



**JANET LAURENCE**

BLINDSPOT  
an installation





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29 March - 29 April, 1989

**Ivan Dougherty Gallery**





Meiosis, 1987 (detail)  
papier mache, straw, fur, pigment, twigs  
50 x 50 cms  
Photo: Victoria Fernandez

## INTRODUCTION

This exhibition by Janet Laurence is the first in an ongoing series of site-specific installations and reflects the gallery's policy of showing the kind of work that might not otherwise be seen by students of art and the broader community.

In a time of increased insistence in the market place on the discrete object, on art as commodity and capital investment, it is critical that installations of this nature reach the widest possible audience.

Janet Laurence places the viewer at the centre of the work, without a fixed viewpoint. She has not reconstructed the given physical space, yet the gallery remains no mere container. An outer ring or outer limit surrounds an inner sanctuary within which spatial and other relationships are remade. These are determined haptically, that is they are felt as much as seen, determined by and for the body as much as the eye: by the touch of the artist's hand in black pigment drawings around the periphery.

We are like the blind seeing and experiencing for the first time a new world made up of primal textures of fur and hair and fragmentary elemental marks which at some ambiguous point begin to form letters and signs.

This wholistic non-hierarchical environment is both physical and psychological. By way of passages, intervals, oppositions, blind spots and textural transitions, we become immersed in a 'voyage in place'<sup>(1)</sup>.

Maggie Gilchrist  
Gallery Director and Curator

<sup>(1)</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Mille Plateaux*, Minuit, Paris, 1980, p. 482.



## THE LANGUAGE OF INSTALLATION: JANET LAURENCE

Janet Laurence's exhibition at the Ivan Dougherty Gallery is significantly an installation. Janet Laurence resists the conventionalized curatorial practice of isolating objects to sanctify art. Instead her pieces are like disparate fragments of a bricolage, a collage which has become unstuck and spread across gallery walls and floors. Rather than finished objects, her work wears the marks of making, with images never concluded but caught in the hiatus of forming. By confounding expectations, she sets out to frustrate literal readings. Within her language of evocation, identities of fragments are never fixed but, like metonymic signs, are veiled and open, shifting in an associational process of incessant mutation. Meanings are not then individually decipherable, but can only be gleaned in relation to one another, as an installation.

Installation provides Janet Laurence with a space in which barriers demarcating the inside personal from the external public sphere are dissolved. Like Bachelard's home of memories, dreams and lost intimacy<sup>(1)</sup>, her space radiates from the home inside. Just as a nest is moulded by the curve of a bird's breast, so is her space formed from the inside by and for the body. As a space for the body, it is not reliant upon the visual but invites the more intimate sensory experiences of touch and smell. While for Luce Irigaray<sup>(2)</sup>, touch is our first sense underlining all others but paralysed by visual primacy, taste was for Proust<sup>(3)</sup> a means of triggering a chain of memories - a simple 'madeleine' cake dipped in

From the Shadow, 1988  
mixed media on Stonehenge (walls)  
coal, lime/ash (floor)  
Installation: Canberra School of Art  
Gallery, 1988  
Photo: Hahn Tran



tea transporting him into the pleasures of childhood. Janet Laurence's incorporation of hair, fur and straw, with their distinctive touch and taste are, like Proust's tea cake, potent stimulants. Along with their scent, they become, as in Baudelaire's correspondences,

