

OPEN GALLERY KELSEY MUNRO

DEPOUILLER - TO STRIP OFF

In one definition, depouiller is a culinary technique - the French name for adding a few drops of cold water to a sauce while it is being cooked so that the scum rises to the surface. Sydney artist Eric Lobbecke says it has other connotations, including to peel away a facade and reveal what lies beneath. The political cartoonist



takes as his subjects

here the unlovely figures of (mainly) overweight men (pictured). There is certainly a political intent: the artist strips the figures of the status their clothes would confer in everyday life. But he also challenges ideas of the classical nude and beauty. Lobbecke renders his figures grotesque but they are also human and vulnerable. **NG Gallery, Upper Level, 3 Little Queen Street, Chippendale, 9318 2992, Tue-Fri, 11am-10pm; Sat, 9am-10pm. Until March 7.**

LOVE MOMENTS

This diverse group mixed-media exhibition has the oldest and grandest theme of art as its linking thread: love. It's a bit uneven in terms of quality and the works are very different, from Georgia Jarrett's neon heart sculptures to photographer Dave Sparkes's sun-splashed and sensual underwater nudes. Serene Aguirre tackles a digital-age version of love, using Japanese manga cartoons in a mosaic; Felicity Hibble uses densely layered text and drawings in her romantic but melancholy works; and Michelle Klisowsky's smooth, abstract steel sculptures are striking. There are also paintings by, among others, Virginia Bucknell and Wendy Cohen. **Art Moment Gallery, 99 Curlew Street, Bondi Beach, 9365 4999, Tue-Thu, 11am-7pm; Fri and Sun, 11am-4pm, closed Saturdays. Until March 8.**

BIRDMAN

British painter Josh Bowes uses oils, enamel and spray paint to render his strangely compelling visions of bird-headed men

(pictured) for his first Sydney show. Wearing suits, seated at a park bench, carrying a briefcase, slouched slyly at a bar or waiting at traffic lights, his figures convey a dystopian sense of the contemporary city. They resemble, too, totemic Native American deities somehow lost in a numbing modern workday. The blank eyes and anthropomorphic form contain an implicit commentary on modern life - and it's not a happy one. **Rushcutters Bay Gallery, 147 Bayswater Road, Rushcutters Bay, 9361 5413, Mon-Fri, 10am-5pm; Sat, 11-3pm. Until March 17.**



ALSO RECOMMENDED

Splinter Workshop at Tin Sheds Gallery, University of Sydney, until March 21; **Lorna Grear** at Peloton, Chippendale, until March 21; **Megan Jenkinson** at Stillis Gallery, Paddington, until March 21.

Send details of exhibitions to opengallery@smh.com.au. No attachments larger than 1MB.

Journeys through dimensions

While a new generation is realising the potential of multimedia, it's still possible to see the beauty in old-fashioned junk.

VISUAL ART JOHN McDONALD

Lynette Wallworth: Duality Of Light Samstag Museum, Adelaide, until April 14

Rosalie Gascoigne National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, until March 15

ARCHIBALD Prize time approaches, and already I'm assailed by intimations of unreality. Whatever the Archibald and its fellow shows have to do with art is as nothing compared to their inestimable benefit as a revenue raiser for the Art Gallery of NSW. It may be a circus but at least it's a good cause. In the lull before the publicity storm I've been able to

see a couple of significant shows in cities unencumbered by the feverish, ephemeral excitement generated by Sydney's season of competitions.

Lynette Wallworth was born in Bexley but has made her reputation as a multimedia artist in other parts of the world. She is highly regarded in Europe and the US but almost unknown in her native country. This omission is being corrected by a survey exhibition held as part of the BigPond Adelaide Film Festival. This festival is unique in Australia in that it commissions works and includes multimedia.

