

## STATE OF THE ART



Hayden Fowler *Goat Odyssey* 2006  
digital video 16:9 format, sound, colour, single  
channel, 15:10 loop Edition 61 of 70 Image  
courtesy the artist. Collection Rachel Verghis



Jonathan Jones *white poles* 2003  
fluorescent tubes and fittings dimensions variable  
Photo: Fiona Morrison Image courtesy the artist &  
Gallery Barry Keldoulis Collection Rachel Verghis

### Just what is Contemporary Art ?

This question came up recently and while I thought I knew, just to be sure I did a search on the web and of course found dozens of definitions of contemporary art. No one could agree on a date as to when 'contemporary art' actually started, with highest percentage agreement on either, from 1945, from 1960, from 1970 or from 2000, but everyone agreed that it is art that is produced now, in our lifetime. So when it started may depend on the date you were born. All definitions did agree that contemporary art is socially conscious and is connected with one issue or another, including feminism, gay, lesbian, transgender and queer cultures, multiculturalism, globalization, global warming, bio-engineering and AIDS awareness to name a few. There are also some who say that the artist should highlight the concept of the subject as being the most important aim of the artwork, however I am with the school of thought that eschews this particular aspect and believes that the actual art work must be technically and artistically valid and not subservient to a concept. Finally there was also agreement that contemporary art can be a combination of materials, methods, concepts, and subjects that challenge traditional boundaries and defies easy definition.

I was also pleased to note that, just as artists in the various periods before them e.g. impressionism, abstraction expressionism, minimalism etc, contemporary artists deny that they are part of something that is recognized and defined by others.

Coming to the Shoalhaven are two opportunities, the first to experience an exhibition of contemporary art and the second for our artists to participate in a contemporary art prize / exhibition.

### Light Sensitive Material: Works from the Verghis Collection

This contemporary art exhibition, toured by Museum Galleries NSW and drawn from the private collection of UK based Australian Rachel Verghis, features 14 Australian artists whose works are created by the literal use of light or by photography or video. The artists range from the ubiquitous Shaun Gladwell and his skateboard in two type-c prints as well as one of his best known works, the digital video *Storm Sequence*. In the latter, the video, in slow motion, through a sea-spray splattered lens, shows the artists spinning on his skateboard, against a backdrop of grey seascape and looming storm clouds. It has a beauty that recalls classical storm paintings but for me, interest starts to wane after a minute or so of the sequence's 8:40 minute length, while the two prints, *Self-Portrait Spinning (Invalides)* and *Self-Portrait Spinning (Bastille)*, hold almost no interest at all. With Hayden Fowler's *Goat Odyssey*, which explores the relationship between human beings, nature and other animals, in

this case two goats existing in a “post apocalyptic” landscape, my attention is held for much longer periods of time, with individual sequences, within the 15:10 running time, ranging from intrigue to humour in the recollection of variations of the kitsch Victorian drama paintings, such as ‘Stag at Bay’.

Petrina Hicks’ photographs are both beautiful and unsettling, particularly *Shenae and Jade*, an image of a beautiful young woman holding a budgerigar by the head with her mouth.

Jonathan Jones, best known for his art light works which use repetition to recall indigenous tribal markings (he is of Kamilaroi / Wiradjuri heritage), has contributed *white poles* made from 12 everyday white fluorescent tubes, though as there is no set way to display this particular work, it mainly references the idea of chance.

Other artists include Julie Rrap, Hossein Valamanesh, Rosemary Laing along with lesser known artists such as Vanila Netto and Shoufray Derz.

As with most contemporary art, the artists represented in this exhibition address contemporary issues such as the urban environment, design and architecture, global warming and ideas of community. All in all this is a great introduction to how artists have experimented with light, photography and video in the last twelve years.

### **Jervis Bay & Basin Arts 2013 Contemporary Art Exhibition and Shoalhaven**

**Contemporary Art Prize** is scheduled to be held in the Main Gallery, Shoalhaven City Arts Centre from 6 September to 2 October 2013. Artists are invited to send in expressions of interest in participating in

- Shoalhaven Contemporary Art Open Prize
- Emerging Artist Contemporary Art Prize
- JBBARTs Member Contemporary Art Prize
- Youth Contemporary Art Prize

A prize total of \$3,000 is being offered and is sponsored by Architects Edmiston Jones. Entry closes on 7 July. See: [http://www.jervisbayarts.asn.au/?page\\_id=967](http://www.jervisbayarts.asn.au/?page_id=967)

### **Shoalhaven City Arts Centre Strategic Plan 2020**

The Strategic plan to take our Arts Centre through to 2020 has passed the next stage of its evolution. On 4 April a public meeting was held at the Council rooms in Nowra and attended by a number of interested artists and local community. Jane Smith, director of the consultant company who have developed the plan explained the key issues which included Community engagement with the arts centre, in particular the importance of local art and artists, as well as the need for positioning the Centre as a Regional Gallery and as a destination point both within the community and for tourism. Space – especially expanded exhibitions, storage and conservation must be addressed for the Gallery to flourish and grow. There is very real opportunity to expand our art environment to include performance, digital work and music in order to appeal to a younger demographic. The major strategic issue is the level and structure of the funding for the Arts Centre and future Regional Gallery. The overall budget has declined in real terms over the last four years, at the same time the operating expenses have increased by nearly 20%. Bluntly more money is spent on cleaning than on funding projects. The next stage is for the Arts Board to review and approve the updated document and then submit to a Council meeting for approval or otherwise.

All artists need to stress to their Council member the importance of having a vibrant arts culture and an active regional gallery.

### **Margaret Dredge - Retrospective 1960 to 2001**

This exhibition continues at the Shoalhaven City Arts Centre until 21 May and it is a must see for all of our community. To quote one visitor who had “ *the pleasure of attending this*

*exhibition..... I cannot tell you enough what an effect it had on me as a whole, and a number of pieces in particular – ‘Bend’, ‘Homunculus through the looking glass’ & ‘Untitled (Grey & Green)’. The pieces simply talk as you approach them – amazing work.”*

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