

**VIRTU**

INTRODUCTION

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# VIRTU

**5 August - 25 August 1993**

**IVAN DOUGHERTY GALLERY**

The University of New South Wales • College of Fine Arts

## INTRODUCTION

This is the second exhibition of artists who are full time members of the faculty of the University of New South Wales College of Fine Arts.

It was agreed in discussion last year that the second such exhibition should encompass a particular theme, to differentiate it from the inaugural exhibition in 1992, which invited each artist to select or create a particular work. The result was two lively and very different exhibitions, each of which worked successfully in its own right. This year, as hard as we all tried, no acceptable theme that could accommodate the great variety of concerns currently engaging artists of the faculty emerged.

However various guidelines were agreed upon that would produce an exhibition of interest both to those participating as well as to the student body, other staff and the general public. It was decided firstly that all works should have been created in the last twelve months and secondly that no works exceed a square metre in size. The latter, a seeming restriction, has released in some the most imaginative use of such space, and will make it possible for all to be included in one comprehensive exhibition. It is particularly appropriate that on Open Day visitors will be able to see such a variety of current work by the full time faculty members.

Jennifer Hardy, the exhibition curator, produced, amongst other rabbits out of the proverbial hat, a most apt exhibition title *Virtu*, Latin for 'a love of fine arts'. On behalf of all those involved in this exhibition I invite each one of you who visits the Ivan Dougherty Gallery to share this passion.

Future exhibitions in this series will be able to look at specific aspects of art practice from the College in the knowledge that over the years the most interesting developments will be revealed and examined.

NICK WATERLOW OAM  
Director,  
IVAN DOUGHERTY GALLERY

## FOREWORD

Joanna Mendelssohn

*Virtu*, the second staff exhibition of the College of Fine Arts is probably the best way of showing what a curious kind of meeting place of ideas, art and passions we are. Our students tend to think of us simply as teachers: the people who facilitate their all important growth, and who help them establish their brilliant careers. On campus we debate with each other at meetings, talk over coffee, and sometimes have accidental encounters of the friendlier kind.

But students and lecturers alike know that outside, in the wider visual arts communities of Sydney, Australia, and international forums, it is not possible to go anywhere without meeting colleagues from the College of Fine Arts. And we read about each others' various exhibitions and participations in public debates in the popular press, as well as the specialist journals. But most of the articles, radio and television coverage of our activities see us as isolated individuals: the romantic image of the artist striving alone in a garret strikes again.

So do we who work together have a common purpose in our approach to art? The short answer is no. The great strength of the staff of the College of Fine Arts is our aesthetic and intellectual diversity. The spiritual explorations of Rod Milgate appear to have little in common with the ecologically aware feminism of Liz Ashburn. The age old tradition of Rose Vickers' etchings seem worlds away from Paula Dawson's holograms which could almost be previews of the art of the third millenium, even though her concerns are as old as memory. In the same way, the experimental proposal for a sky performance by Peter Travis seems to belong to another dimension from the methodical structured art of Ken Reinhard, and Col Jordan's precise and ordered paintings have different concerns from the equally precise but coolly spiritual work of Alan Oldfield. And two colleagues in the same school, Bill Seaman and Joan Grounds, make art which on the surface belongs to totally different worlds.

But on reflection there are a few common threads. The long tradition of Sydney art is as an art of surface appearance, it is the tradition of advertising, Colour Field and the Charm School, but increasingly the work which is produced by those teaching at the College of Fine Arts, is adding depth to surface, while keeping to the formal interests of good design. Even so, there is no such thing as a "house style" in the visual art produced by those at the College of Fine Arts.

There is one common element in all the creative work of those who teach here. And that is our commitment to excellence. When we encounter other faculties of the University, the staff at the College of Fine Arts are in a dilemma. It is easier to understand excellence in mathematics, innovation in science and technology, or discovery in historical research. We are only too aware that to those linear thinkers our lateral achievements may appear puzzling, or even obscure.

At their best the work of each of these artists challenges itself and the viewer. And while in a conventional sense some of the works are beautiful, demanding the attention of avaricious collectors, it is not enough to label a painting with a price tag and a red sticker, sign a cheque and move on to the next one. Each work needs to be looked at in its own context, to be measured against itself and the rest of the artist's oeuvre.

But when art made by such a variety of people is placed together, here in the Ivan Dougherty Gallery, there is a sense of debate, of ideas and media bouncing off each other in a way that can only create more debate, more ideas and more art.

And that is the true value of the College of Fine Arts, over and above its role as a teaching institution. Because nineteenth century mythologies are not true. The best art is rarely made in isolation. We need our communities of artists, and our many different perspectives so that we can all learn from each other: and in learning, teach.

## **Ivan Dougherty Gallery**

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