

**HANDLE
WITH
CARE**

2008 Adelaide Biennial of Australian Art

inside cover detail: Lorraine Connelly-Northey
O'Possum Skin Cloak, 2007

woven rusted barbed wire, 135 x 230 cm
South Australian Government Grant 2007
Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide
Courtesy of the artist and Gallery Gabrielle Pizzi, Sydney

p. 6 detail: Catherine Woo
Blue Sky Project – puff, 2007
mixed media on canvas
194 x 133 cm
Private collection

p. 7 detail: James Darling and Lesley Forwood
Protest at Didicoolum Drain Extension construction site, South Australia, 2007
Courtesy Greenaway Art Gallery, Adelaide
photo: James Darling

p. 8 detail: Hossein Valamanesh
Longing Belonging, 1997
direct colour positive photograph, carpet
2 components 99 x 99 cm, 215 x 305 cm
Collection: Art Gallery of New South Wales
photo: Rick Martin

p. 9 detail: Ken Yonetani
Sweet Barrier Reef, 2005
white sugar, icing sugar, vegetable gum,
polystyrene foam and ceramics
160 x 1200 x 600 cm (approx.)
installation view, Artspace, Sydney
Courtesy the artist
photo: Lucy Macnaught

p. 10 detail: Dorothy Napangardi
Mina Mina Country, 2007
acrylic on linen
152 x 76 cm
Courtesy Gallery Gondwana, Alice Springs

p. 11 detail: Kate Rohde
In My Nature, 2007
mixed media
dimensions variable
Courtesy the artist and Kaliman Gallery, Sydney

p. 12 detail: Alfredo and Isabel Aquilizan
Be-longing: In-Transit, 2006
personal effects, Sampaguita scent
dimensions variable
Courtesy the artists and Jan Manton Art, Brisbane

p. 13: James Newitt
altered state (video still), 2006
two-channel DVD video installation
14 minutes
Courtesy the artist

p. 14 detail: Gregory Pyror
Black Noise (Ghost of Tongcao), 2007
ink on Chinese silk and paper
118 x 1608 cm (approx.)
Courtesy the artist and Lister Gallery, Perth

p. 15: Dennis Del Favero
Eclipse (280208) (video still), 2008
two-channel DVD video installation
8 minutes
Courtesy Galleries Andreas Binder, Munich, Marion Scharmman,
Cologne, and Mori Gallery, Sydney

p. 16 detail: Dadang Christanto
Never Ending Stories, 2008
acrylic paint on used cardboard
150 x 500 x 500 cm
Courtesy the artist

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FOREWORD

The term 'handle with care' implies fragility, vulnerability and exceptional care. The *2008 Adelaide Biennial of Australian Art* – entitled *Handle with Care* – presents a range of current art practice in Australia which, among other things, draws attention to the fragility of life, of culture and, significantly, given the importance for our long-term survival and its relevance to national public debates, of the environment. Artists, as much as any other sector in our society, are concerned with these complex and contentious issues. Often it is the artist – isolated, studious, engrossed – who is most engaged. Through his or her work the artist offers new concepts, new perceptions, new approaches.

Handle with Care: 2008 Adelaide Biennial of Australian Art includes recent work by twenty-two artists and artist teams living and working in Australia. Their range of artistic and cultural backgrounds and experiences is impressive. This is reflected in the wide variety of work in the exhibition – paintings, drawings, sculptures, installations, film and video – and in subjects and issues that they address.

I am grateful to all of the artists for their commitment to the *Biennial* and for allowing us to represent their work in this important forum. I would also like to thank the many lenders who have so generously made works available for display.

Felicity Fenner is to be thanked and congratulated for presenting such a stimulating exhibition and group of artists. With her carefully selected cross-section of artists she has managed to achieve her aim – to give the *2008 Biennial* a new look. It is to her credit that none of the artists included in it has been shown in a previous *Adelaide Biennial*. Given that the first *Biennial* was held in 1990 and that each has contained well over twenty artists, many of whom are among Australia's most prominent, this is no mean feat. Ms Fenner has selected an impressive and balanced cohort of well-established artists, along with some who are less familiar in this context.

