

I FEEL LIKE CHICKEN TONIGHT

TOLARNO GALLERY, MELBOURNE OCTOBER 1994

ARTSPACE, SYDNEY FEBRUARY 1995

CANBERRA CONTEMPORARY ARTSPACE, MAY 1995



**I FEEL LIKE
CHICKEN
TONIGHT**

MATHEW JONES

TOLARNO GALLERIES 13 OCTOBER - 5 NOVEMBER 1994

ARTSPACE SYDNEY 20 JANUARY - 4 MARCH 1995

CANBERRA CONTEMPORARY ART SPACE 5 MAY - 4 JUNE 1995



PRESS RELEASE



***... an art
exhibition by
Mathew Jones
about gay
politics and
rogering
schoolboys***

ARTSPACE
20 JANUARY to
4 MARCH 1995

Once there was a time in the gay subculture when 'chicken' meant 'schoolboy'. Now, as part of the Sydney Gay & Lesbian Mardi Gras Festival, Artspace presents *I Feel Like Chicken Tonight* an exhibition by Mathew Jones about the mainstreaming of the gay subculture.

Jones rebels against the pressures at work within the gay community to homogenise and sanitise the image of the gay man. Taking as his mock 'cause' the rights of paedophiles, he stockpiles the gallery with flags and placards in anticipation of an uprising of rockspiders and chicken-snatchers, who'll take to the streets, to liberate Michael Jackson and demand their pleasures.

Mathew Jones is a Sydney based artist whose work about sexuality and queer politics has been widely exhibited. *I Feel Like Chicken Tonight* was shown at Tolarno Galleries as part of the 1994 Melbourne International Festival. His previous exhibition for Mardi Gras in 1993, *A Place I've Never Seen*, has subsequently been shown at the Museu de Arte Moderna in São Paulo, Brasil and is currently on tour in Canadian venues. Concurrent with *I Feel Like Chicken Tonight*, his work is appears in *Australian Perspecta '95* at the Art Gallery of NSW, and *Art in the Age of AIDS* at the National Gallery of Australia.

Other recent exhibitions include *POOF!* (1993), at the Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, Melbourne; *A Place I've Never Seen* (1993) at the Australian Centre for Photography, Sydney; and *Silence = Death* (1991) which toured Melbourne, Sydney and Brisbane venues. His work was also featured in the 1994 *Adelaide Festival*.



This exhibition has been sponsored by the Sydney Gay & Lesbian Mardi Gras Festival 1995.

For press prints or further information please contact Artspace on (02) 368 1899, or Mathew Jones on (02) 519 7015.

Artspace Visual Arts Centre, 43-51 Cowper Wharf Rd, Woolloomooloo NSW 2011. Telephone (02) 368 1899 Facsimile (02) 368 1705. Gallery Hours: Tuesday - Saturday 11.00 - 6.00.

ART
FELICITY FENNER

GENDER and sexuality, recurrent themes in contemporary art since feminist theory began its deconstruction of Freud, are the subject of an exhibition at Artspace entitled *True Stories*.

It is neither a lightweight peep-show nor a heavy visual thesis on the French theory that informs so much art being made on this subject, and the 10 artists represented combine esoteric with more personal responses to the topic.

The curator and outgoing Artspace director, Louise Pether, invited each artist "to make public their personal contemplation on the issues of sexuality and desire — acknowledging their role as cultural fabricators, speculators and originators of meaning".

The results are as individual and idiosyncratic as the nature of sex and sexuality in today's society. Unlike thematic group exhibitions based on more tangible concerns (politics, racism, for example), much of the work in *True Stories* explores the murky depths of the human psyche, raking over that paradoxical zone where hope, expectation and emotion blend together in a volatile and vulnerable cocktail of inevitably insatiable desire.

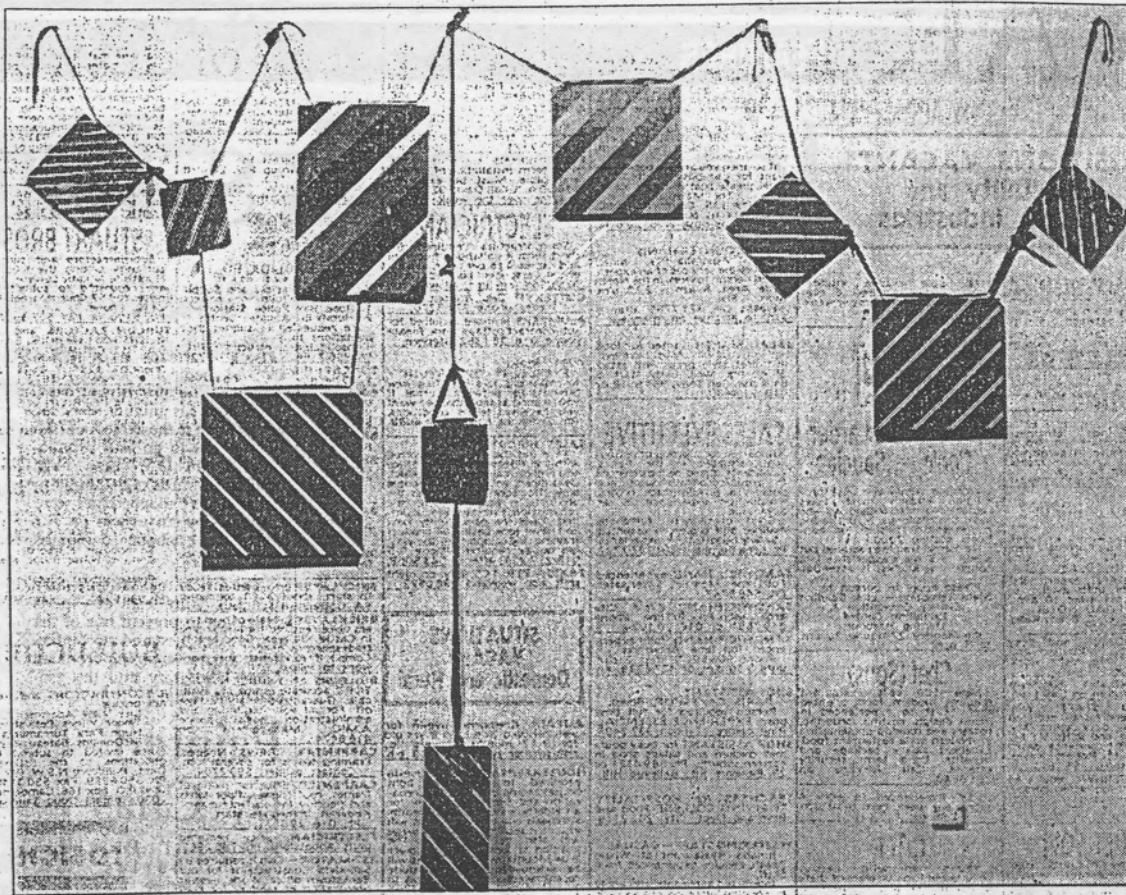
The inherent contradiction of the exhibition's title describes the impossibility of articulating a universal concept of gender and sexuality. The artists in the show reflect a truly democratic cross-section of the community.

