world and is of necessity of 'something' however abstract that 'something' may be. And most often photography is giving us an escape space to inhabit and sometimes the photographer invites the viewer to be a voyeur into this world. Viewing photography can often be an emotional experience and one that may act very much as an aphrodisiac to the senses.

On show in The Cube simultaneously with Breynard's show is Catherine K's Text-Tiles. If Breynard has employed the language of minimalism, Text-Tiles offers something akin to *maximumism* for the walls and ceiling are completely covered by the works. The installation plays on the tension formed by placing together textiles and their computer generated reproductions. The making of a tapestry is of course something that is very labour intensive and historically the tapestry was symbolic and indeed literally indicative of wealth. So to reproduce them on the computer, relatively cheaply and quickly and with no numerical restriction, is clearly an ironic gesture.

The tapestries seem gentle and quiet — belly buttons and doodles — that speed up in the computer manipulation into whirlwinds. Catherine K explores the notion of the tapestry as used for domestic decoration, for we all know the computer too is beginning to infiltrate every aspect of our lives. ■

Art

Third Artist Space Project Exhibition

ANCA Gallery, Dickson, 12-17 August.

Reviewed by Kerry-Anne Cousins

Ten artists have recently completed a project which involved a two weeks residency at Megalo Access Arts in their studio workshop at Hackett. The works on display are the result of this residency. The exhibition also includes work that is part of some of the artists' continuing involvement in the Megalo workshops.

As the primary aim of the project was to encourage the artists to experiment with the screen printing process, it was no surprise to see such a varied display of different techniques and media. Treahna Hamm, Christine James, Ann Widdup and Sonya Jayne Smith screen-printed onto paper, canvas and tiles. Sara Thorn, Lorraine Lamothe and Anne Balcomb used fabric and other materials. Jane Bruce and Jaishree Srinivasan saw screen printing as being just one of the many techniques that was involved in their own creative process.

The diversity of the work testified to the success of the project yet it was also possible to make connections between the artists. Christine James and Jaishree Srinivasan both commented on aspects of Indian life. James created small maps of Kalighat (Calcutta) with depictions of the temple of Kali, the all-powerful Hindu goddess. Srinivasan's intriguing work, 'Blouse for an Unsuitable Girl' emphasised the more mundane aspect of Indian femininity — women's role as both ornament and housekeeper. Srinivasan screened text onto the type of blouse worn by Indian women with their saris. The text commented on the number of chapatis made by Indian women in the course of their daily chores. The blouse was also ornamented with tiny household utensils in mimicry of the ornamental mirrors normally seen on Indian textiles.

Sara Thorn, in her fabric length, 'whips and thorns', also drew comparisons between the way women are perceived, using images of comic strip pin-up girls on the one hand and Marian iconography on the other. In her works 'Powerstick with black worms', and 'Power stick with silver worms', Jane Bruce made a dramatic statement as to the power of women. It was one of the most ambitious works in the show.

Anne Balcomb's work was by contrast, more of an exploration of the possibilities of the qualities of various textures and materials. 'Flight' was one of the most successful of her works. The design was lyrical and subtle yet it was able to retain its integrity in close-up and from a distance.

Ann Widdup, in an artist's book and several works on paper, explored the elusiveness of memory using old postcards. These worked best as a group. The large screen prints on their own did not I feel add anything new to the fragmentary and elusive nature of the original postcards.

Sonya Jayne Smith made use of the characteristic nature of the reproduced print in a series of works which replicated the grainy quality of newspaper print. Lorraine Lamothe's work 'Fly Screen 1' became simultaneously a ubiquitous part of suburban life, an artistic tool and an art object in itself.

This was a very enjoyable exhibition — the outcome of a worthwhile project. Megalo is again calling for expressions of interest for next year's exhibition which will co-incide with the National Textile Symposium held in Canberra in 1998. ■

Kerry-Anne Cousins has an Honours Degree in Fine Arts, she works at the Nolan Gallery and also co-ordinates Artstop in Civic.

Art

Prayer Rugs for the Antipodes

*By Kate Derum,
Canberra School of Art Gallery,
August.*

Reviewed by Catherine K

Since the 1988 International Tapestry Symposium hosted by the Victorian Tapestry Workshop in Melbourne, the medium of tapestry has experienced a revival of interest in Australia. Many textile artists have taken on tapestry weaving as their new venture and emerging painters have had the urge of seeing their work being interpreted in tapestries. Tapestry workshops and master classes have been offered by prominent tapestry weavers; art schools have seen their floors covered by upright tapestry looms; tapestry weavers have gathered in different parts of Australia in order to be inspired and stimulated by the landscape; and national touring tapestry exhibitions, writings and reviews have surfaced due to the sheer energy of tapestry makers. Kate Derum has been an active participant in some events, observer or critic at other times. She has carved out for herself an unique position of individuality.

Prayer Rugs for the Antipodes presents the strength of the maker as a skilled artist who is able to choose her medium as a means to her end and the essence of her art. Derum's work, although personal, is fused with symbolic content: faces, masks and hands (which contrast with the tradition of Muslim representations which inspired her work) are juxtaposed as neo-expressionist stylised figures. The treatment of the picture reminds me of the works of the painter Mimmo Paladino and indeed Derum's collages on paper reveal a sensibility for constructing works out of matter. Her face profiles, sharpened by her woven lines, stand out in the tapestries as her signature, while she has restricted her palette of colours to rich and sombre burgundies and blues.

The exhibition presents three different scales of works. Derum's large tapestries enable her to extrapolate a rich narrative with a Jungian perspective, emphasising the superimposition of personal and collective memories by fragmenting the tapestry with irregular shapes. In the series 'Speaking and Silence' (medium size scale) each of the tapestries are given a stylised shape like a code so that the series is constructed like a puzzling sentence. 'Postcards from the end of the world' is even more problematic for the viewers. They are like unlabelled snapshots with few images which are framed and placed under glass as precious material of recollection.

Derum's work deserves more than a mere description. It is a work that is striking for its singular expression and distinct quality of craftsmanship. It is a work that has visual and emotional impact: it demands a response. ■

Catherine K is a textile artist who writes about arts issues.

art

AAAR!

*Australian Artists Against Racism:
Collaborate for tolerance & respect,
Canberra School of Art Foyer Gallery,
9-24 August.*

Reviewed by Anne O'Hehir

Artists must be continually thinking about and assessing what role their art performs. Some artists work is naturally more political or issue-based than others though of course artists who shun such 'impurity' are themselves making a comment by not making a comment.

Art is the result of a combination of a number of factors — social, political and personal. It has often of course been used by the ruling body for propaganda ends where sometimes the art produced is great, say some of the French art of the eighteenth century and sometimes dreadful, the social realism of the Stalinist years for instance or art produced to espouse the ideals of fascism.

A show with a strong social and political purpose was the AAAR! exhibition in the Foyer Gallery at the Canberra School of Art. The exhibition