Several Art Gallery of South Australia staff have been involved with the production of this exhibition, and I thank all of them for their efforts: David O'Connor, Exhibitions and Public Programs Manager; Asher Faulkner, Exhibitions and Public Programs Officer; Vicki Petrusевичs, Assistant Registrar; and Anne Wright, Registration Assistant; and the Installation Team and Workshop. Antonietta Itropico, Publications Manager, has designed and produced the catalogue, which has been edited by Penelope Curtin.

The presentation of the *Biennial* over two decades has been a long-term commitment of the Art Gallery of South Australia, as well as of the funding bodies that support it. This project has been assisted by the Australian Government through the Australia Council, its arts funding and advisory body, and by the Visual Arts and Craft Strategy, an initiative of the Australian, state and territory governments. The Gallery is also grateful for the continued funding support provided by the Adelaide Bank Festival of Arts. This funding enables presentation of the *Biennial* and publication of this catalogue. Several other organisations have assisted artists in the production of their work and they are acknowledged elsewhere in this publication.

Handle with Care: 2008 Adelaide Biennial of Australian Art is an exciting and challenging exhibition. I am sure that these new works, arranged so thoughtfully, will confront, engage and delight.

Christopher Menz

JAMES NEWITT

Altered State

In this work, James Newitt juxtaposes footage of three performances. They are all singers and that the performers are Africans who live in Tasmania lends the work a power beyond the intimate voyeuristic qualities of the quasi-documentary approach adopted by the artist. This nuanced video installation throws into high relief a complex web of recent economic, socio-political and art-historical issues.

Around the globe, music and singing are concerned with the broad social expression of life experience. They are said to have therapeutic value, they are survival tools. Music and singing make people happy. In theory at least, everyone has a voice, their own sound. In the home cultures of Fabio, Aurelia and Alfred, singing is innately linked to family and to community. Usually involving an extended series of call and response, waiting and listening, then reply, in *altered state*, however, the performances are strangely singular and introverted. The performances are staged in the drab and rudimentary domestic environments of 1950s and 1960s-style government housing. Here we become witnesses in the processes of strategic remembrance (Fabio, Aurelia) and perhaps forgetting (Alfred). The latter sings 'original' rap in his mother's lounge room, while the former are re-enacting and re-experiencing events from the past. James Newitt's work makes the subject position of both performer and audience one of dis-ease. There is no moment when the self-consciousness of the singer and non-singer disappears. The absence of subtitles and the split screen format are calibrated

to emphasise this quality of awkward separateness.

At present Tasmania is now home to about a thousand people from Africa. Since 1960 severe political crisis (over thirty wars) is the condition of the African continent. With a few notable exceptions, the tenets of liberal democracy – the rule of law, citizens' rights to regular elections, free expression and association – have been shown to be a post-colonialist fantasy. In the twenty-first century we have become inured to the new languages of post-colonialism. Whether it is state-sanctioned or caused by civil wars, forced eviction of peoples, or as it is politely known, 'population transfer', is commonplace. In *altered state* the performers are refugees from Sierra Leone, Sudan and Zimbabwe.

What survives, what grows in the wake of immigration? While radical dislocation and displacement have been popular formalist art tools since the 1970s, this video demands consideration of the psychic and cultural effects of radical dislocation and displacement on refugees from Sierra Leone, Sudan and Zimbabwe.

In this case, it is glib to state that isolation is merely a state of mind. The denial of black-white relations, imprisonment and exile are *leitmotifs* in the cultural history of Australia. Geographically, Van Dieman's Land/Tasmania is even more isolated from the rest of the world than Australia itself. So it goes without saying how weird things are in this singularly conservative, white bred state of Tasmania. Is this place the hope of a better life?