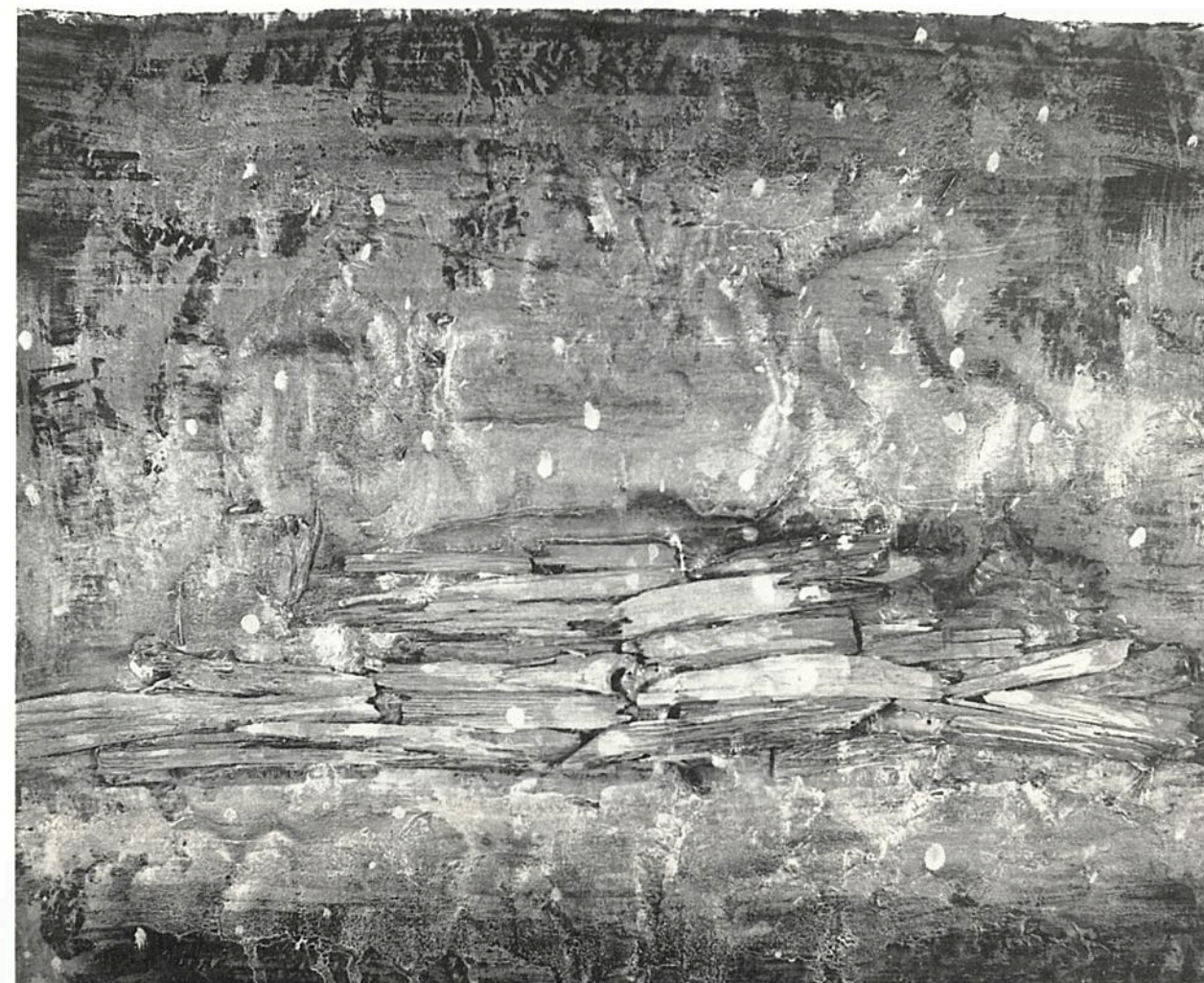
"Like prolonged echoes which merge  
in an opaque, deep oneness,  
Vast as darkness and vast as light,  
Perfumes, sounds and colours answer each other."<sup>(4)</sup>

As the touch, taste, scent and colour of Janet Laurence's fragments respond to each other, they then arouse the sensation of being immersed. They form what Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari call a 'smooth space', an experimental moreso than a visual space in which, like an enveloping cocoon, it is possible to lose oneself<sup>(5)</sup>.

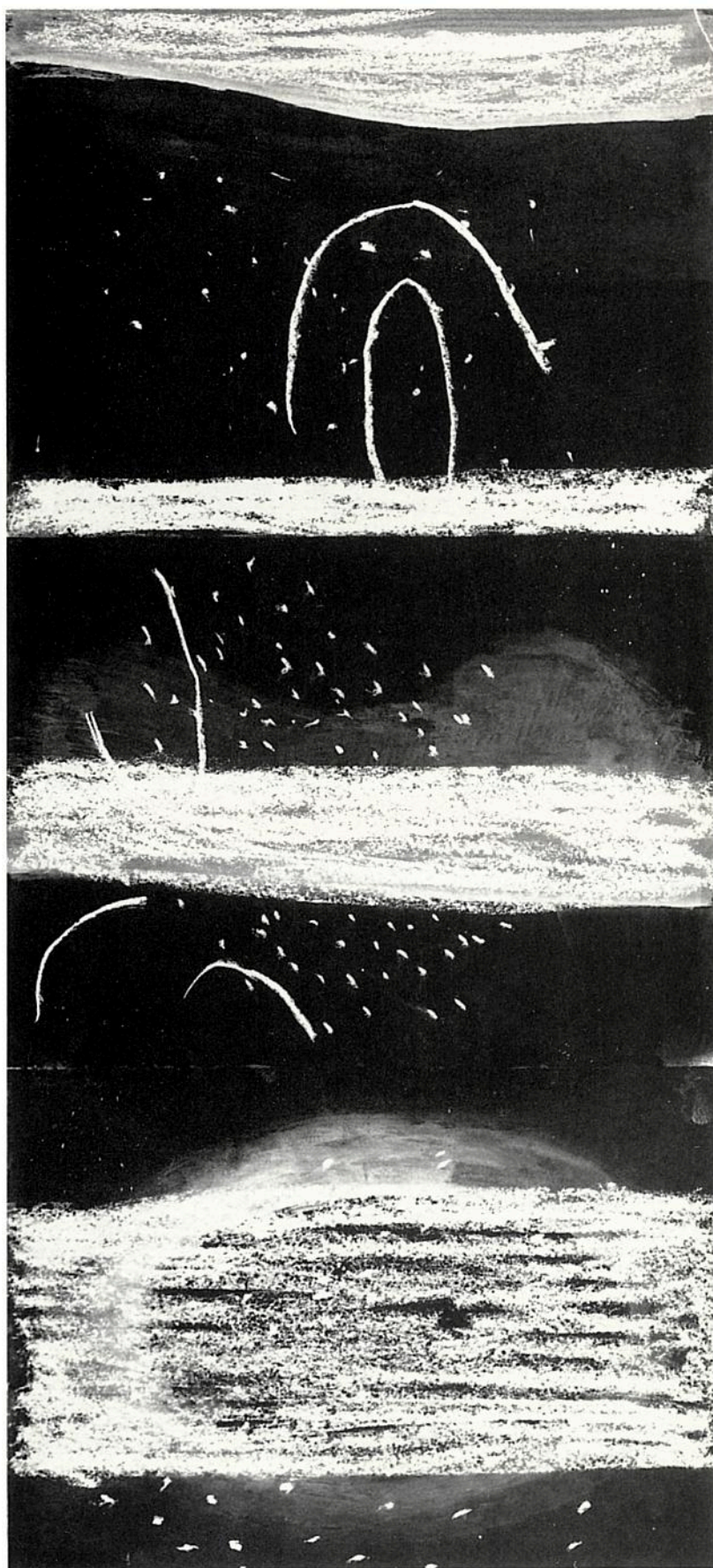
Rather than maintaining an integrity to materials, Janet Laurence explores a range of media to activate associations. Her iridescent layers of metallic materials hint at the fleetingness of light, water and air, by contrast to the earthy element of ground charcoal placed on the floor.