Male and female, homosexual and heterosexual, black and white, they are aged in their 30s, 40s and early 50s.

Never before linked thematically in an exhibition (though parallels in the work of some artists have become obvious over the years), all are well known for their various forms of individual practice: Virginia Barrat as a performing cyber-feminist (only a remnant of her performance remains in the exhibition); Pat Brassington and Dennis Del Favoro as evocative, photo-based visual artists; Mikala Dwyer, Deej Fabye and Adrian Hall as creators of intense, gender-specific mixed-media installations; Fiona Foley and Harry Wedge for their personal commentaries on Aboriginal historical and social issues; Matthew Jones for his deliciously subversive camp sense of humour expressed in a variety of media; and Lindy Lee for her repetitive postmodern appropriations of Old Master fragments.

The exhibition would have been more thorough had it looked beyond Sydney and included artists such as Juan Dávila and Jenny Watson from Melbourne or Annette Bezor from Adelaide. From Sydney, though, it is disappointing not to see the work of Ken Unsworth in this context: the mounted burnt piano with protruding elephant tusk (shown earlier this year) exudes more sexual gusto than anything in *True Stories*, and the elegiac sculpture of stepped piano keyboards (now in the Art Gallery of NSW foyer gallery) resonates with a silent musicality of desire that is all but lacking in this exhibition.

Despite its shortcomings, the exhibition makes for a provocative and often humorous insight



Trophies, a reference to schoolboy homosexuality, by Matthew Jones.

Trappings of desire



Deej Fabye's version of Marilyn Monroe.

into the poetry, paradoxes and pitfalls of delving into the issues of gender that inform sexuality and desire. Adrian Hall's fraught installation of suspended bed springs (upon which he slept on opening night), electric railway track and barge pole is, typically, the least accessible and most disturbing work here. It strikes a chilling chord under the skin, evading definitive form or voice.

There is a male violence at work here, one which seeks to dominate through psychologically loaded objects and sharp gestures.

Deej Fabye's train track, in contrast, supports a tacky, dispossessed toy lamb astride a toy train, going in backward circles around and around, an innocent puppet to the cycles of fate.

The tension of Fabye's work differs from Hall's staccato symbolism in its traumatic revelations of personal desire and defeat. Her giant, ceiling-height highchair with its fatal glass seat describes an intersection of childhood fear and adult wisdom, the point where an innate desire to climb up to the seat of power is undermined by a danger of death at the point of success.

A third component of her installation is a lipstick-smearing colour photograph of Marilyn Monroe. By doctoring a quintessentially flirtatious image of the 20th century's favourite femme fatale, the artist reveals her as a victim of her own desire, or perhaps that of others.

Not all the works here engage on this psycho-sexual level.

Dennis Del Favoro's pair of photographic triptychs are an exception, their haunting invocations of death and corporeal release revealing a macabre beauty in the ecstasy of death, rather like that found in American photographer Andres Serrano's morgue series. Similarly, the silent stillness of Lindy Lee's portrait grid distils the moment of self-revelation.

Pat Brassington's elliptical photographs of fragments of

remembered objects and bodies self-consciously arranged on the floor, by contrast, do not share this transient moment of heightened sensibility. The other compromise to the exhibition's focus is the suite of paintings by Harry Wedge. His colourful, wry protagonists are as endearing in their grappling with the dilemmas of human interaction as always on Wedge's unpretentious stage, but they have more pressing problems on their agenda than sex and desire. The artist's honesty and self-deprecating humour make a refreshing counterpoint to the exhibition's highly strung atmosphere, but the characters seem to have ended up in the wrong play.

Fiona Foley's dialogues on racial stereotyping incorporate generous-sized black condoms, postage stamps of Australian wildlife in Aboriginal colours, and in one set of paintings a frieze of smiling goliwogs. Foley's wry humour is undermined by the persistence of the racial-sexual myths that her work challenges.

Also critical of social stereotyping, yet more cheeky in its commentary, is Matthew Jones's *Trophies*, an old boys' network of paintings strung together by the school ties on which the images are based. In the gay community the work's subtitle — the annoying tune of the "I feel like chicken tonight" TV advertisement — has more to do with schoolboy dates than supermarket dinners.

The most elegant expression of desire and its dirty underside, however, is found in Mikala Dwyer's *Phoenix Deluxe*. Unusually minimal for this artist with her propensity for colourful excess, the installation comprises a pair of pure white Regent hotel bathrobes, hung meticulously with cords pulled tight and insignia flaunted. It is completed by a vacuum cleaner dust bag displaying the secret nitty gritty of luxury hotel room carpets. Of all the work here, Dwyer's honeymoon suite best sums up the contradictory nature of desire as that gap between idealism and reality. It reminds us of John Lennon's warning to beware of what you desire, because if you really want something enough you might just get it.

WHAT'S ON

CRITICS' CHOICE

- **Hany Armaniou's** *CBD*, Gallery, 62 Erskine Street, Sydney. Until tomorrow.
- **Ruth Waller's** *Watters Gallery*, 109 Riley Street, East Sydney. Until July 2.
- **Kate Dorrrough's** *James Harvey Gallery*, 8 Evans Street, Balmain. Until July 10.
- **David Yin-Wei Chen's** *Art One by One*: Fire Station Gallery, 749 Darling St, Rozelle. Until July 23.
- **Fiona Hall's** *Garden of Earthly Delights*: Art Gallery of NSW, the Domain. Until July 31.

