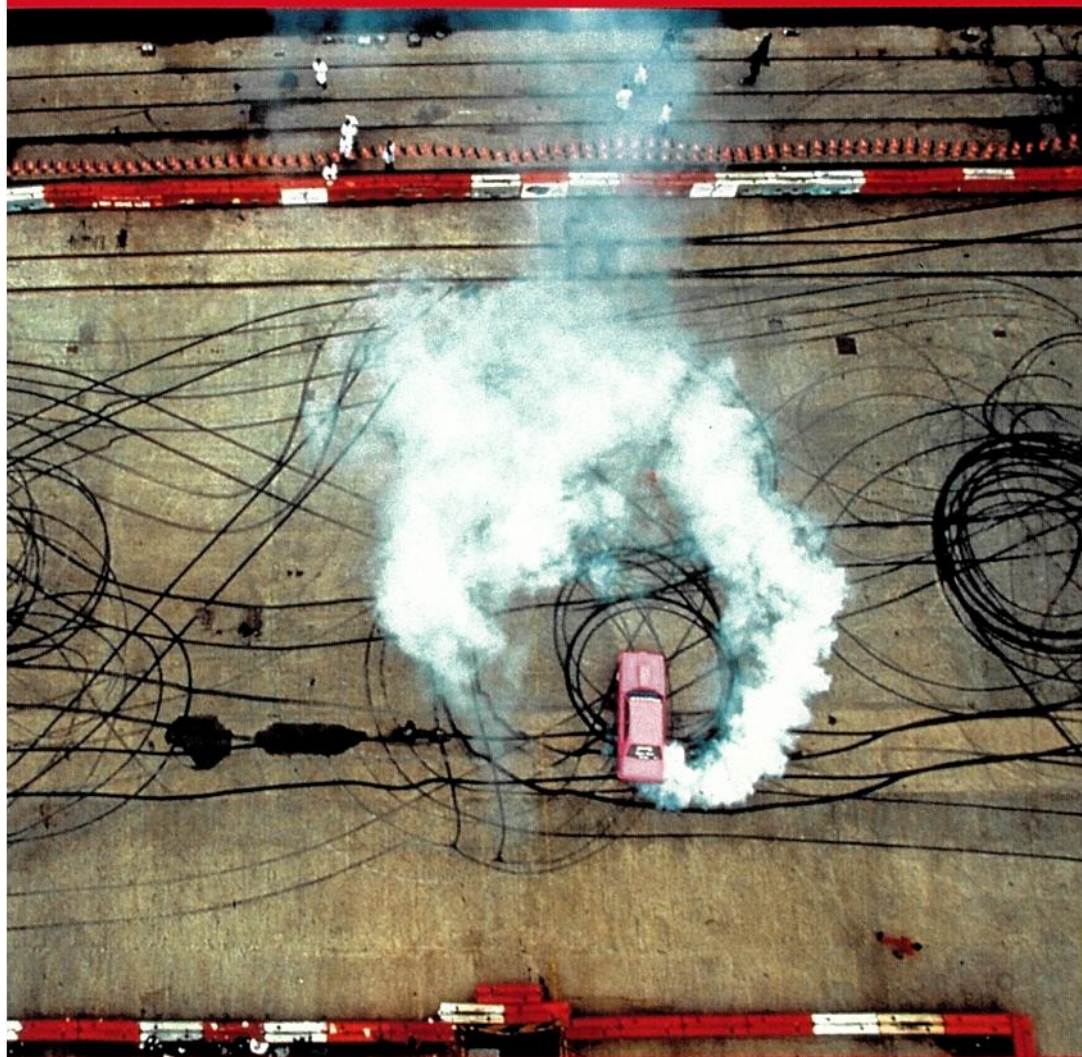


# LOVE LETTER TO CHINA: Drawings by 35 Australian artists



Suzanne Archer Tom Arthur Deborah Beck Godwin Bradbeer Peter Burgess  
Tim Burns Jon Cattapan Jonathan Dady Michael Downs Mike Esson David  
Fairbairn Rina Franz Richard Goodwin Ian Grant Anton Hart Patrick Hartigan  
Philip Hunter Meagan Keating Victoria King Barbie Kjar Maria Kontis Nungalka  
Kunmanara & Nura Rupert Vivienne Miller Ben Morieson Anne Morrison  
Jacqueline Rose Sylvia Ross Bernhard Sachs David Thomas Tony Twigg  
Trevor Weekes Paula Wong Helen Wright Michael Zavros Paul Zika



## THE ONLY THING CERTAIN IN LIFE, IT SEEMS, IS UNCERTAINTY

During 2001 and 2002 the International Drawing Research Institute (IDRI) invested considerable time and effort in developing four major projects for 2003. The first was an experimental drawing event to be carried out by hundreds of students and artists in the western Chinese city of Xi'an. An army of artists was to draw the terra-cotta warriors. The second event followed on in Xi'an and was to be the most comprehensive international drawing exhibition ever held in China, with an associated colloquium. Consisting of more than 200 works gathered from Australia, China and the United Kingdom, this exhibition was to travel to Guangzhou and Beijing. The third project was to bring a more tightly focused exhibition of Chinese drawings to the Ivan Dougherty Gallery (IDG) during July, and the fourth was the linking of this show to the inspired Drawing Connections II conference at the College of Fine Arts.

