

OPEN GALLERY JOSEPHINE TOVEY



TOBY BURROWS

This photographic exhibition, *Footprint*, is the product of a road trip through western NSW, and the images have the haunting quality of a wild frontier. Sydney artist Burrows depicts landscapes that appear to have been abandoned by people: long and empty roads, lonely weathered buildings and landscapes filled with debris. The images are piercingly clear colour works, capturing every detail of these intriguing vast spaces. But some of the best work is a series of vivid close-ups of moths caught on a vehicle's radiator, which evoke the harshness of this remote place. *Blender Gallery, 16 Elizabeth Street, Paddington, 9380 7080. Tue-Sat, 10am-6pm. Until June 3.*

OWEN YALANDJA

The work of Arnhem Land sculptor Yalandja has been increasingly popular in recent years and his latest exhibition *Yawkyawk Spirit Figures* shows why. The yawkyawk are female water spirits, like mermaids, which are believed to exist in billabongs in an area over which Yalandja has spiritual and practical responsibility. His sculptural representations are tall, thin figures made from trunks of kurrajong trees. Some stand straight while others are curved like wriggling fish. The intricately dotted wooden sculptures stand on a pointed fish tail, giving them a delicate, feminine appearance. *Annandale Galleries, 110 Trafalgar Street, Annandale, 9552 1699. Tue-Sat, 11am-5pm. Until June 7.*

THE WAYBACK MACHINE

Sydney artists Jaki Middleton and David Lawrey have collaborated before - one of their sculptural installations is on display at the *Experimenta Playground* show at Carriageworks. In this wonderful new show, they use pre-cinematic illusionary technologies, like the praxinoscope and the perpetual gallery, to explore iconic imagery from the Hollywood films of their childhood. In *Magic Mountain (Edward)*, visitors look through holes in the side of a mini-mountain to see a small-scale model of the neat suburbia from the film *Edward Scissorhands*. Mirrors create the illusion of the chilling suburban perfection spreading forever. *MOP Gallery, 2/39 Abercrombie Street, Chippendale, 9699 3955. Thu-Sat, 1-6pm. Until June 8.*



ALSO RECOMMENDED

Christina Cordero at Australian Galleries, *Private Treaty* at Sullivan and Strumpf (both close Sunday), Parliament of NSW Indigenous Art Prize at Hawkesbury Regional Gallery (until June 8).

Send details of exhibitions to [opengallery@smh.com.au](mailto:opengallery@smh.com.au). No attachments larger than 1Mb.

# Snapshot of a

The country's cultural agenda is being hijacked by witch-hunters, vigilantes and reactionary politicians.

VISUAL ART  
JOHN McDONALD

**Bill Henson, 2008**  
Roslyn Oxley9, until June 21 (by appointment only)  
**Annette Bezor**  
Harrison Galleries, until June 6  
**Wendy Sharpe: Paris**  
King Street Gallery on William, closes today



BILL HENSON has dominated the headlines during the past week for all the wrong reasons but when the hysteria dies down we might find this affair has coughed up a few revelations.

First: the level of public ignorance that exists in relation to the visual arts. In 2005 Bill Henson was the subject of huge retrospectives at the Art Gallery of NSW and the National Gallery of Victoria, which were advertised in the media and even on bus shelters. His work is held by most of the important public collections in Australia and he is every bit as internationally successful in his field as Cate Blanchett or Hugh Jackman are in theirs. He has been making works that use teenagers for almost 30 years, exhibiting and publishing at the highest levels. And yet, when this furore breaks, it seems that his detractors have never heard of him.

This should be a source of concern to art museums, arts funding bodies, art educators and organisations with cultural responsibilities such as the ABC. It seems that most people in Australia could not care less for the visual arts unless they are presented in the form of a page one scandal.