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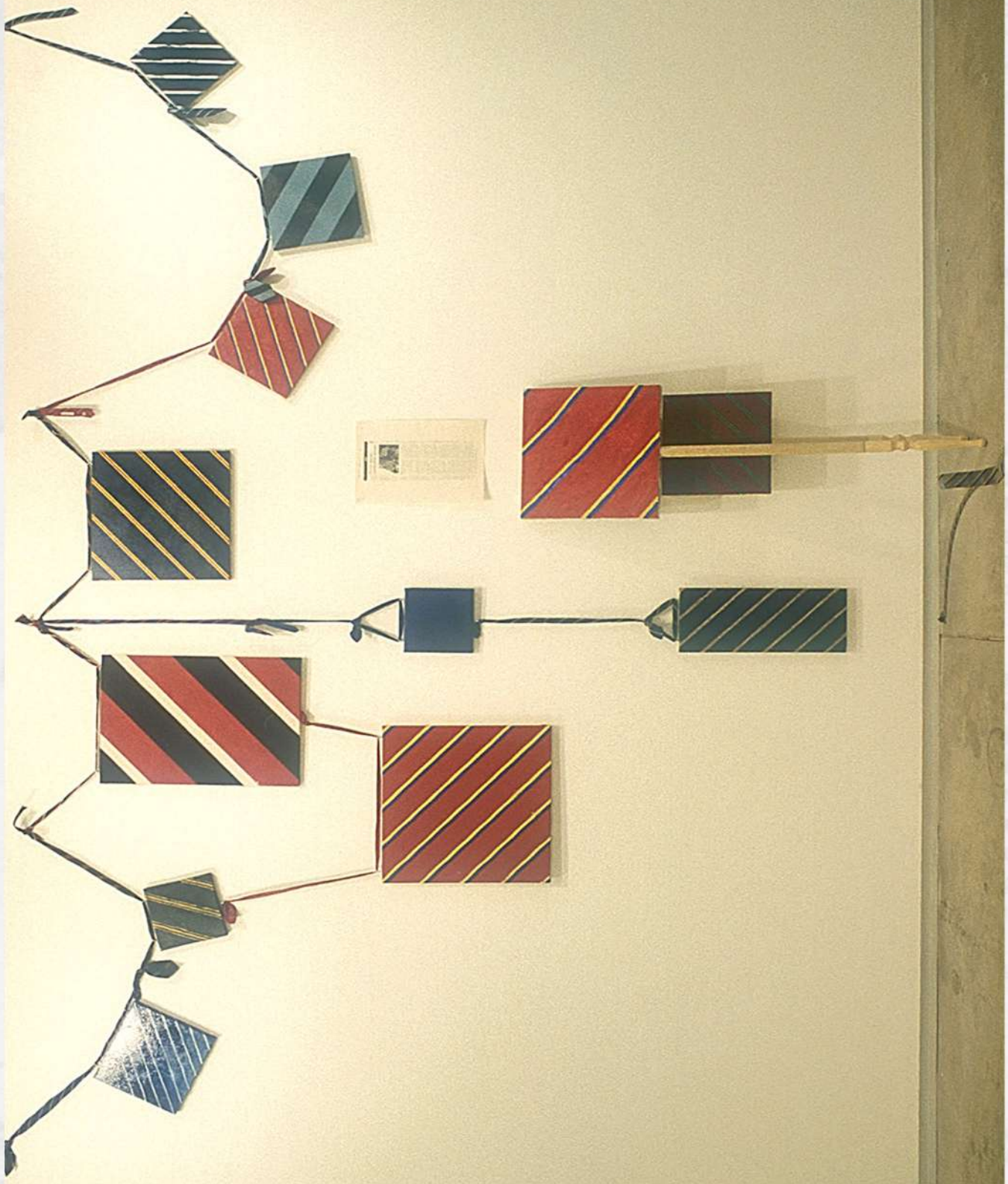
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A chicken pecks back

Sydney-based Mathew Jones is a Queer artist with a conscience. Currently exhibiting a number of works in various locales as part of Mardi Gras '95, he is alarmed at what he sees as a "rampant mainstreaming" of the Mardi Gras Festival, seeking instead a return to a more community oriented and grassroots events. This desire, reflected in much of his work, dominates our discussion at Jones's Newtown studio.

“openQuotes”

by Steven Thurlow

Your work *Poof!!* currently dominates the vestibule of the Art Gallery as part of *Perspecta '95*. How did it get there?

The space was offered to me as it suits the nature of the piece. The piece is about the spectacularisation of gay culture. It's a piece that is all spectacle with no substance. It's about the sudden explosion of interest in the mainstream press, mainstream TV shows. Everything has to have the kiss that shocked America, everything has to have a gay character. The other side of it is that Mardi Gras is becoming increasingly mainstream and it's increasingly difficult to tell the difference between the mainstream and the subculture. The difference we used to feel has evaporated.

And that's not a good thing according to you?

I increasingly feel at odds with things I used to feel I identified with. I increasingly feel different. I guess it's like everyone's complaint about the Mardi Gras party or clubs on Oxford Street. We're beginning to think they're there for the straight community – they're no longer ours. As an artist participating in the Mardi Gras festival, it's a bit of the same sort of feeling nowadays.

Is commercial exploitation to blame?

Who knows? But it pisses me off. One example is Mardi Gras advertising. I think the Mardi Gras Festival Committee and the Director have completely lost the plot. In the *Guide*, in the advertising, they foreground these large institutions and overseas stars: *Perspecta*, *Art in the Age of AIDS*, MCA, Mapplethorpe, Pierre et Gilles. And then

all the others are lumped into this ghetto – 30 community exhibitions. As an artist who has worked in *Art in the Age of AIDS* and *Perspecta* – I mean supposedly the reason why *Perspecta* is funded and supported by Mardi Gras is because of my work in it – and yet, along with all the other Queer artists, when I have a solo exhibition that's not of any interest, that's ghettoised. You wonder whether the Festival's investment is in my work and that of other local artists, or it's actually in currying favour with institutions. It's absurd to me. It's the same with the Pierre et Gilles thing. Certainly it's going to be wonderful to look at their work, but it's a question of proportion. If that gay blockbuster is happening at the expense of the local artists, what's the point in our money going towards it?

Speaking of blockbusters, what were your impressions of *Art in the Age of AIDS*?

For me, as an artist exhibiting in *Art in the Age of AIDS*, it was one of the worst experiences of my career. I think I suffered what most artists suffered and that was a feeling that the curator was ill-informed about local product and cursory. He took work out of context and de-natured it. There you have the situation of the institution being infatuated with overseas product at the expense of local product.

So the cultural cringe is alive and well?

Yes and in the worst possible place – the Australian National Gallery. I was told in my dealings with the curator that the exhibition was there for another audience. Which for me was a bit like being told that the Mardi Gras party is there for other people. Or the Oxford Hotel is there for straight people.☹

I Feel Like Chicken Tonight is simmering away at Artspace, Woolloomooloo until March 4, while *Poof!* is blowing them away as part of *Perspecta '95* is on at the Art Gallery of NSW until March 26.