Whilst charcoal conjures up burntness, smearing it by hand on paper also records her bodily movements. The rawness of material plus its immediacy of application becomes like a metaphor for a primal condition. Yet it is not just a condition capturing the spontaneous moment before conscious intervention as with, say, the Tachistes. It also signifies the pre-verbal state connoting, for Janet Laurence, the self-exploration of woman before socialisation and the imposition of man-made structures.

Orientation Series (1988)  
wood, shellac on handmade paper  
90 x 60 cms  
Photo: Malcolm Hill







Search, 1987  
 pastel, gouache on paper  
 100 x 45 cms  
 Photo: Malcolm Hill

While it could be interesting to speculate on the calligraphic nature of Janet's charcoal marks as reflectors of her residency in Japan, there are other, less tentative connections to be drawn. The absence of colour in this installation creates a silent austerity not evident in Janet's previous work. Instead of relieved assemblages, Janet began to experiment with small flat units in her Japan studio, which she likened to notes. The regularity of the paper, together with the replication of units provide a means of ordering. At the same time, as Janet became increasingly aware of interstitial space in Japanese architecture, she began to see this process as a way of degrading, of 'depicturing', to fracture pictorial space. Hence whilst the fragments operate as loci in sensory space, they also define intervals which, like looming shadows, become conspicuous as absence.

All parts of Janet Laurence's installation, fragments, wall and floor space, are then imbricated within one another. By summoning up taste, touch and smell, she creates a tantalizing experience of immersion, in which space and objects become inseparable and can only be absorbed as a whole. As Janet's title may imply, her installation can also be contemplated in relation to the feminine - in relation to woman's relative lack of centrality, her bodily multiplicities, her incompleteness but also her interconnectness<sup>(6)</sup>. By weaving a web of fragments through her installation, ultimately Janet Laurence evokes an interconnected space in which there is 'room enough for everything to exist', where 'everything is worth exchanging, nothing is privileged, nothing is refused'<sup>(7)</sup>.

Fay Brauer  
 February, 1989.

<sup>(1)</sup> Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, Beacon Press, Boston, 1969, pp 100-102.

<sup>(2)</sup> Luce Irigaray, *Divine Women*, Local Consumption Occasional Paper 8, Sydney, April, 1986, p 2.

<sup>(3)</sup> Marcel Proust, *Recherche 'a temps perdu*, vol. 1, Chatto & Windus, London, 1981, pp 48 - 51.

<sup>(4)</sup> Charles Baudelaire, *Les Fleurs du mal*, first pb. 1857:

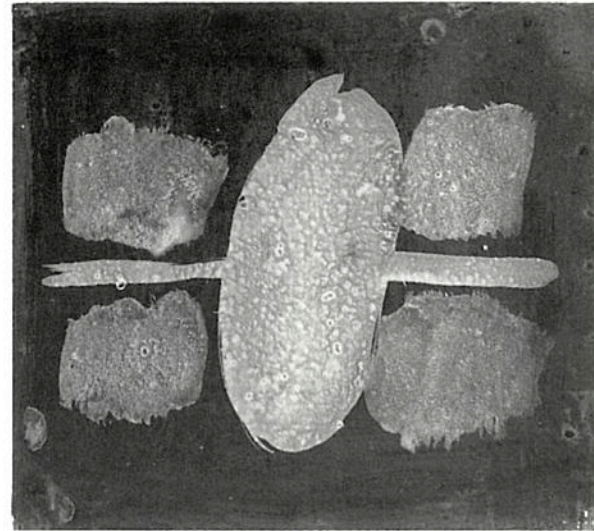
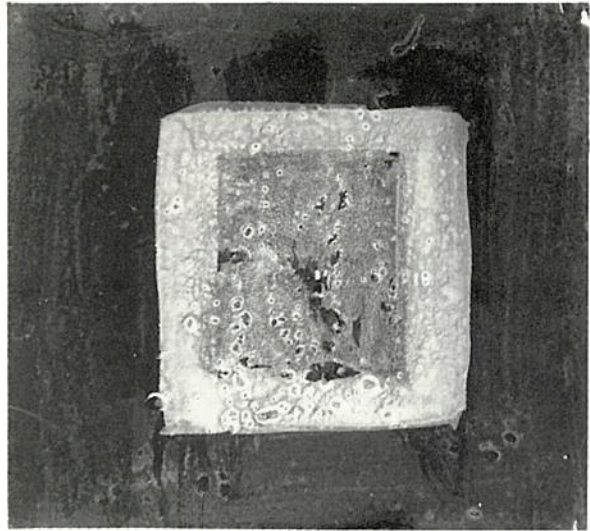
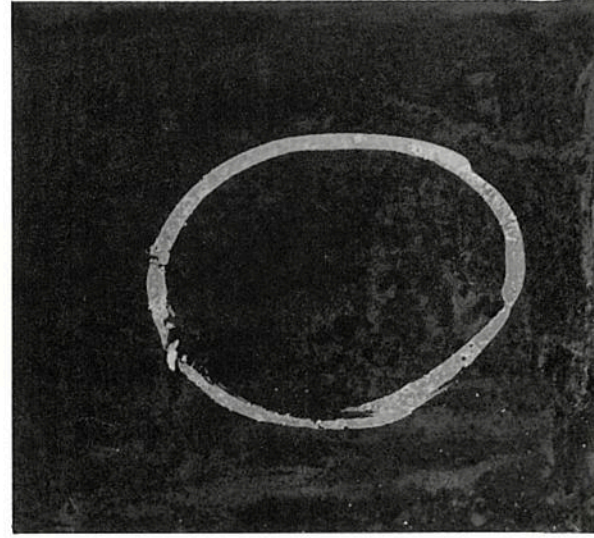
"Comme de longs échos qui de loin se confondent  
 Dans une ténébreuse et profonde unité,  
 Vaste comme la nuit et comme la clarte,  
 Les parfums, les couleurs et les sons se répondent."

<sup>(5)</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Nomad Art*, in *Mille Plateaux*, Minuit, Paris, 1980, pp 614-24.

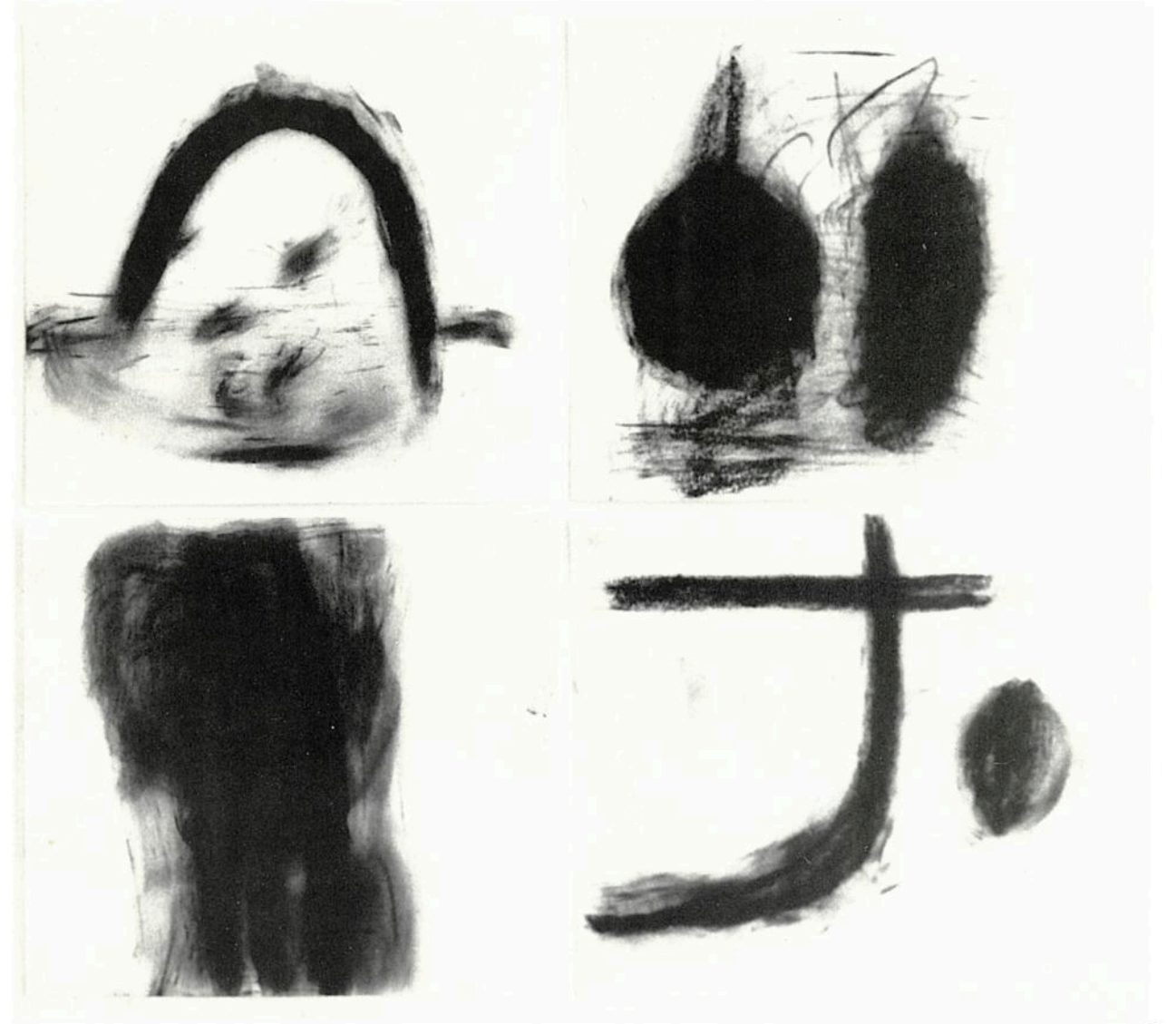
<sup>(6)</sup> Janet Laurence's exhibition title refers to Luce Irigaray's *The Blind Spot on an Old Dream of Symmetry*, in which this 'exiled lacanian' deconstructs Freud's apriori of sexual symmetry as defined by the male. Hence woman's prescription in terms of 'lack', (the sex which is not one), rather than 'différence'.

