

Police widen Henson inquiry

Josephine Tovey, Les Kennedy and Jonathan Dart

CRIMINAL investigations into Bill Henson have widened to include previous work by the controversial photographer, after police received complaints about several Henson works on display at a regional gallery.

Police advised the Albury Regional Art Gallery to take down several photographs by the artist dating back to 1985, after they received a complaint from the public about "inappropriate" images, which they are investigating.

The *Herald* also understands that a number of older Henson works were seized from the Roslyn Oxley9 gallery storerooms when police raided it last week.

The Albury gallery agreed to remove three photographs from display, which included two images of a naked young woman, while the police made inquiries.

An Albury police spokesman confirmed they had contacted the Sex Crime Unit in Sydney over the nudes, which is investigating the images of naked 12 and 13 year-olds seized from the Roslyn Oxley9 gallery on Friday.

A former director of the Albury gallery has slammed the current management's decision to take down the works.

"He's not entitled to censor work on everybody's behalf," said Dr Aubray Banfield. "That is pandering to the fears and obsessions of a whole lot of people."

A spokesman for the gallery said they considered it prudent to remove the works given the police investigations, but hoped they could return them to public display in the future.

"We believe the artist is one of the pre-eminent photographers in Australia and that's one of reasons why we bought them in the first place," he said. "If at all possible we want to have them on display."

Police said on Friday they intended to lay charges in regard to Henson's latest exhibition, but confirmed yesterday that they had yet to interview the artist, who has appointed a solicitor.

Rose Bay police, who are head-



No show ... Jules Boag, who works at the Albury Regional Art Gallery, with an invitation to Bill Henson's photographic exhibition. Photo: Matthew Smithwick

ing the investigation with assistance from officers in the Child Exploitation Internet Unit within the NSW State Crime Command's Child Protection and Sex Crimes Squad, are attempting to contact the girl in the photographs from the latest exhibition and her parents.

Police have denied that investigators have to go overseas as part of their inquiries.

Henson's work is held in a number of regional and state

galleries, including the National Gallery and the Museum of Contemporary Art in Sydney, though no other gallery has removed any Henson work from display.

The director of the MCA, Elizabeth Ann Macgregor, said she deplored the police's decision to seize Henson's work from the Roslyn Oxley9 gallery, and she would never consider removing his work from her gallery.

"The idea of getting rid of them is ridiculous," she said.

The MCA was the subject of police inquiries in 2002 over a painting depicting teenage sexuality. In that instance, police visited the gallery but decided not to pursue charges against the painting *Where Do You Want to Go Today?* by Roderick Bunter & Ben Frost, a decision Macgregor said was entirely appropriate.

Macgregor is one of a growing number of participants in the Creative Australia forum of the 2020 summit who have sup-

ported Henson and expressed concern about the police investigation into his work.

The author J. M. Coetzee said yesterday that he was concerned about censorship and joined the criticism of Kevin Rudd's labelling of Henson's work as "revolting" and "devoid of artistic merit".

"Nothing he said led me to actually believe he had given proper thought to the questions at stake, which are actually quite subtle and complex," said Coetzee.

Other prominent arts figures who have expressed concern include the actor Rhys Muldoon; the Sydney Festival Director Fergus Lineham and the chief executive of Melbourne of University Press, Louise Adler.

The Albury newspaper *The Border Mail*, which is owned by Fairfax, also contacted the Sex Crimes Squad about the Albury exhibition, though they were not responsible for sparking the investigation, a police spokesman said.