Craig Judd

altered state (video still), 2006
two-channel DVD video installation
14 minutes
Courtesy the artist



DOROTHY NAPANGARDI

Dorothy Napangardi (Walpiri; born c.1956, Tanami Desert, Northern Territory) is one of Australia's most highly acclaimed Aboriginal artists. She paints a women's ceremonial site known as Mina Mina, the artist's custodial country near Lake Mackay in the Tanami Desert, north of Yuendumu. Her work has featured in exhibitions throughout Australia, as well as in Europe and North America. In 2001 she won the prestigious National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art Award and in 2002 her work was the subject of a major survey exhibition and publication produced by the Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney – *Dancing Up Country: The work of Dorothy Napangardi*. Her paintings are in the collections of the National Gallery of Australia, the National Gallery of Victoria and the Art Gallery of South Australia, as well as in many regional and corporate collections in Australia and the United States. Napangardi is represented by Gallery Gondwana in Sydney and Alice Springs. She is based in Alice Springs.

JAMES NEWITT

James Newitt (born 1981, Hobart) received a Bachelor of Fine Arts (Honours) in 2003 and has recently completed a PhD at the Tasmanian School of Art. His work has been exhibited in *Hatched*, Perth Institute for Contemporary Art (2004) and in the *City of Devonport Art Prize* (2004, 2006). Recent group exhibitions include *Next Wave Festival*, Melbourne (2006), and a major billboard project throughout Hobart (with Justy Phillips) for *Ten Days on the Island*, Hobart (2007). Newitt is a founding board member of INFLIGHT, Tasmania's only artist-run initiative. In 2006 *altered state* was screened at *Electroprojections – The Doco Hour*, Electrofringe Festival, Newcastle, and at the First International Film and Memorialisation conference, University of Applied Sciences, Germany. Newitt has been commissioned to create video and public works of art for the Royal Tasmanian Botanical Gardens, the Hobart City Council and the Port Arthur Historic Site, Tasmania, among others. He lives and works in Hobart.

BRONWYN OLIVER

Bronwyn Oliver (born 1959, Inverell; died 2006, Sydney) was one of Australia's foremost contemporary sculptors. She gained a Bachelor of Education (Art) from Alexander Mackie College of Advanced Education, Sydney (1980) before winning a NSW Travelling Art Scholarship and subsequently completing an MA (Sculpture) from Chelsea School of Art, London in 1983. Oliver spent the next two decades working intensively in the creation of sculptures for exhibition and commission. She was awarded the prestigious Moët & Chandon Australian Art Fellowship in 1994 and was shortlisted for the Helen Lempriere National Sculpture Award (2001) and the Clemenger Contemporary Art Award (2006). She was selected for *Australian Perspecta* (1991), the *Asia-Pacific Triennial* (1993) and the inaugural *Beijing Biennale* (2003). Major commissioned sculptures were undertaken for the Botanic Gardens, Sydney, Queen Street Mall, Brisbane, the University of New South Wales and many corporate and private collections. The Estate of Bronwyn Oliver is represented by Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery, Sydney, and Christine Abrahams Gallery, Melbourne.

GREGORY PRYOR

Gregory Pryor (born 1958, Swan Hill, Victoria) has created installation, video, object and text-based work over a 25-year period. His recent practice has been shaped by periods of intensive and immersive travel, often through international art residency programs, to places such as France, Italy, China, Austria and Taiwan. This travel has informed Pryor's interest in and methodology for examining issues about Australia, the country of his birth. Since moving from Melbourne to Perth in 2003, his work has begun to address ideas about the threatened flora of Australia and its rich botanical history. In 2005 he held a large-scale, installation-based solo exhibition, *Black Solander*, at Perth Institute of Contemporary Arts and in 2007 he completed a two-month residency at the Taipei Artist Village in Taiwan. In 2008 Pryor will undertake a residency in Kings Wood, Kent in the United Kingdom. He is represented by Lister Gallery, Perth.

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Art Gallery of South Australia

North Terrace Adelaide South Australia 5000

tel: 61 8 8207 7000 fax: 61 8 8207 7070 www.artgallery.sa.gov.au