PHOTO: COURTESY MATHEW JONES

How do you think the visual arts are dealt with generally in the Mardi Gras festival?

I think it's really interesting that in the last three or four years there has been an explosion of visual arts content, whereas it was really theatre-dominated before. And I think that explosion is for the very base reason that you can fund a visual arts exhibition very very cheaply. Like mine! And so you've got a lot of events happening. So now we have a lot of people making great art and a lot of people going to see it - so that's just what we want.

28 October 1994

art and activism



**I FEEL LIKE CHICKEN
TONIGHT**

Mathew Jones
Tolarno Gallery

review by
marcus o'donnell

Mathew Jones has always managed to produce art with an edge, even though his visual language is more often than not a cool minimalism.

In his latest show, *I Feel Like Chicken Tonight*, he has installed a series of small striped canvases that each relate to the school tie from which they hang. But 'installed' is a rather too formal word—the paintings are more strewn around the gallery, with some meandering on to the floor and some sitting awry on the walls.

But the installation is piece perfect, nothing is actually accidental. It immediately evoked for me the dishevelled look of the school boy, tie only half knotted, shirt only half tucked in, a smear of something recently eaten around the lips. It is, after all, to all sorts of people from grandmothers to rock spiders, a *perfect* image.

The tie paintings, squares, rectangles and triangles, if they had been placed neatly in rows would look like typical gallery fare.



In another postmodern take on 1960's hard edge abstraction, the styles vary; some clean, others deliberately blurring the edges. Many of the images are, in their own right, beautiful paintings but here that is not the point.

Strung up they stretch those elastic boundaries between art and activism that Jones talks about in his catalogue statement. Interspersed with the paintings are doctored pages of *Sydney Star Observer* highlighting various stories of paedophile groups, protests and murders. Paedophiles were once an ideological cause for gay liberation, but now with the mainstreaming of gay culture and gay politics they have been off-loaded as too difficult.

Jones' doctored gay press images show protesters marching the streets with stripped banner paintings and with the ACTUP Silence = Death triangle suddenly reading "I Feel Like Chicken Tonight". He *imagines* his images being taken out of the gallery and into the street, and in so doing he brings the concerns of the streets into the gallery.

In his images and in his statement Jones raises the question of what a radical gay/queer aesthetic might look like. As usual he cheekily offers no real solutions. Instead he creates an environment where we can wonder, where we can laugh, where we can question: an environment neither devoid of politics nor of the comfort of images. *





MATHEW JONES, "I FEEL LIKE CHICKEN TONIGHT," 1994

war, the family, even the government). And the art world plays along with these endgames of democracy, fostering civil servants of "radical" sexuality and bureaucrats of multi post-queer culture. Artist's hoping to be activists only contribute to this pointless clatter when they claim to speak on behalf of a given constituency. We no longer need a politics that seeks to represent, but one that snarls and fidgets, making incomprehensible gestures toward a community yet to come.

Mathew Jones's particular form of activism strategically screws up debate with unspeakable art works created for specific problems. He describes his method in terms of a Coming Out; it's a matter of making revelations that leave people speechless, of inventing ways to turn contexts inside out. Over the past five years he has hatched a variety of surprises, transforming canvas stretchers into condoms, gallery walls into giant braille texts, and blank paintings into enigmatic furniture. The ambiguity of these works involves more than a dead end, than double-dealing conditions for something else to happen.

MATHEW JONES

TOLARNO GALLERIES, MELBOURNE
OCTOBER 13 - NOVEMBER 5, 1994

The democratic injunction to discuss and debate is unnerving. Radio and television talk shows effectively neutralize difference by giving the microphone to everyone. Street marches have been derevolutionized to become legitimate forms of protest (you can march for or against

They demand to be embarked upon or utilized rather than simply contemplated.

In his current project "I Feel Like Chicken Tonight," Jones has filled the gallery with flags and placards used to display allegiances or incite a crowd; but who would wave these banners brandishing nothing but abstract patterns? He provides clues: "Chicken" is gay slang for "adolescent boy"; the designs are taken from school ties used to string the pennants together; and the exhibit includes newspaper articles on pederasty, illustrated with retouched photographs of ACT UP demonstrators bearing Jones's schoolboy emblems.

Shortly before Jones's exhibition opened in Melbourne, the International Lesbian and Gay Association (ILGA) lost consultancy status with the United Nations because of their affiliation with groups that advocate pedophilia. The link between gay culture and pederasty has threatened the dream of a socially integrated homosexuality for some time. As Félix Guattari remarked in the mid-1970s, pedophilia constitutes a sort of "Jewishness" that provokes racist reaction, even within the gay community.

For Jones, pedophilia gestures toward a politic that is essentially incomplete. Its open-endedness can be traced from the fact that this is a discourse that does not *speaks* for silent or silenced others, foreclosing possibilities, but instead makes them the focus of desire. Jones eludes the world of guilt and justice by turning its symbols into abstract, a-signifying fluxes. School ties are waved under the nose of political dogmatism, like red flags at a charging bull.

STEPHEN O'CONNELL

I Feel Like Chicken Tonight

VENUE ARTSPACE
43-51 COWPER WHARF RD WOOLLOOMOOLOO
DATES FRI 20 JAN - SAT 4 MAR
COST FREE
INFO 368 1899

Activist, painter and photographer Matthew Jones presents his startling one-man show, fresh from showcasing during the 1994 Melbourne International Festival. This exhibition questions the value of gallery-based visual arts and uses paintings and photographs of street demonstrations to argue that greater political import is attained when art proudly defines its gay, lesbian and queer intentions. Jones's 1993 Mardi Gras Festival show, *A Place I've Never Seen*, was described as "a seminal work of 90s gay culture" by the *Sydney Star Observer*.



LIPsINC Exhibition

VENUE SENATE
175 OXFORD ST DARLINGHURST
DATE OPENS THU 2 FEB
COST FREE

Lesbian art photography gets a boost thanks to the inaugural LIPsINC award, designed to reward excellence in photographically exposing Sydney's lesbian culture. An exhibition of winners and selected entrants to the LIPsINC Photographic Competition, open from November through to the end of December, 1994 and via *Capital Q* newspaper.

Live in the Fever

VENUE NEWTOWN GALLERY
161 MISSENDEN RD NEWTOWN
DATES 21 FEB - 5 MAR
TIME 10AM - 6PM
COST FREE
INFO 550 6597

Anton Veenstra's gay-sensible tapestries and woven sculptures help to show there's absolutely no limit to queer culture's courage to reconcile the eternal opposites - male and female, art and craft, high and folk art. Macramophobes should get over it and help celebrate those among our community who are good with their hands.