<sup>(7)</sup> Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which is Not One*, (transl. Catherine Porter), Cornell University Press, New York, 1985, p. 214.



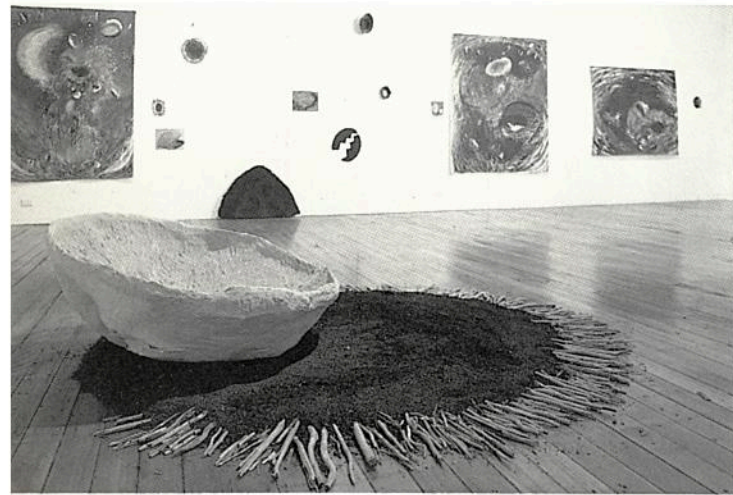


**From the Shadow, 1989** (detail)  
coal, charcoal, gouache, pigment on Stonehenge  
24 x 27 cms each unit  
Photo: Malcolm Hill



**Blindspot, 1989** (detail)  
pigment, charcoal on archival parchment  
24 x 27 cms each unit  
Photo: Malcolm Hill





**The Madonna in the Stone Has a Memory, 1983**  
paper, gauze, oil-stick, plastic  
Installation: Melbourne University Gallery, 1983



**Life is Probably Round, 1985**  
mixed media  
Installation: Artspace, Sydney, 1985  
Photo: Greg Piper

## BIOGRAPHY

Born 1949, Sydney.  
Studied University of Sydney  
Academia Belle Arte, Perugia  
Alexander Mackie College, Sydney  
New York Studio School  
City Art Institute, Sydney

## SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 1982 ZONA-Australia, Florence, Italy
- 1983 S.C.H.E.M.A. Gallery, Florence, Italy.
- 1984 *Surface and Image*, Crafts Council Gallery, Sydney and Lewers Regional Gallery, Penrith.  
*26 Characters*, Adelaide Festival Exhibition.
- 1985 *A Contemporary Australian Art*, Warwick Arts Trust Gallery, London U.K.  
*ISOL-Australia*, Venice, Italy.  
*AUSTRALIANA*, Belgrade, Yugoslavia.  
*Perspecta '85*, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney.
- 1986 *Coincidence of Location*, First Draft Gallery, Sydney.  
*Vessels of Meaning*, Scholaric Arts Council Gallery, New York, U.S.A.  
*Oz Drawing Now*, Holdsworth Contemporary Art Gallery, Sydney.
- 1987 *Tutti Fruitti*, Milan Art Fair, Italy.  
*The Age of Collage*, Holdsworth Contemporary Art Gallery, Sydney.  
*Nature and Technology*, Sanctuary Cove, Queensland.  
*Abstract*, King St. Gallery, Newtown.
- 1988 *Abstraction By Degree*, Milburn + Arte, Brisbane.  
*200 Years of Australian Drawing*, Australian Drill Hall, Australian National University and Australian National Gallery, Canberra, A.C.T.  
*Directors Choice*, Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology Gallery, Melbourne.
- 1989 *Intimate Drawing*, Coventry Gallery, Sydney.

