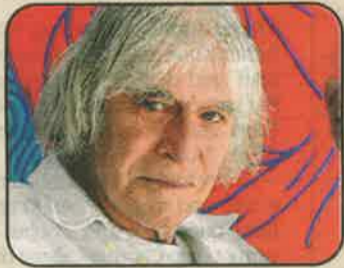


SPECIAL REPORT

The case for Henson



> BETTY CHURCHER
Former director of the National Gallery of Australia
 "It's a farce. It will be thrown out of the courts if anyone is charged. Bill is one of Australia's leading artists. He has had a retrospective at the Art Gallery of NSW. And any of the leading galleries of Australia would defend him."



> MARTIN SHARP
Artist
 "It was a powerful image. I would call it very beautiful in its vulnerability rather than 'revolting', as the Prime Minister has done. The image I saw is very innocent, and what's happening now is challenging its innocence."



> MARGARET OLLEY
Artist
 "It's shocking, the treatment of Mr Henson. I got the invitation which sparked the initial furore and thought it was a beautiful picture. There was nothing pornographic at all. I am quite convinced the courts will throw this out."



> TIM OLSEN
Gallery owner and son of artist John Olsen
 "This puts Australia in the dark ages. We are still a philistine country. I feel sorry for the children involved who will come under much greater scrutiny because of this misplaced campaign."

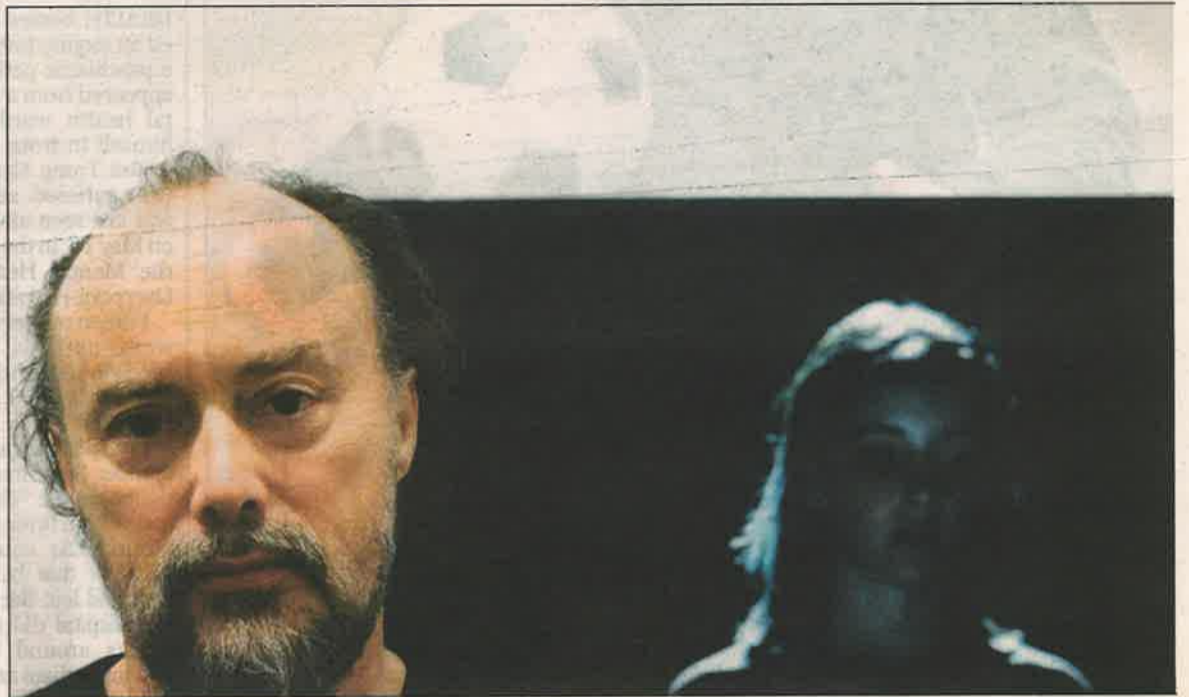


> LEE RHIANNON
Greens MP
 "The images I have seen in the media are not pornographic. The state's intervention would appear to be inappropriate. Naked children have appeared in art throughout the ages but we always need to ensure the children are not exploited."



> HUGH MACKEN
NSW Law Society President
 "What is relevant to the commission of a crime is the intention. If the intention is to produce a work of art, and solely to produce a work of art, then I can't see how a crime has been committed."

Threat to burn Henson anger



Controversial artist ... Henson could face charges over his work.

Photo: Adam Hollingworth



The police move in ... Henson's photos are removed as evidence.