EXHIBITION PREVIEW

What do you feel like?

ONCE there was a time when, in the gay subculture, 'chicken' meant 'schoolboy'. Now, Canberra Contemporary Art Space presents *I Feel Like Chicken Tonight*, an exhibition by Mathew Jones about the loss of that subculture as it gradually becomes indistinguishable from the mainstream.

Jones rebels against the pressures at work within the gay community to homogenise and sanitise the image of the gay man. Taking as his mock cause the rights of paedophiles, he stockpiles the gallery with flags and placards in anticipation of an uprising of rockspiders and chicken-snatchers, who'll take to the streets, to liberate Michael Jackson and demand their pleasures.

Mathew Jones is a Sydney based artist whose work about sexuality and queer politics has been widely exhibited. *I Feel Like Chicken Tonight* was shown at Tolarno galleries as part of the 1994 Melbourne International Festival and Artspace in Sydney Gay & Lesbian Mardi Gras Festival.

Other exhibitions include *A Place I've Never Seen*, exhibited in Australia as part of Mardi Gras 1993 and subsequently at the museu de Arte Moderna in Sao Paulo, Brazil in 1994 and Canadian venues throughout 1995.

Most recently his work appeared in Australian Perspectives '95 at the Art Gallery of NSW and Art in the Age of AIDS at the National Gallery of Australia.

I Feel Like Chicken Tonight, meanwhile, will show at the Canberra Contemporary Art Space in Manuka until June 4.



Con-Text: Sub-Text: Bruce Tunks, Canberra Contemporary Art Space, Fumeaux Street, Manuka. Closes May 14.

I Feel Like Chicken Tonight: Mathew Jones, Canberra Contemporary Art Space, Gorman House, Braddon. Closes June 4.

BRUCE TUNKS' installation is simple, unadorned and extremely effective.

Six empty display cases surround an illuminated relic from an earlier age. The piece touches on questions of preservation and presentation of work from another civilisation within our museum structure. Once we feel secure within the display we notice, behind us, in a showcase larger than the rest, a relic from our own time, as if lining up in a queue to be encapsulated for future presentation.

The selection of objects, the lighting and the sounds, all play on one another to create an environment in which the problematic nature of the objects and the new context which they acquire within a museum setting is apparent to all. I suppose the questioning of the construct of epistemologies has become a popular pre-occupation amongst conceptual artists. Most viewers tend to die of boredom, while the obvious is revealed to them in labyrinth complexity. Bruce Tunks succeeds in his economy of means and a simplicity which touches on profound questions.

Mathew Jones is a well-known artist who has been widely represented in Australian art institutions. I personally found his *I Feel Like Chicken Tonight* installation disappointing.

The theme he tackles, male paedophilia, is an important one. In gay circles, chicken



Mathew Jones—I Feel Like Chicken Tonight

Presented by Canberra Contemporary Arts Space, at Gallery 1, CCAS, GHAC.

Jones rebels against the pressures to homogenise and sanitise which are at work within the gay community.

Jones is a Sydney-based artist whose work about sexuality and queer politics has been widely exhibited. "I Feel Like Chicken Tonight" was shown at Tolarno Galleries as part of the 1994 Melbourne International Festival, and Artspace in Sydney as part of the 1995 Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras Festival.

May 5 until June 4. Contact Trevor Smith on 2471088.

By SASHA GRISHIN

means a young boy, so a vulgar American promotional advertisement gains a new sub-text within the gay community. The whole exhibition is built around this notion of disjunction between the intended and implied meanings.

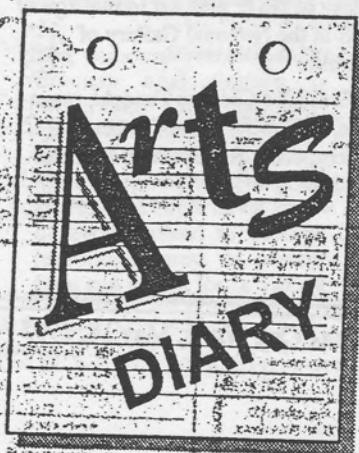
A series of photocopied sheets from newspapers carry banner headlines about gay issues, however the inserted photographs obviously do not belong to the stories and subvert their meaning.

The school ties, blank placards and flags, strung around the walls, all imply a fight for a cause, but the cause is never spelt out.

James Rosenquist spoke of an aesthetic indifference, in painting his anonymous objects like cars and spaghetti. They were non-objects, where the artist's intentions did not go much beyond the artist's indifference to his subject. As he once said "If you paint Franco-American spaghetti, they won't make a crucifixion out of it, and who could be nostalgic about canned spaghetti?"

I remember a recent review exhibition in Madrid which tackled these questions in a way which was disturbing, unsettling, but thought-provoking. This one, for me, falls a little flat.

THE CANBERRA TIMES, Monday, May 8, 1995, 29



Something for everybody
JENNIFER KINGMA
previews concerts and

continues until May 28 and gallery hours are Monday to Friday 10am to 5pm.

★ And Bruce Tunks (any relation?) opened at Canberra Contemporary Arts Space, Manuka with Context — Subtext, an installation which examines issues related to the way in which Western society interprets and classifies information about "primitive" societies. The exhibi-

tion ends on May 14. At CCAS, Gorman House Gallery, *I Feel Like Chicken Tonight*, by artist Mathew Jones, who rebels against the pressures at work within the gay community to homogenise and sanitise the image of the gay man. The exhibition runs until June 4.

ARTS

Artist acts up to the gay politics

BY STEPHEN DUNNE

MATHEW JONES is definitely not PC. He says the whole notion of political correctness doesn't interest him at all. Though given the subject of his solo exhibition at Artspace for the Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras Festival, some people may accuse him of rampant political incorrectness.

The exhibition is called *I Feel Like Chicken Tonight*. Its subject, or at least its point of departure, is gay male paedophilia, a topic which still manages to frighten those of various political and sexual hues.

"The attraction of the issue is that it's equally contentious to both the mainstream, in inverted commas, and the queer community," says Jones. Anyone expecting a scandalous depiction of this taboo issue will be sorely disappointed. The only under-age person in the show is *Home Alone's* Macaulay Culkin, grimacing in horror as his image is born aloft by radical paedophile activists.

On the white walls of Artspace are nine flimsy photocopies. At first glance, they appear to be articles from the gay and lesbian press about paedophilia, but on closer examination the photographs accompanying the text don't quite match.