## SOLO EXHIBITIONS

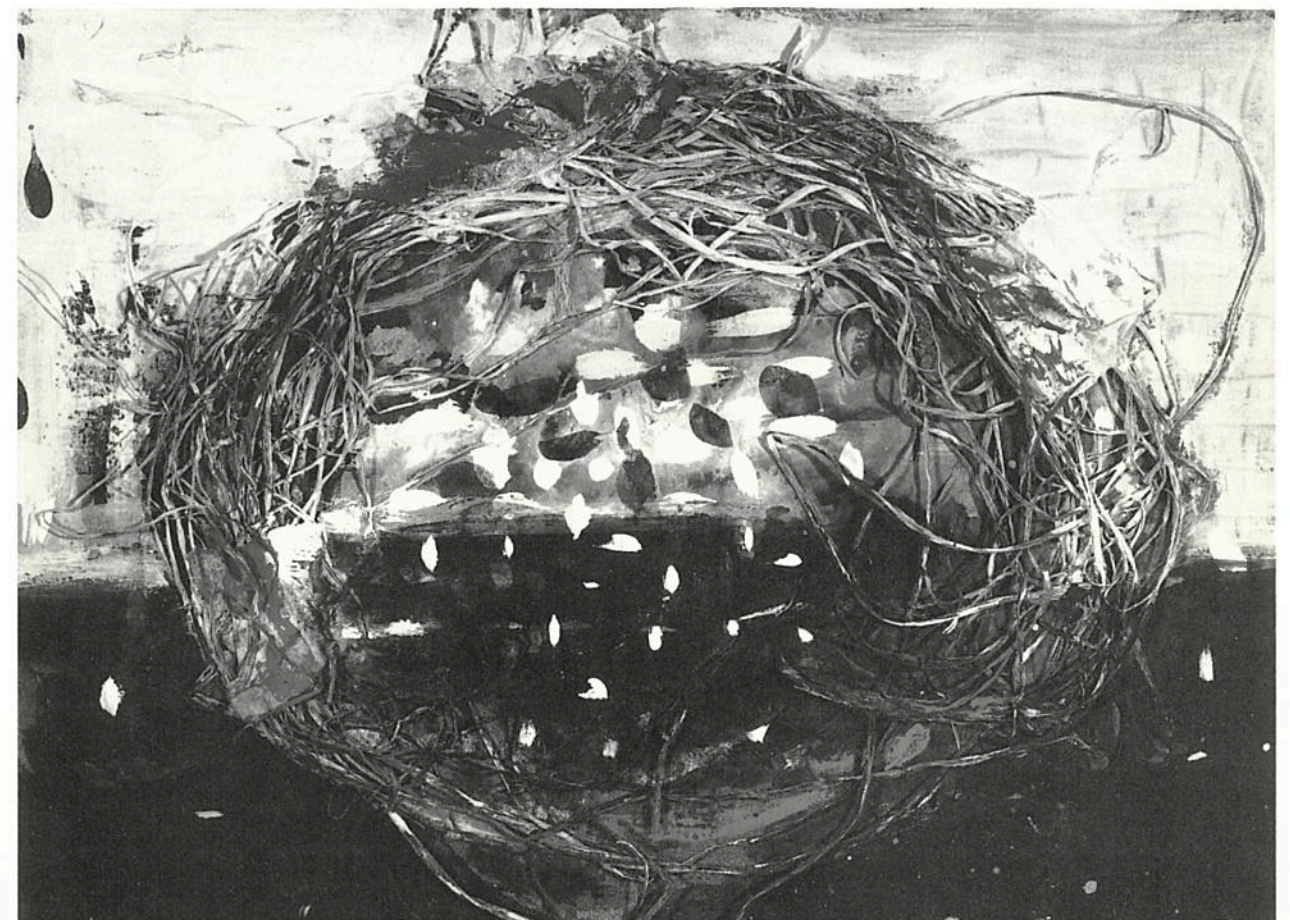
- 1981 *Notes from the Shore*, I.C.A. Central St., Sydney.
- 1982 *Strings for Glass*, Brisbane College of Art Gallery.  
Roslyn Oxley 9 Gallery, Sydney.  
*Recollections*, Perc Tucker Regional Gallery, Townsville.
- 1983 *Toiana*, Adelaide Festival Centre Gallery.  
*The Madonna in the Stone has a Memory*, Melbourne University Gallery.  
*Memories in the Stone*, Experimental Art Foundation, Adelaide.
- 1984 *Ice Memory*, Avago Gallery, Sydney.
- 1985 United Artists Gallery, Melbourne.  
Garry Anderson Gallery, Sydney.  
*Life is Probably Round*, Artspace, Sydney.
- 1986 *Spells of Origin*, Wollongong Regional Gallery.
- 1987 Garry Anderson Gallery, Sydney.  
*The Blind Spot of an Old Dream of Symmetry*, Michael Milburn Galleries, Brisbane.  
*MEIOSIS*, United Artists Gallery, Melbourne.

- 1988 *Elsewhere*, King Street, Newtown.
- 1989 *From the Shadow*, Canberra School of Art Gallery, A.C.T.  
Garry Anderson Gallery, Sydney.  
Ivan Dougherty Gallery, Sydney.