Photo: Sahlan Hayes

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ART OR PORNOGRAPHY?

art gallery as turns vicious

By FRANK WALKER and HEATH GILMORE

THE owner of the Sydney art gallery at the centre of a storm over photographs of naked teenagers was holed up inside it yesterday after receiving violent threats.

Messages left on the answering machine at the Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery in the inner-city suburb of Paddington threatened to "burn the building down".

The owner, Roslyn Oxley, remained in the gallery yesterday after police on Friday seized photographic works by world renowned artist Bill Henson.

The seized photos depicted boys and girls, some as young as 12, naked in dark, moody photographs.

The police removal of the photographs provoked a nationwide outcry over the sexualisation of children in the media and art worlds.

Yesterday Tony Oxley, the shaken husband of Roslyn, spoke outside the gallery where his wife was rehanging the remaining photographs of the exhibition - for a possible reopening as early as Tuesday - before flying to an art fair in Switzerland.

"There are some crackpots out there," Mr Oxley said. "They have left threats on the phone. We have had threats to burn the building down. It is very worrying."

He said the artist was taking the issue very hard, and he and Ms Oxley were concerned about his welfare.

Interstate authorities will play a role in determining what charges are laid against Henson or Ms Oxley over the images of a naked and under-age girl seized on Friday.

Rose Bay Local Area Commander Allan Sicard said the 13-year-old girl featured in the studio-produced prints, photographed by the Melbourne-born Henson, did not live in NSW.

Police seized the photographs from the gallery just before it was due to open on Thursday night.



In the spotlight ... one of the images featured in the exhibition.

This followed an outcry that reportedly began on a Sydney talk-back radio station and continued with a formal complaint by Hetty Johnston, of the child sexual assault advocacy group, Bravehearts.

The images were seized using a warrant issued under section 91G of the NSW Crimes Act which prohibits the use of children for pornographic purposes.

If charges are laid under the same provision, the fate of the photographs could turn on whether expert evidence can show they were being used for an artistic purpose.

Superintendent Sicard said the seized items depicted a child under the age of 16 years "in a sexual context". Commonwealth charges could be laid over the gallery's website and state charges over the pictures.

It is not clear if Henson will face charges, and he is yet to comment publicly.

Prime Minister Kevin Rudd has condemned the prints as "absolutely revolting".

"Whatever the artistic view of the merits of that sort of stuff - frankly I don't think there are any - just allow kids to be kids," he said.

The art market analyst and com-

mentator Michael Reid said the naked bodies of young women had been the subject of art for thousands of years. Mr Reid viewed the exhibition on Wednesday morning before the photographs were seized.

"I have noticed people are prepared to give their opinion without actually seeing the photographs," he said. "I find this quite disturbing because this debate is very important."

Mr Reid said he judged the artistic merit of the work to be valid and not pornographic.

"The main photograph in question is in the style of the Old Masters," he said. "The model is enveloped in a black velvety shroud and she is backlit. She is very still. There is not any sexual charge about the image. It is quite restful and contemplative. She is demure."

"I was aware of the child sexualisation issue but that does not exist here in my opinion. Bill Henson had done a huge body of work that goes across a whole range of areas ... This is a debate that has to happen - but rationally."

> Michelle Grattan: Henson unlucky - Page 56

The case against Henson

> MORRIS IEMMA
NSW Premier

"These images were simply not appropriate. This exhibition not only crossed the line but jumped right over it. This is not a debate about censorship - it's about human decency and the moral codes by which we live and raise our kids."



> KATRINA HODGKINSON
NSW Opposition spokeswoman on child safety

"I am concerned that children as young as 12 are not able to understand the full impact of their actions if [they] agree to pose for this type of photography. We should let kids be kids."



> KEVIN RUDD
Prime Minister

"Kids deserve to have the innocence of their childhood protected. Whatever the artistic view of the merits of that sort of stuff - frankly I don't think there are any - just allow kids to be kids."



> CLAUDIA KEECH
CEO of on-line magazine Mother Inc.

"This is totally unacceptable. It is wrong. Why have a photograph of an underage child in the nude? Whatever way you dress it up, it's a young child in the nude being displayed in the public domain."



> LINDA BURNEY
NSW Youth Minister

"There is always licence when it comes to art but not when it comes to the protection of children. It is simply unacceptable - art or not - that inappropriate images of children are available because of the potential for exploitation."



> BRENDAN NELSON
Opposition Leader

"It violates all the fundamental values for which we stand. We need to send strong signals to young people that we believe in them. We believe in the inherent dignity of young people ... and the protection of their rights and values."



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