Groups of men are protesting.

Some wear T-shirts proudly proclaiming them "Rockspiders". They are members of an imaginary activist group called FUCT, dedicated to F---ing Up Cute Teenagers. In most pictures, the activists carry curious placards in abstract stripes and geometrical motifs.

In the far corner of the gallery lie the banners, heaped randomly, as if dumped after a demonstration. Strung up on the wall and lying on the floor is painted bunting, also in colourful abstract motifs. The bunting is tied together by the inspiration for the stripes - schoolboys' ties.

FUCT is a parody of ACT UP, the AIDS activist group which erupted into public view in the late '80s. The doctored photographs are of ACT UP demonstrations. ACT UP's work was quickly co-opted by art galleries, turning street banners and political statements into collectible objects.

"In this exhibition, the street placards, the ACT UP images, all the celebrated images of politically and socially engaged art, have been twisted around so they become these rarefied art objects," says Jones.

"[FUCT] is the starting point, but then you come to these questions: What is it possible for them to say? What would the placards look like? What I've come up with is simply this repetition of the school tie image,

which is saying nothing. That's the absurdity of those retouched photos - there are these guys standing there waving these placards which don't mean anything! It's multiplied from the other angle, because when those things are hung on the gallery wall, everyone's running around saying that they're so meaningful. The rhetoric is that it's politicised modernism, when in fact it's content free."

I Feel Like Chicken Tonight had two inspirations. The first was a decision taken last year by the International Lesbian and Gay Association to expel two paedophile advocacy groups after pressure from conservative United States senators. The second was a TV ad for a chicken simmer sauce.

AS JONES points out, most people would have looked at the mums, dads and kids imitating chooks in the advertisement as merely embarrassing. In gay male subculture, however, "chicken" is slang for a young or underaged sex partner, giving this innocent campaign a new meaning.

Jones uses this example to discredit the popular theory that advertising and mass media create a universal language ready to be co-opted by the art world.

"There is no universal language. Art is always going to be a juggle between simply being a recognition by the audience of

something they already know, and actually pushing them a bit."

It's an issue Jones understands well. While installing his work *POOF!* in the Art Gallery of NSW's vestibule as part of the current *Perspecta* show, every visitor to the gallery walked past him. "Quite a few asked me what I was doing. Most probably thought it was something about Hiroshima, or ecology."

POOF! is a huge fluffy explosion, an eruption of camp into the gallery's entrance. It's about the way things appear, and disappear, in a puff of smoke. At the heart of this *POOF!* lies a shining mirror ball, and a squillion sequins - perfect for Mardi Gras.

For Jones, *POOF!* is about the "apogee and hopeful disappearance of identity politics", but he notes with irony that identity politics is now becoming popular in mainstream media.

"It's a fad, that's it, and now we're going to have to move away from that, onto something else. What it is, I don't know."

Jones, a Melbourne boy who now lives in Sydney, has worked in four exhibitions. Apart from *Chicken* and *Perspecta*, he has a piece in *Art In The Age Of AIDS* at the Australian National Gallery, and in *Dark O'Clock* show, being in Winnipeg, Canada, after a season at the Biennale in São Paulo, Brazil.

Jones credits his previous

Mardi Gras shows for this international exposure, but is disillusioned at what he sees as Mardi Gras "infatuation" with international artists.

"I just don't understand why they need to support, to the point of fetishisation, overseas artists at the expense of local artists. It's disappointing."

Jones is happy to be described as a queer artist, noting that his work addresses his own culture. "The things I feel strongly opposed to are actually these things within the subculture, the gay institutions like Mardi Gras, the gay press.

"I don't make political art per se, but I'm interested in the idea of political art, because the eternal problem is why are you doing it, what's the point of making art."

"I think a lot of people will look at the *Chicken Tonight* show and say it failed, because it didn't contain images of boys getting buggered, or because the placards weren't placards, they were a lot more like art objects. Whereas this is actually what I'm trying to deal with."

"I'm trying to deal with my own cynicism about the possibility of politically engaged art practice, at the same time as my desire for it."

● *I Feel Like Chicken Tonight* can be seen at Artspace, Cowper Wharf Road, Woolloomooloo, until March 4. *Perspecta '95* is on at the Art Gallery of NSW until March 26.



Mathew Jones . . . criticising the gay subculture. Photograph by JENNIFER SOO



STONEWALL 25
We blitz NYC
The Lesbian Group

MATTHEW JONES

Artspace
Until March 4

The success of Mardi Gras' mainstreaming approach to visual arts must be partly judged on the success of the exhibitions which it brings to life and tours.

Both P&G and *Homocraft* are going touring; and Mathew Jones' show *I feel like Chicken Tonight* has been in Melbourne as part of the International Festival of the Arts last year.

Like all Jones work, *Chicken* is challenging. 'Poof', his work in *Perspecta*, is a throw away line, and *Chicken* is a flag, he says.

What he means is it functions as a thing to wave, a call to arms. It's not supposed to be a work that sits anaesthetised in the cool white box of the gallery unable to respond, unable to make people respond.

And in paedophilia and the gay movement, one might have thought, he had the kind of obvious issue that would whip up a moral panic or a sense of outrage.

Chicken builds on themes, techniques and political art practices Jones has used in previous shows, one of which, at the Access Gallery at the National Gallery of Victoria, met with the kind of response he apparently seeks here.

But the show has largely been greeted with silence.

Perhaps this relates to the recent attack by Deirdre Grusovin under

parliamentary privilege on John Marsden's reputation — an attack which has been entirely discredited and shown to be without foundation.

But does response to the exhibition suggest the fundamental irrelevance of art in terms of raising political issues? Is it a function of *Chicken's* hectoring and provocative tone — does it seem merely self-serving?

Or is it the fact that the gay movement, except in North America and Germany, has so successfully

purged itself of the misrepresentation of gay men as child molesters and paedophiles, that the issue is now foreign to our culture? Or is it waiting in the wings for someone from tabloid teleland to run with it? Again.



FROM *I FEEL LIKE CHICKEN TONIGHT*, 1994, BY MATHEW JONES

Behind the chicken wire

by Paul Purcell

February visitors to the Art Gallery of NSW will be dazzled by a giant *Poof!* To be more precise: an installation, about six metres square, supported by chicken wire within (ironically, as will become apparent), *Poof!* will be covered with tons of dacron pillow stuffing, four kilos of sequins and a central mirror ball beaming light at patrons entering the staid Victorian vestibule. This art work will make a loud, queer, glamorous statement, but whether the general public catches the gay significance is another matter.