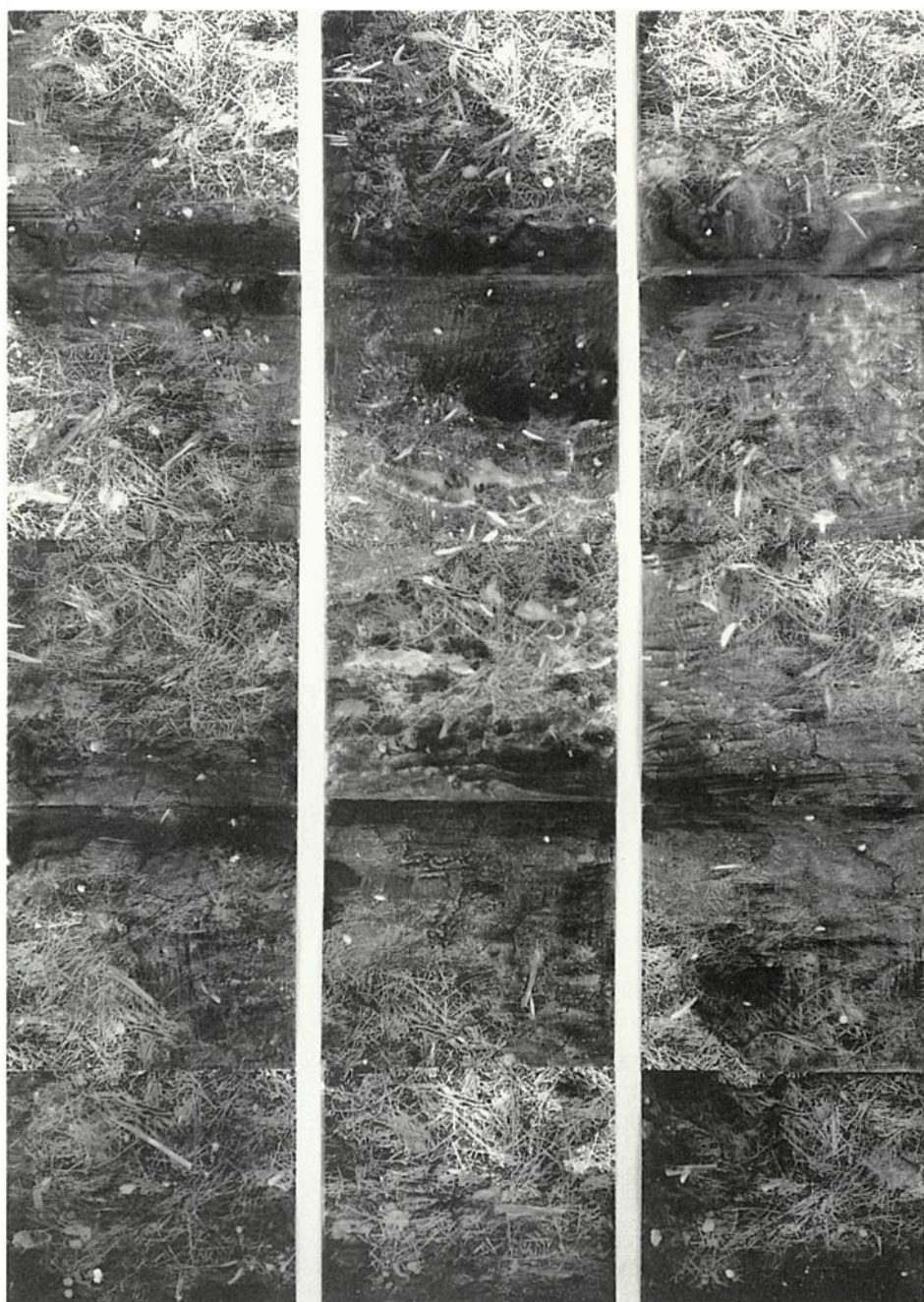
## AWARDS

- 1982 Gold Coast City Art Purchase Award.  
Women in the Arts Painting Prize, Sydney.
- 1984 Campbelltown Drawing Purchase Prize, N.S.W.
- 1985 Camden Painting Prize.
- 1986 Woollahra-Waverley Art Prize, Sydney.
- 1987 Maitland Painting Prize, N.S.W.  
Lake Macquarie Art Prize, N.S.W.  
Pring Prize, Art Gallery of N.S.W.
- 1988 Newcastle Invitation Purchase Painting

*Elsewhere*, 1988 (detail)  
mixed media on paper, 29 x 35 cms  
Photo: Robert Parkes







**Blindspot, 1989** (detail)  
 photocopy, metallic paint, shellac  
 on archival parchment  
 24 x 27 cms each unit  
 Photo: Malcolm Hill

## COLLECTIONS

Australian National Gallery, Canberra; New Parliament House Collection, Canberra; Gold Coast Regional Gallery, Queensland; Newcastle Regional Gallery, N.S.W.; Muswellbrook Regional Art Gallery, N.S.W.; New England Regional Art Museum, Armidale, N.S.W.; Campbelltown Regional Gallery, N.S.W.; Camden Regional Collection, N.S.W.; Faber Castell Collection; S.C.H.E.M.A. Collection, Florence, Italy; Darling Downs Institute, Queensland, private collections in Australia, U.K., Italy.