The second eye-opener is the irresponsible way the politicians have responded to this affair. From the Prime Minister to the Premier, to the leaders of federal and state oppositions, every one has blurted out a litany of damning, inflammatory comments, having seen nothing more than a few blurry snapshots.

It is no secret that rank populism is now a fact of life in Australian politics. But in an age when every message is refined and spin-doctored to avoid offending anyone's

delicate sensibilities, it appears to be OK to pronounce judgments on unseen works of art in the name of public morality. The comments of the politicians have provided tremendous support for one-eyed activists such as Hetty Johnston, who claim to be speaking in the name of "the community".

Directly or indirectly, our leaders have encouraged the police to act in a high-handed manner by confiscating works of art, thereby setting the scene for an ugly and futile battle in the courts. Finally, they have helped create a climate in which self-appointed witch-hunters and vigilantes can ring the Roslyn Oxley gallery with threats of violence.

It should be an enormous embarrassment to our would-be moral guardians that Henson has been making this kind of work for 30 years and only now have they become shocked and offended. It should be an embarrassment for our political leaders, who have revealed their cultural ignorance.

Using the law as a blunt instrument to victimise Henson and Roslyn Oxley will not make the slightest difference to the activities of pedophiles and child abusers. Any attempt to stigmatise Henson's work as "pornography" is doomed to end in failure. Where are the victims? What pornographer has his work in the collections of public museums around the world? If it is impossible to decide where to draw the line between art and pornography, one can at least examine the intention behind the work - and in this case, there can be no doubt that Henson has set out to make works of art.

I went to see the remnants of the Henson exhibition last week and listened to Oxley's description of

where the confiscated works fitted in. As usual, Henson had hung the show so that the human figures stood in contrast to velvety black landscapes, in this case dimly lit images of the ruins of ancient Rome. The arrangement of pictures and the lighting were orchestrated to make a powerful impression on the viewer. It would require an incredibly narrow mind to see only the "offensive" images of under-age children. To view Henson's work in context is to understand why 65,000 people visited the artist's 2005 retrospective at the AGNSW and no one complained.

The wider ramifications of this case hardly bear thinking about. Every Henson show will now attract a flock of media vultures, hoping to find a few dirty pictures so they can prate about "common decency". It will have an inhibiting effect on Henson's art and his everyday life. Furthermore, it creates a climate in which any work of art can be subject to the attentions of Thought Police who believe, paraphrasing Johnston, that everyone likes art so long as it's tasteful. In the eyes of the world it is hardly less humiliating and damaging to our image than Pauline Hanson's political pronouncements. Australia is not a theocracy but it seems there are plenty of people who want to act like the Taliban.

A few blocks from Roslyn Oxley9, Harrison Galleries is exhibiting the work of Annette Bezor, a painter who has also dabbled in provocative sexual imagery.

Women artists are often able to get away with things that would land their male counterparts in hot water but Bezor has endured a visit from the police in Adelaide, when

Who let the dogs out  
The dog in contemporary Australian Art

Until 29 June 2008

Over 90 works by 67 contemporary Australian artists including Rick Amor, Narelle Autio, Kate Benyon, Adam Cullen and Noel McKenna.

Developed in partnership with Lake Macquarie City Art Gallery and curated by Merryn Gates.

Free Talks

by Hanrob Pet Care Centre

Pets in the Community

Sunday 1 June @ 2pm

Protecting Our Borders

Sunday 22 June @ 2pm

For further information please call 8536 5700.



Annie-Fernoo Folgosa (I ran by night 2007), oil on plywood. Courtesy the artist & Michael Hazy Fine Art, Sydney.