The man behind the dacron and chicken wire is the last person you would think responsible for this fantasy. In a flannelette shirt rolled up to his elbows, blue jeans, a shaved head and a few days growth of beard, Mathew Jones looks more like a truck driver than an artist of fluffy art works. "It's a literalisation of the word 'poof'," Jones explains over a beer and a cigarette. "The original stimulus was those cartoon explosions with the word 'poof!'"

Yet Jones' construction is not all fluff signifying nothing. *Poof!* has a lot to say about the experience of being gay or lesbian: "It's something appearing and something disappearing. It was that ambiguity that I wanted to pull out."

A former member of ACT-UP and artist of ten years, 33-year-old Jones isn't afraid of tackling more politically dangerous waters. *I Feel Like Chicken Tonight* (from the catchy TV ad) is his latest exhibition, being installed in Sydney during Mardi Gras, which uses schoolboys' ties in oil paintings, and as placards. He also retouched photos of ACT-UP activists in the streets, replacing the words "Silence = Death" with "Chicken Tonight!". The finished product looks like the activists were fighting for the right to chicken (schoolboys). Schoolboys were present by their absence.

"The TV ad amused me with its naivety", Jones says, "because in subculture chicken also means schoolboys, and in the earliest ad they even had this cute kid in uniform, tie askew, legs akimbo, arse in the air, flapping his wings and clucking. Interesting!"

Jones recalls that the exhibition was taken in two ways: "There were people who thought because it was funny it was somehow liberating. It was taken another way by people who thought it was just sick." Melbourne's Scotch College objected to schoolboys' ties being used in the works, though Jones admitted that they came from friends who were former students of the college.

Regarding the Australian National Gallery's *Don't Leave Me This Way: Art in the Age of AIDS*, Jones finds the works too sentimental (not to mention depressing). He also finds much of the gay world too mainstream. Luckily for us Jones isn't yet another artist who's been lured overseas by richer climes, so he'll continue to shock and please us with work as glamorous and challenging as *Poof!* and *I Feel Like Chicken Tonight*, *Chicken Tonight*. ●



MEDIA RELEASE
28 April 1995

Exhibition: Mathew Jones: I Feel Like Chicken Tonight

Artist: Mathew Jones

Exhibition Dates: 6 May-4 June, 1995

Opening: 6:00 pm Friday 5 May 1995

Venue Canberra Contemporary Art Space
Gorman House Arts Centre
Ainslie Avenue, Braddon

Exhibition Details:

Once there was a time when, in the gay subculture, 'chicken' meant 'schoolboy'. Now, Canberra Contemporary Art Space presents I FEEL LIKE CHICKEN TONIGHT an exhibition by Mathew Jones about the loss of that subculture as it gradually becomes indistinguishable from the mainstream.

Jones rebels against the pressures at work within the gay community to homogenise and sanitise the image of the gay man. Taking as his mock 'cause' the rights of paedophiles, he stockpiles the gallery with flags and placards in anticipation of an uprising of rockspiders and chicken-snatchers, who'll take to the streets, to liberate Michael Jackson and demand their pleasures.

Mathew Jones is a Sydney based artist whose work about sexuality and queer politics has been widely exhibited. I FEEL LIKE CHICKEN TONIGHT was shown at Tolarno galleries as part of the 1994 Melbourne International Festival and Artspace in Sydney Gay & Lesbian Mardi Gras Festival.

Other exhibitions include A PLACE I'VE NEVER SEEN, exhibited in Australia as part of Mardi Gras 1993 and subsequently at the Museu de Arte Moderna in Sao Paulo, Brazil in 1994 and Canadian venues throughout 1995.

Most recently his work appeared in Australian Perspectives '95 at the Art Gallery of NSW and Art in the Age of AIDS at the National Gallery of Australia.

For press prints or further information please contact Jane Barney or Trevor Smith at the Canberra Contemporary Art Space on (06) 247-0188. the artist is available for interview from 3-5 May.

The Canberra Contemporary Art Space gratefully acknowledges the assistance of the Commonwealth Government through the Australia Council, its arts funding and advisory body and the ACT Government through its Cultural Council.



THE ARTS YEAR IN REVIEW

Diversity up, sales down, spirit high

WRAPPING up a year of art in this town is like stuffing the Botanic Gardens into a paper bag. The volume, the diversity, the color, the organisation are awesome. I have never met anyone who claims to have comprehended a week of art in Melbourne.

First, the bad news. Art has been hard to sell this year. Many a show has happened without a single sale, in spite of lowish prices, high standards and prestigious commercial galleries. I don't understand why. We're told that we've got 6 per cent growth and that the economy is in danger of overheating. Maybe the warmth and liquidity are on their way for '95.

Anyway, within the bad news for artists and galleries, there is a reciprocal quantum of good news for collectors. There are bargains galore. Some original prints, for example, cost little more than a photographic reproduction. Keep buying *The Age* in '95 and we'll offer some hints for purchasing art of genuine quality and integrity at extra fair prices.

Second, the good news. Despite abysmal sales, artists have been blitzing Melbourne with good exhibition which probably couldn't take place if the artists were watching the market. The state-funded galleries, such as ACCA and Gertrude St, have long assisted artists in this non-commercial enterprise; further, they devote some of their resources to producing catalogues which help explain the art to the community.

However, the new kid on the block for the '90s has been the artist-run spaces. Venues such as The Basement, Westspace, Argyle St, Arttroungtown and Temple Studio have been showing rich and innovative art. Not only do they represent a trysting place for established artists whose commercial galleries have folded (as with Merrin Eirth or Sarah Curtis) but they constitute focal points for the next generation.

Visual arts critic **Robert Nelson** takes a snapshot of a year of art in Melbourne.

Consequently, the commercial galleries (and a few clever collectors) take great interest in such places. There is an extraordinary feeling of vigour and commitment surrounding the artist-run spaces, as the normally competitive spirit which artists jealously cultivate is harnessed toward common objectives.

In this economy, the artists use their own capital in an almost sacrificial gesture to art and discourse. Emily Clarke told me that her installation (which was poetic and memorable) cost her well over \$2000. Other striking shows which come to mind were by Chris Tabecki, Carolyn Eskdale and two by Elizabeth Boustead, all of which were full of curiosity, rich in allusion, funny and beautiful.