## RESIDENCIES AND GRANTS

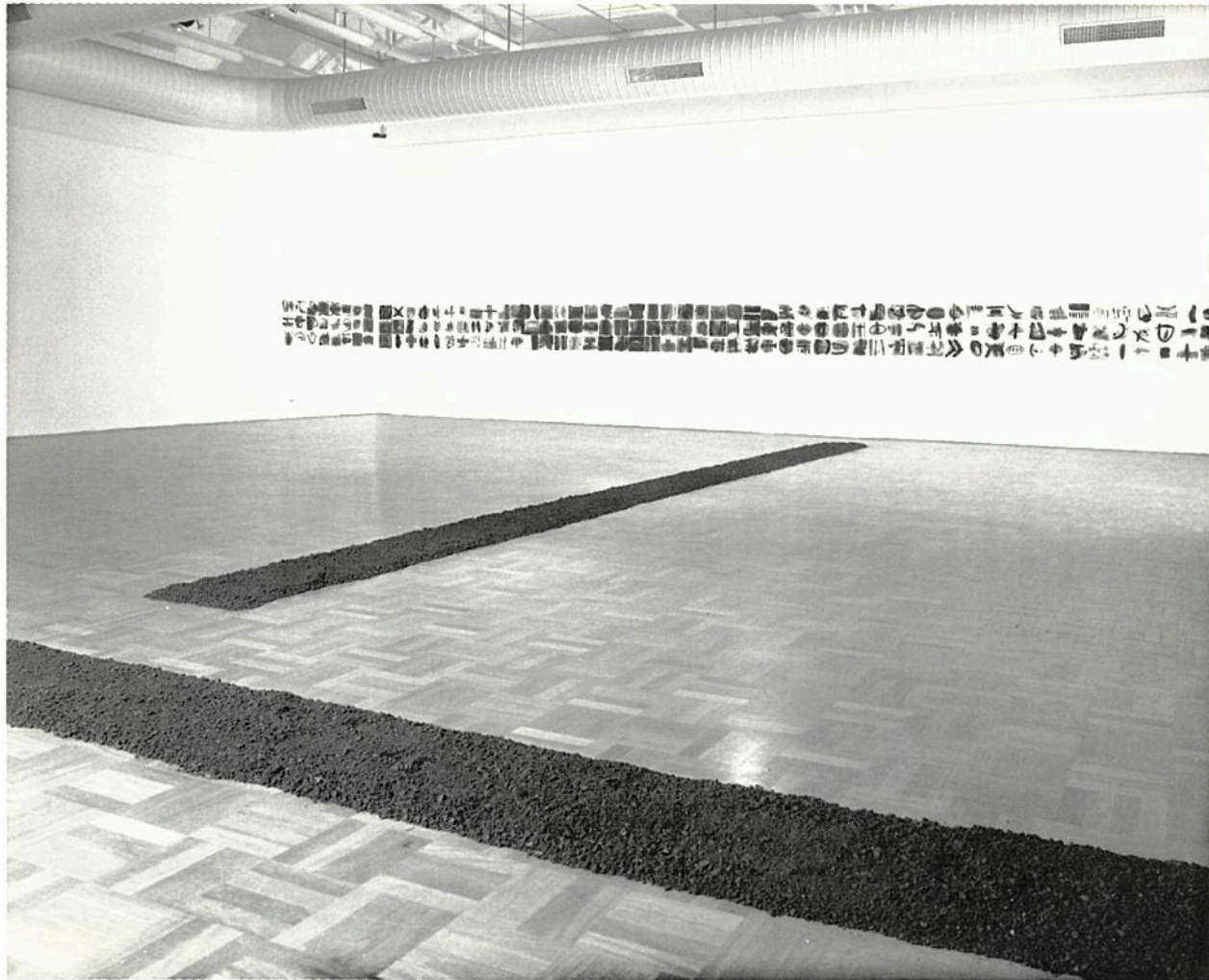
|      |  |
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| 1980 | Bennington College, Vermont, U.S.A.  |
| 1983 | Paretaio, Italy, Visual Arts Board, Australia Council.<br>V.A.B. Travel Grant        |
| 1987 | Canberra School of Art<br>V.A.B. Project Grant                                       |
| 1988 | Tokyo, Japan, Visual Arts/Craft Board, Australia Council.<br>Canberra School of Art. |

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 BRITTON, S., *26 Characters*, catalogue essay, March, 1984.  
 MCDONALD, J., *Life is Probably Round*, catalogue essay, April, 1985.  
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 ACHILLE, B.O. & BLACKALL, J., "ISOL-Australia", *Domus*, July, 1985.  
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 DELARUELLE, J., "Janet Laurence at Art Space", *Art Press*, Paris, September, 1985.  
 CROSS, E., "Life is Probably Round", *Art Network*, October, 1985.  
 BLACKALL, J., *AUSTRALIANA*, Belgrade, Yugoslavia, October, 1985.  
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 MOORE, C., "The Darker Side of the Great Divide", *Sydney Morning Herald*, April 28, 1987.  
 STEWART, M., "Playing Down the Line", *Express*, April, 1987.  
 BRAUER, F., "From the One into the Other", *Art Monthly*, Sydney, July, 1987.  
 WOODCOCK, P., "Boomtime for Dreamtime", *Courier Mail*, Brisbane, October 28, 1987.

CATALANO, G., "The Ordinary with the Extraordinary", *The Age*, November, 1987.  
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 MCINTYRE, A., *Contemporary Australian Drawing*, Boolarong Publications, Brisbane, 1988.  
 HAYNES, P., *From the Shadow* catalogue essay, October 1988.  
 BARRON, S., "A Total Experience", *Canberra Times*, October 26, 1988.





From the Shadow, 1988  
charcoal, pigment on paper (walls), coal (floor)  
Installation: Canberra School of Art Gallery, 1988  
Photo: Hahn Tran

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