In Melbourne, the National Gallery of Victoria is holding a retrospective of Rosalie Gascoigne (1917-99),

one of Australia's most respected artists of the late 20th century. There have already been museum surveys in Sydney, Canberra and Wellington but this is the first time that Melbourne has hosted a full-scale exhibition. This is also the largest, most comprehensive overview of Gascoigne's work yet assembled and provides an opportunity to take a fresh look at her achievements a decade after her death.

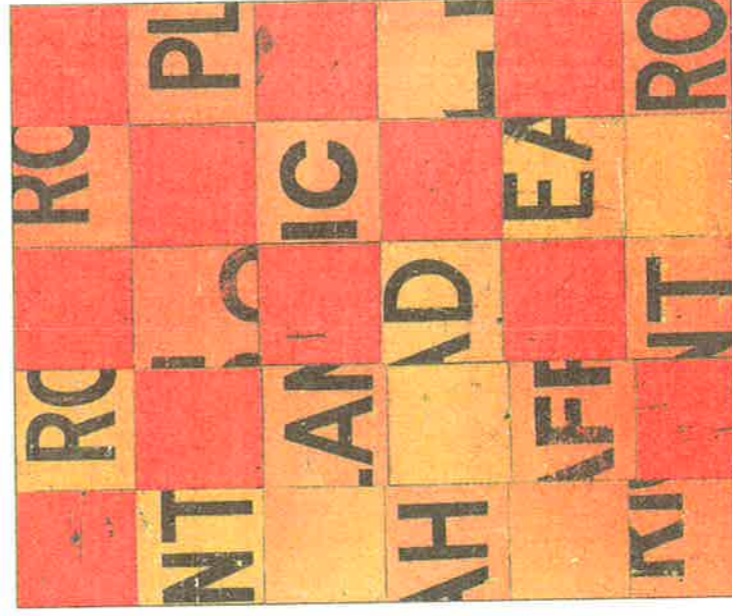
Turning first to Adelaide, it is undeniable that after years of relentless tedium and technical glitches, multimedia art is entering a phase of new maturity. A couple of weeks ago I wrote about the impressive Chinese video artist Qiu Anxiang, and Lynette Wallworth (b. 1961) is a distinguished addition to the international ranks.

The differences between earlier forms of multimedia art and those of the current generation are easy

to pinpoint. First, there is the huge advance in technological know-how, with equivalent advances in ease of use, cost and reliability. Next, and most importantly, there is a sense in which artists are no longer overawed or simply titillated by technology. Instead, there is a growing understanding that a successful audio-visual work must not simply fool around with gimmicks; it must make use of qualities that are intrinsic to the medium to relate to the viewer in ways that are not possible with painting or sculpture.

This often means creating an immersive or interactive environment that turns the viewer into an active participant. Wallworth does this in a subtle way with her video installations *Damavand Mountain* and *Beautiful Sunset* (both 2006): the former a view of a snow-topped mountain in Iran, the latter a slow-changing vista of the Flianders Ranges. Both are pieces to be inhabited imaginatively, as we follow the slow changes of light and weather. In *Damavand Mountain*, the occasional appearance of a woman in a chador acts as a surrogate for our own presence as viewer and as a reminder of the unbridgeable gulf that separates us from that landscape.

Yet these works are mere exercises alongside the piece that gives the show its title. In *Duality Of Light* (2009), Wallworth invites the viewer to walk down a long, dark corridor filled with the sounds of dripping water recorded in an underground cave in New Zealand. As we approach the end of the corridor, our own bodies loom up in front of us as white, ghostly pres-



To the letter... Gascoigne's Checkerboard (1990).