**HAZELHURST REGIONAL GALLERY & ARTS CENTRE**  
Open Daily\* 10am - 5pm • Admission Free • Tel 8536 5700  
782 Kingsway Gympie NSW • [hazelhurst@ssc.nsw.gov.au](mailto:hazelhurst@ssc.nsw.gov.au)  
[www.hazelhurst.com.au](http://www.hazelhurst.com.au) • [www.wholetthedogsout.com.au](http://www.wholetthedogsout.com.au)  
(\*Closed Good Friday, Christmas Day, Boxing Day & New Year's Day)



A facility of Sutherland Shire Council  
**Sutherland Shire COUNCIL**

ACGN AUSTRALIAN COMMERCIAL GALLERIES ASSOCIATION

- ANNANDALE** 110 Trafalgar Street, Annandale 9552 1699 Tues-sat 11-5  
OWEN YALANDJA *Yawkyawk Spirit Figures*  
HOWARD TAYLOR *Constructions Paintings Maquettes Drawings*
- AUSTRALIAN Galleries** 15 Royston Street, Paddington 24 Glenmore Road, Paddington  
ROYLSTON ST: 9360 5177 PETER KINGSTON and BOB MARCHANT  
GLENMORE ROAD: 9380 8744 Tues-Sat 10-6 Sun 12-5 CHRISTINA CORDERO
- GALLERY GONDWANA** Level 1, 7 Danks Street, Waterloo 8399 3492 Wed To Sat 10-5 or by Appt  
DIVAS OF THE DESERT
- LEGGE** 183 Regent Street, Redfern 9319 3540 Tues-Sat 11-6  
STEVE KIRBY *Paintings* REW HANKS *Linocuts*
- MARTIN BROWNE FINE ART** 57-59 Macleay Street, Potts Point 9331 7997 Tues-Sun 11-6  
JOHN PULE
- ROSLYN OXLEY9** 8 Scudian Lane, Paddington 9331 1919 Tues-Sat 11-6  
BILL HENSON
- TIM OLSEN** 63 Jersey Road, Woollahra 9327 3922 Mon-Fri 10-6 Sat 10-5 Sun 12-5  
PHILIP HUNTER Until June 1  
From June 3 GEORGE RAFTOPOULOS and KATHRYN RYAN
- UTOPIA ART SYDNEY** 2 Danks Street, Waterloo 9699 2900 Tues-Sat 10-5  
LIZ COATS *See, Hear and Know*
- WATTERS** 109 Riley Street, East Sydney 9331 2556 Wed-Fri 10-8 Tues & Sat 10-5  
EUAN MACLEOD *Paintings*

WILLIAM BOISSEVAIN - *Nude Studies*  
PATRICK SHIRVINGTON - *Homage to the Birds*  
Until 19 June  
**Wagner Art Gallery**  
29 Garraway St, Paddington NSW 2011 T: 9556 6068 E: [wagnerart@bigpond.com](mailto:wagnerart@bigpond.com)  
W: [www.wagnerartgallery.com.au](http://www.wagnerartgallery.com.au) Hours: 16.30-6.00 Mon-Sat 1.00-6.00 Sun

MIGUEL MEIRELLES  
FRENCH ANTIQUES  
We bring our shop to you  
on [meirelles.com.au](http://meirelles.com.au)

# small-minded people



It figures ... from far left, Annette Bezor, *Mirror Face - Camellia*, oil on canvas; Bill Henson, *Untitled, 2007-08*, type C photographs, courtesy of the artist and Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery, Sydney; and Wendy Sharpe's *Mona And Stephan*, oil on linen.

she was suspected of using underage models. In her case the defenders of the law were satisfied that everything was in order and never paid a second call. Bezor still sees sexuality as an important theme in her work but she rejects the idea of using sex in a way that is gratuitous or sensation-seeking.

Her current exhibition is pretty much a head-and-shoulders event, featuring large images of women's faces that pose questions about how we define beauty - both subjectively and culturally. Bezor is interested in how we can continue to read a distorted or disfigured image as beautiful. This has led her to a long-running obsession with the green-faced Chinese ladies painted by Vladimir Tretchikoff in the 1950s that became worldwide bestsellers as popular prints. Even today, one may find quantities of these

images in suburban lounge rooms and cheap hotels.