Then there was SARS.

It is of interest to note that at all times leading up to the Xi'an project and exhibition, all parties were determined to push ahead, not careless of the threat of SARS, considering the risk, willing to take precautions and determined to see this important work realised. In the end, and at the most critical moment, (early May) local travel in China was banned and international travel more than strongly discouraged. The event in Xi'an had to be pulled.

Further, the necessarily determined manner in which the Chinese authorities have contained the spread of SARS has meant that the curatorial work for the Chinese exhibition for the IDG has also been curtailed. Typical of any good organisation, there is always a capacity to respond to adversity. With the agreement of the participating Australian artists the IDRI has been able to redirect the show originally planned for China into the IDG July time slot and characteristically title it *Love Letter to China*. The Drawing Connections II conference will coincide, and it is expected that a delegation of senior artists from our partner institution, the Central Academy of Fine Arts, Beijing, will be able to join us here in Sydney.

Although these are uncertain times, it is reassuring to see that through a combination of good ideas, hard work, strong long-term friendships, and purposeful and flexible institutions, adversity can be tamed and in this instance, excellent outcomes for art and artists prevail.

## WITH LOVE TO CHINA

The impulse to draw, to leave a mark, the trace of an idea, reflects more than a personal act of creativity, it defines who and what we are. It conveys what our values are, how we think and feel, more directly than any other form of visual expression. It is the most immediate way of engaging with experience, of observing our world and giving voice to our imagination. There is no hiding place; drawing is the fingerprint of art.

Drawing no longer embodies moral and aesthetic certainty, the received experience and knowledge of drawing whether formal or not, is like the children's game of Chinese whispers where that which is handed on, changes, develops and transforms through both understanding and misinterpretation. Where the line of tradition is broken there are exciting possibilities of bridging, reviewing and re-inventing the drawing process. It is to this end that the International Drawing Research Institute (IDRI) is committed.

The IDRI is a consortium of three art schools; the Glasgow School of Art, Scotland, the Central Academy of Fine Art, Beijing, and the College of Fine Arts, The University of New South Wales.

The aim of IDRI is to support, encourage and promote the role of drawing in contemporary art practice through a range of research initiatives. The exhibition *Love Letter to China* demonstrates well the value of this collaborative activity bringing together drawings from throughout Australia, which clearly explore the rich diversity of drawing strategies. The three founder members of IDRI welcome project partners, in the form of either individual artists or institutions to join with them in specific projects which will not only propose exhibitions of already existing works, but produce new and challenging drawings embracing the traditions, together with the dynamic possibilities of what drawing offers in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

### Michael Esson

Director, International Drawing Research Institute



Jon Cattapan *Ball Game* 2002  
ink, pencil, watercolour 36 x 52 cm





Trevor Weekes *I Dreamt I Could Fly* 2002  
conte, carbon, graphite pencils 100 x 100 cm

## CONCEPT, PROCESS AND TRADITION IN AUSTRALIAN DRAWING

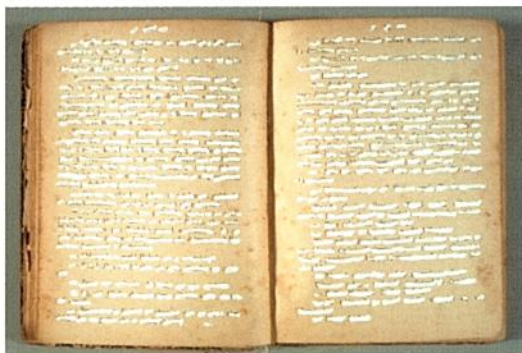
As Professor Ian Howard, Dean of COFA, so accurately said in his introduction “along came SARS”. It came from left field and with the same suddenness and long-term change of world view that we also associate with September 11. But what if SARS had never happened? My catalogue essay to the proposed China projects and exhibitions would have started something like this. And I reproduce it here to show the thinking behind what might have been, and one day will be:

I was delighted to be invited to curate this exhibition of contemporary Australian drawing which will be seen in three important venues in China. From the beginning, I was determined that it should take as broad a view of the act of drawing as possible and that it should represent Australians from many different states and regions across the continent. Some of these artists are young and emerging, others are senior and have established international reputations. Collectively, they trained at over twenty art schools in Australia and overseas. I would like to thank them all for the enthusiasm they have brought to this project.