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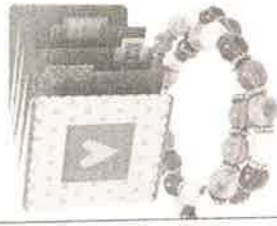
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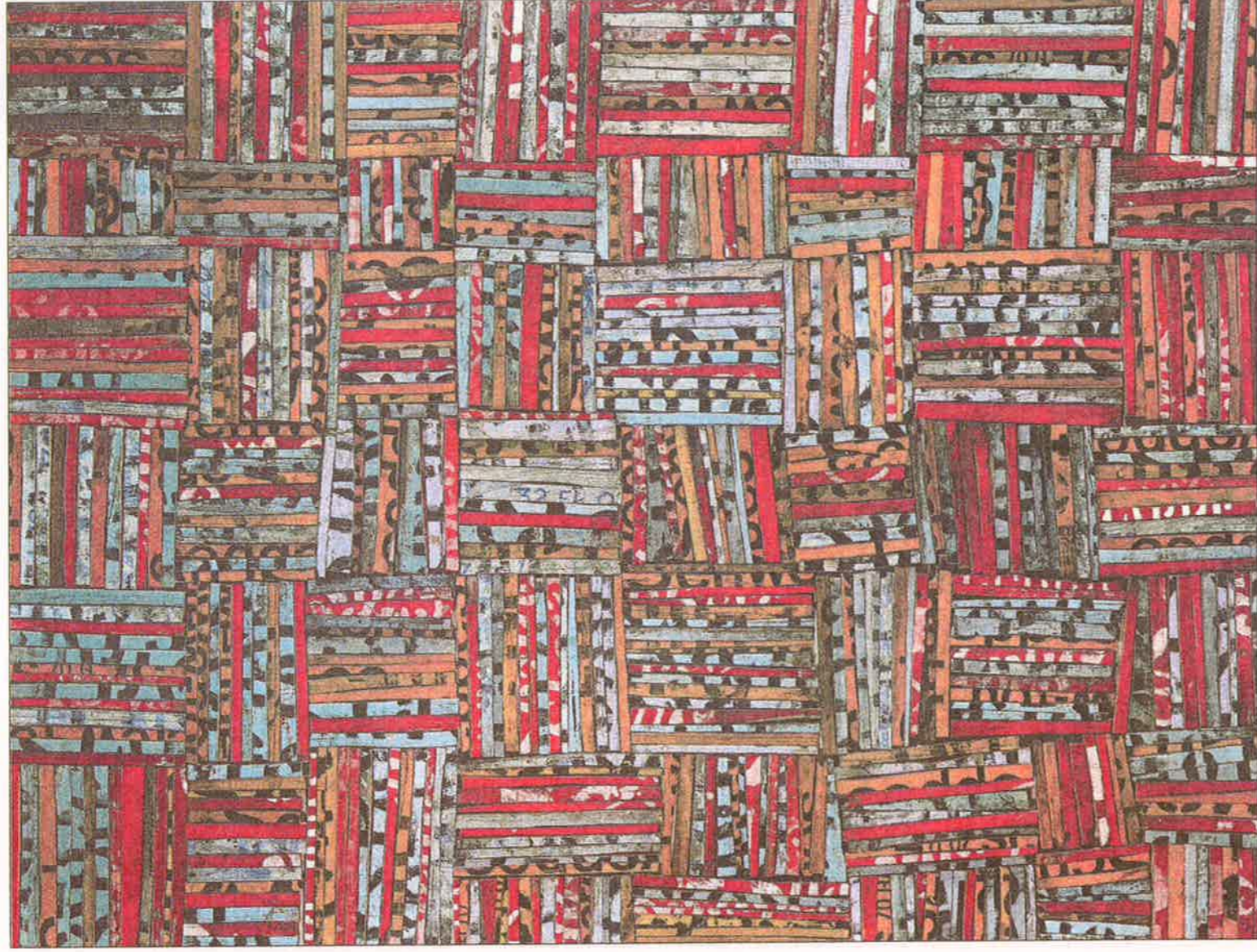
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Colourful note ... Rosalie Gascoigne's *All That Jazz* (1989), weathered painted wood on plywood.

reason that brought Captain Cook to Australia in 1770, when he claimed this land for Britain.