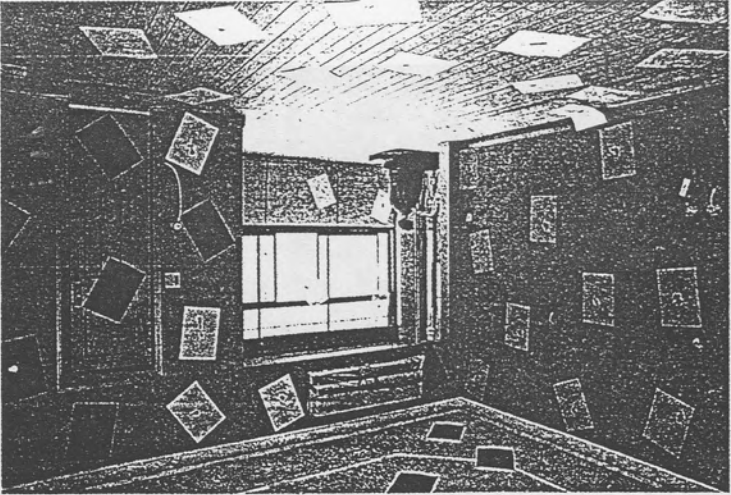
Third, the international decline of media-specific work is notable in Melbourne. The biggest victim of this shift is sculpture. The beneficiary is installation. These days, sculptors attract little attention unless they position their work within a meaningful discourse. The art community is bored by things which stick up in the air for an abstract reason.

Despite strong exhibitions of more or less formalist sculpture by Augustine dall'Ava (Australian Galleries) and Geoff Bartlett (Waverley), there is a move toward soft media, craft-based techniques of assembly or technological elements. The Bad Girls exhibition *Aberrant Object* (MoMA at Heidi), *Luminaries and Passage* (Monash), Matthew Jones (Tolarno) and Peter Cripps (Anna Schwartz) were full of good examples. Mention should also be made of a formidable touring exhibition of Lyn Plummer's sculpture (*Wangaratta & Benalla*) which evoked religious ritual in the context of women's identity.

Painting has been the least affected by the weakening of traditional media. It was the star of the Art Fair; computer-generated imagery was minor. Painting has survived so well because it has rediscovered the richness of its rhetorical languages, which are now so relevant to current discourses. Witness the work of Caroline Durre (Flinders Lane and Moorabin) and Lyndell Brown & Charles Green (Michael Wardell). Current themes of the post-colonial and the post-industrial have been explored in memorable and sensual images by these painters, exploiting many of the resources of the old masters.

Talking of tradition, Geoff Ricardo's print interpreted by the Victorian Tapestry Workshop was one of the strongest works in the Art Fair. As for the NGV, well we did miss the old masters from Dublin; but with Duerer, Renoir and Phillips Fox, who's complaining? For all that, I recommend a trip to the Art Gallery of South Australia to see the old masters. Another exhibition in Adelaide to justify the pilgrimage is *Texts from the Edge*, a stunning show of contemporary tapestry at the Jam Factory.

On current indications, the projected buzz words for '95 will remain bad girl, soft media, traditions, geographies, the body, ornament, technologies and incommensurable ethnicities.



ROOM 32

REGENTS COURT HOTEL, SYDNEY
JULY 16 - SEPTEMBER 18, 1994

Over ten weekends from mid-winter to spring, with modest means, little preparation time, and an empty hotel room, coordinating artist Matthew Johnson and nine colleagues

from Sydney and Melbourne held a series of solo shows that reminded this viewer of just how stimulating the often disappointing genre of site-specific installation can be.

Johnson negotiated a deal with the art-friendly Regents Court Hotel in Sydney's Kings Cross, which gave him the use of a room on weekends while it was being renovated during the week. The arrangement had many advantages: the hotel is centrally located and well patronized by local and visiting culturati (I know of one curator who regularly resides there for extended periods, living, as the French would say, *sur la branche*).

A fascinating story attaches to the renovation of Room 32. It had long been the home of Jean, a Kings Cross "gypsy" fortune-teller, well known on the strip for her late-night kerbside tarot readings. She had refused to sell when the rest of the building became a hotel. Defiant to the end, she died in her room, which the hotel subsequently acquired. Jean's ghost animated the electronic ether of Ross Harley's video installation *Woman in Room 32*, a piece that brought the spirit world to in-room cable TV. The hotel as a kind of theater of human life and action was also taken up

by Matthew Jones's *A Person looks at a work of art, someone looks at Scott Wilson*. Jones deranged the room's furnishings and the evidence of a schoolboy's recent presence (school uniform, bag, examination paper) to suggest the abandoned mise-en-scène of an illicit encounter. Mikala Dwyer made witty reference to the former occupant's name through the use of denim, while using sound to evoke further traces of human presence with a series of tape-recorded amateur renditions of *Love Me Tender*.

Matthew Johnson, Lindy Lee, and Jon Catapan, all more familiar as painters than as installation artists, made the room a space in which to indulge the sensuous imagination. With his glowing *Amber Wall*, Matthew Johnson divided the room using floor-to-ceiling painted compact disc cases, creating something akin to a monochromatic stained-glass window. In her *The 10,000 Things*, Lindy Lee plastered the walls, windows, ceiling and floor with sheets of white, colored and/or photocopied paper which had been splattered with ink. The room was permeated with an atmosphere of silent intensity as Lee sat meditating in the corner, thus creating a

remarkably minimal performance piece. Jon Catapan's untitled installation also involved the artist's presence, here seated on a red chair amidst an undulating pattern of red discs and framed wall-mounted photographs.

Room 32 became a space of metaphor and metonymy for several of the artists, including Bill Seaman whose computer-generated video poetics, titled *Abstraction machine—erotic—the voyeur of light*, could only be viewed through an inverted peephole in the door. Rooms within rooms were teasingly suggested by Callum Morton's *Door Door*, a front door self-consciously derived from modernist typologies installed in the room but leading nowhere. Gail Hastings's *Pages 32, 28, 19, 7, 2 and one* elaborated the reproduced photograph of Russian avant-gardist Vavara Stepanova through correspondences between her patterned dress and its life-sized double (made by Hastings) that hung in the room's opened wardrobe. Fabrics and furnishings were also the focus of Constanze Zikos's *Soft Flag One*, a bedspread in the form of a symbolically reconfigured Australian flag, fully reversible

with sequined lining.

The fact that the room itself changed from week to week, beginning its journey from gutted shell to smartly appointed suite, lent the whole enterprise an organic quality since each artist dealt with a slightly altered site. But what really stimulated so many engaging responses from the participating artists was the nature of the site itself. Occupying at once the public and private spheres, a hotel is by definition a transitory space, welcoming the spontaneous and the impermanent, while providing an escape from routine expectations.

NICHOLAS BAUME