Some drawings, such as that by Godwin Bradbeer in Melbourne or Mike Esson in Sydney grow out of years of hard looking in the life drawing studio. In some works a narrative element is added to the pure recording of visual events. Meagan

Keating and Paul Zika from Tasmania, Australia’s island state, use the most noble elements of decoration and pattern making in works that also celebrate colour and form. Some work is highly experimental and grows from a conceptual basis. Jacqueline Drinkall from Sydney, who recently submitted a PhD on the topic of telepathy, makes drawings which take exactly one hour to complete. During the course of those

Bernhard Sachs *Agnostic Dispersion Project*  
1997 book 16.5 x 12.5 x 2.5 cm



sixty minutes she does not allow her hand to remove the pencil from the surface of the paper. Other artists work with sheer spectacle. Ben Morieson from Melbourne films V8 cars burning rubber on a cement forecourt. What he creates is a trace of a fast, mechanical movement in which the driver of the car has to manipulate the steering wheel with the same urgency as someone drawing manipulates a pencil or stub of charcoal. I commend all of the artists in this exhibition to you and hope you agree that the ancient art of drawing is very much alive right across Australia and is of great contemporary relevance.

Then along came SARS. Hope gave way to pragmatism. A new exhibition was born. Again, all the artists, curators, gallery, academic and administrative staff showed heroic determination that a significant event would still happen. This is what we now have, coinciding with the International Drawing Research Institute's biennial conference, but importantly also paralleling two major drawing exhibitions at Sydney's Museum of Contemporary Art. One is the work of London-based artist Avis Newman, and the other is her selection of drawings from the past three centuries, drawn from the Tate Gallery's permanent collection. Before coming to Sydney this exhibition was enthusiastically received at The Drawing Center, New York.

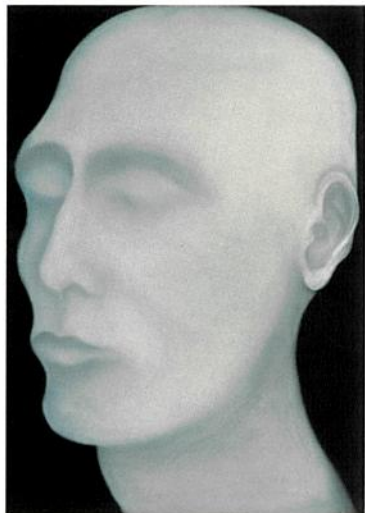
The title *Love Letter to China* is supposed to represent an on-going dialogue between the members of the International Drawing Research Institute and collegial practitioners around the world. For that reason, this exhibition is neither exhaustive nor all-inclusive. The fact that Euan Heng in Melbourne, Mary Scott in Tasmania, John Olsen in Sydney, or the perpetually travelling and drawing John Wolseley are not in this exhibition only underscores the need for future exchange and dialogue. Wherever it is next time, I look forward to seeing you there, with news faces, new marks, and new representations of the human condition.

**Peter Hill** Curator



Ian Grant *Tulips* 2003  
airbrush acrylic ink 75 x 46 cm

Helen Wright *Head of a Man* 2000  
pastel on paper 97 x 76 cm





**LOVE LETTER TO CHINA:  
Drawings by 35 Australian artists**

24 July – 30 August 2003

Curator: Peter Hill

Design: Sally Robinson  
Publisher: Ivan Dougherty Gallery,  
UNSW COFA

PO Box 259 Paddington NSW 2021

Copyright © Ivan Dougherty Gallery, UNSW COFA  
and contributors

(COVER IMAGE) Ben Morieson *Burnout 2001 – Torana Spiral 2001*  
photograph 51 x 84 cm Photographer: John Donegan

ISBN: 0 7334 2056 7



International Drawing Research Institute

**IVAN  
DOUGHERTY  
GALLERY**

**The University of New South Wales • College of Fine Arts**  
Selwyn St Paddington NSW 2021 Australia Tel +612 9385 0726 Fax +612 9385 0603  
Email [idg@unsw.edu.au](mailto:idg@unsw.edu.au) Website [www.cofa.unsw.edu.au/galleries/idg/news/](http://www.cofa.unsw.edu.au/galleries/idg/news/)  
Hours Monday to Saturday 10am – 5pm closed Sundays and public holidays

**COFA  
UNSW**