Bezor is fascinated by the idea that during the era of the White Australia Policy, we had a collective love affair with a green-faced Asian lady. The Tretchikoff image appears in several guises in this exhibition, along with the face of an African girl and another based on a porn star. The juxtaposition of a face with oversized flowers and other decorative devices asks us to consider the different registers of beauty that we explore daily. There is an old Chinese saying that a young girl is like a flower but Bezor suggests there is a world of difference in the way we look at a camellia and the way we look into the eyes of an attractive model.

Beyond all cultural constructions, the laws of attraction are different for each individual. It is hard, therefore, to make hard-and-fast

**It is hardly less humiliating and damaging to our image than Pauline Hanson's political pronouncements.**

statements about what is offensive and what is tasteful. Bezor knows that the search for what is tasteful often ends in kitsch. She pushes her own paintings to the edge of that particular abyss but always pulls up short. She may employ bright colours and large flowers but her pictures are not occasions for simple visual pleasure. They are full

of subtle distortions that leave us feeling as though some vital component is missing. In fact, something has been added: an element of critical distance that asks viewers to reflect on themselves, even as they reflect on the work.

Finally, and with some relief, I turn to Wendy Sharpe's *Paris* exhibition at the King Street Gallery on William. This show, which closes this afternoon, is a brilliant performance by a painter who is rarely so consistent. This is not to say that Sharpe lacks integrity but there have been occasions when her paintings feel dutiful and uninspired. Not this time, because she is in resounding form. These new pictures are mostly small-scale, all painted in situ, while staying in one of the studios at the Cité des Arts. Her compositions are busy and lively, her control of colour is precise and the entire

collection is bursting with energy and quick observations.

Sharpe is an instinctive painter whose works tend to mirror her states of mind. In Paris, she seems to have enjoyed herself immensely. In these pictures she has given herself the freedom to be a tourist, to enjoy the sights of Paris and the hubbub of the streets and cafes. She has blended with the crowd and makes the viewer feel like he or she is right there at her elbow.

The French playwright, Marivaux, said that Paris was the world and the rest of the planet nothing but suburbs. One suspects that in Paris, where Henson once undertook a project for the Opera, they would be appalled at the way Australia is treating one of its leading artists. It appears that we Aussies find the suburbs so congenial that nothing will induce us to act like citizens of the world.

A Selection of works by important Australian painters



Garry Shead *Dejeuner sur l'herbe* 1992, oil on board, 91 x 122 cm

**FOR SALE**  
Garry Shead  
Fred Williams  
Brett Whiteley  
Euan Macleod  
John Olsen  
Margaret Olley  
Charles Blackman

Tel: 02 9327 8311  
Open Sat, 11-5  
Mon - Fri, 10-6  
art@savill.com.au

**SAVILL GALLERIES**  
156 Hargrave St  
Paddington 2021  
[www.savill.com.au](http://www.savill.com.au)



**DIRECTOR/CEO  
PERFORMANCE SPACE**

Performance Space is an internationally-recognised contemporary arts centre that creates space for artists and audiences from across the street and around the world to come face to face in intimate exchange, interactive events and live encounters.

In its new home at CarriageWorks, Performance Space has the opportunity to produce works of scale, broker new partnerships,

and imagine new possibilities for contemporary arts practice and production.

The Director will be an inspired and visionary leader, with an intimate knowledge of the contemporary arts sector, exceptional negotiation skills, and diverse and strategic networks. The Director is both the Artistic Director and the CEO, responsible for the overall program as well as the

company's strategic direction, operations and financial management. The Director reports to the Board of Directors, and is supported by the General Manager and a programming, technical, marketing and administrative team.

**For an information package, please contact Kristal Maher on (02) 8571 9111, or go to [www.performancespace.com.au](http://www.performancespace.com.au)**  
Closing date: 7 July 2008