One might tease out many different poetic and historical allusions in Wallworth's choice of imagery but the primary experience is one of wonder. It feels as though one is holding life itself - both microcosmic and macrocosmic - in one's hands. The bowl becomes a holy grail, a crystal ball, an offering to the gods of countless different faiths.

With Wallworth's work still fresh in my mind it was strange to enter the Rosalie Gascoigne show and experience that blend of earthiness and nostalgia so characteristic of this late-blooming artist, whose first solo exhibition was held at the age of 57. The story has been told many times how Gascoigne began her creative life as a highly original student of ikebana, the Japanese art of flower arranging. Within a few years she had outgrown the medium and become a maker of sculptural assemblages, pieced together from the junk and detritus she found in the vicinity of Canberra.

A large group of these early works is included in this show. They incorporate collections of old beer cans, battered kewpie dolls, rusted pots and pans, shards of crockery, used shotgun cartridges and cardboard parrots clipped from Arnott's biscuit cartons. There is a raw, infectious humour in these works, offset by an occasional glimpse of something true and beautiful.

In the work that followed, Gascoigne would use soft-drink crates, corrugated iron and reflective road signs as her preferred materials. These are the pieces with which she made her reputation and they still have a commanding presence in the gallery. This is largely because of the artist's skill in choosing what to change and what to preserve, what elements to conceal or reveal. For instance, a work such as *Scrub Country* (1982) is nothing but a grid of wooden slats taken from old soft-drink crates. But by leaving intact the logos of now-defunct companies, Gascoigne has created a kind of ritual invocation of the magic hold a cold, fizzy drink once had on the Australian psyche. "Sparkling fruity flavours" is

repeated like a Buddhist chant, as a charm against the imposing heat of a summer's day.

Her grids of cut-up reflector signs are like scrambled lines of concrete poetry, hinting at meanings that have to be decoded. Their yellow blaze invokes the summer's heat, the dry landscape of the Monaro region and the long car journeys necessary for crossing from one country town to another.

What Gascoigne reveals is the poetry and pathos that lies dormant in even the humblest objects, scarred and moulded by years of rough handling. At her best she creates a vivid impression of an environment where nature is inextricably entwined with human labours and aspirations.

There is, however, a good deal of repetition in this show, which might have benefited from a little

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editing. Neither is Federation Square a particularly sympathetic venue, with white laminated platforms having to be laid over its grey stone floors to display some of Gascoigne's installations.

The show ends on a note that is sad rather than triumphant. A large series of brown, tightly gridded panels called *Earth* (1999) has none of the vibrancy of Gascoigne's earlier work. They are intimations of mortality, a dull, slow-beating of the Creator's drum, as he grows impatient waiting for the artist, who continues to fiddle around in the studio without much conviction. They are not the last testament of a great artist but a delaying tactic from a woman who loved life and experienced its small, sensual details with a keen pleasure. Having found such depths in material things, she seems to have given up that world with the greatest reluctance.

of physics, or perhaps religion, for the dematerialised self is also a metaphor for the soul.

Two pieces in the upstairs gallery are just as fascinating. *Invisible By Night* (2004) explores the experience of personal grief and the way it isolates us from the world. It begins with the life-size figure of a woman, her head wreathed in clouds. When we touch the screen, she responds, wiping away a small patch of condensation to look out at us with bleary eyes. It is one fragile moment of communion that breaks through the mists of mourning, a poignant and

strangely moving encounter with a stranger.

In *Hold: Vessel 1 And 2* (2001-07), the viewer picks up a shallow, opaque glass bowl and takes it into a darkened room. Columns of light projected from the ceiling are captured and held by the bowl, which becomes a hand-held screen, showing vibrant images of the night sky taken by the Hubble space telescope, microscopic organisms of the Great Barrier Reef and footage of the 2004 transit of Venus. The latter is especially significant because the transit of Venus was the ostensible

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