

South by southeast: the 14th Sydney Biennale avoided many of the excesses typical of international art festivals by showing fewer artists and newer, often specially commissioned works

Lilly Wei

No longer quite so far away--22 hours from New York as Qantas flies--lies Sydney, Australia, where this past summer the 14th edition of the Sydney Biennale unfolded. The show was curated by Isabel Carlos, a Portuguese native born in Coimbra in 1962, who now lives in Lisbon, Brussels and Sydney. She is an art critic, international curator, and founder and former deputy director of the Instituto de Arte Contemporanea of the Portuguese Ministry of Culture. She is the first Latin and the second woman (after Lynne Cooke, curator of New York's Dia Center for the Arts, in 1996) to be appointed artistic director of a biennial that some consider to be second only to Venice. In fact, the Biennale of Sydney, founded in 1973 by Italian-born Franco Belgiorno-Nettis, was modeled after the Venice show and has been largely funded by Transfield, his family-owned, Sydney-based construction company. The Biennale is still a family affair, and its current chairman is Luca Belgiorno-Nettis, Franco's son.

The title and very broad theme of this year's exhibition, "On Reason and Emotion," was inspired by Descartes' Error: Emotion, Reason and the Human Brain (1994), written by the noted--and sometimes controversial--Portuguese neurologist and philosopher Antonio Damasio. Carlos believes that Damasio's pioneering work on the neurology of emotions, which reassesses the importance of "cognition," has profoundly altered epistemological discourse, shifting the emphasis away from cognition to emotions. One of his premises is that ratiocination is dependent on emotion, as mind is on body. Therefore, reason and emotion, like mind and body, are not separate entities, let alone opposite principles, but deeply interdependent, both physiologically and psychologically, so that the Cartesian system, based on cognition alone, is incomplete. Ultimately, according to Damasio, it is emotion that facilitates choice and governs thinking. Carlos, whose ties with the Americas are through Brazil rather than the U.S., invests the south and southern cultures with a higher emotional quotient than the north, which she sees as rational, cooler. Carlos said she had expected Australia to be a "southern" country in this sense, purely because of its location. When she discovered that in fact Australian colonial history had trumped indigenous heritage and geography, she decided to make a "southern" show, one in which emotion was not presented as reason's inferior but as its other--inseparable from it, if not dominant. For Carlos, it seems that true north points south.

However dubious these notions might seem, as curatorial imperatives they did no harm. Whether or not "On Reason and Emotion" constitutes sound science, it provided a provocative frame work for looking at art. The Biennale's traditional preference for having a single curator encourages clarity and cohesiveness of vision, although some works were naturally more relevant to the theme than others. This admirably installed and integrated presentation, characterized by balance, solid viewing pleasures and comprehensible scale, resembled a major museum show more than the frenetic, fashionable fare of many international biennials. Refreshingly, "On Reason and Emotion" did not stress cultural displacement or cultural clashes as such, the frequent--and natural--subject of so many globe-trotting international artists. Neither was it didactic, theory-driven nor particularly enamored of sophisticated technologies. Carlos also did not seek out the sensational, and what erotic charge there was to the show remained subtle, a combination of body, mind and soul. She brought to Sydney a mix of several generations of well-known and lesser-known artists working in a variety of mediums--painting, drawing, photography, video, installation, sculpture, sound and performance--with the machine- and handmade equally represented.

Nearly every one of the 50 artists (actually 57, counting the members of collectives and collaborations, as well as one "unknown artist") was given what amounted to a room of their own. More than half the show consisted of new works, many site-specific, and several artists were seen in more than one venue--sometimes redundantly. Although Carlos claimed no interest in nationalities and waved no flags--just compass points--an international show by definition has nationality on its mind. In Sydney, 32 countries were represented, although a number of the artists included have dual

residence. Europeans dominated. Australia and New Zealand had 10 strong participants, and the split between "northern" and "southern" was almost 50/50, even if the division got a little fuzzy, and a number of countries had historic ties to Portugal. There was also a nearly equal gender split. "To tell the truth," Carlos said, "I only counted afterwards." There were, however, disappointingly few artists from Asia this time and none from the Pacific Islands.

Instead of spending money on costly architectural renovations for the show, Carlos channeled available funds into the art itself, commissioning site-specific works for the Biennale and bringing artists to Sydney as part of her theme of connection. With the exception of Helena Almeida, Fernando Alvim, Bruce Nauman and Michael Sailstorfer, all included artists attended the show. The verdant, well-groomed grounds of the Royal Botanic Gardens were host to six installations and connected the two principal venues, the Museum of Contemporary Art, which was turned over entirely to the Biennale, and the Art Gallery of New South Wales, which allocated its ample temporary exhibition space to the show. At Artspace, a center for experimental art, an additional four projects were shown. The forecourt of the Sydney Opera House was used for a performance by Native American Jimmie Durham, and the glass cube exterior of the Museum of Sydney displayed a nighttime video projection by New Zealander Daniel von Sturmer. Overall, the show was a concentrated walkabout, pairing outside and inside, banded by the sparkling waters of Sydney's famous bay and punctuated by the city's twin landmarks, the Opera House and the Harbour Bridge. The route was clearly marked, so as to minimize the number of stray biennial-goers wandering about in search of an installation. The circularity of the exhibition route was also emblematic of Carlos's theme, in which reason and emotion, north and south, were deemed to be interconnected. Carlos also emphasized that a biennial should take into account the place where it is held, not only as a "physical space but an economic, social, political and philosophical space."

Royal Botanic Gardens

Entering the show this way, you saw, situated along a path leading toward the bay, *Words for Gardens* (2004) by Luisa Cunha (Lisbon), an installation composed of a bench and headphones that whispered a text linking drawing to seeing the world, defined here as a zone that exists simultaneously inside the listener's head and outside in physical reality. Nathan Coley (Glasgow) created an architectural structure, *The Edge of the Radiant City* (2004), that was a form of trespass, an intrusion into nature. The work consisted of a simple, gray modernist building facade, papered on the back side with the "ugliest wallpaper" the artist could find and "furnished" with fake potted plants. It was a more literal exterior and interior than Cunha's, its ungainliness offered in deliberate contrast to the cultivated beauty of the park, resulting in a skewed dialogue between a nature that wasn't quite nature and the towering Sydney skyscrapers beyond. Members of Coley's crew were spotted wearing T-shirts printed with this succinct credo: "conception, construction, installation, destruction."

From here, you could turn left or right. If you turned left, you came out onto the forecourt of the Sydney Opera. Durham, under a piercingly blue sky and surrounded by large crowds two days after the official opening of the Biennale, presided over the crushing of an economy-sized fire-engine-red car which remained in situ for the duration of the show. A 2-ton boulder with a painted face that resembled Mr. Potato Head was lowered onto the car's roof, while Durham conducted the operator of the crane in a spectacle that was also beguilingly "anti-spectacle," in the words of one viewer. The slow-mo buckling of the car--everyone applauded when the windows shattered--was a parable of nature crushing technology, albeit abetted by technology; it might also be read as one way to solve the perennially vexing question of sculpture and pedestal.

If you turned right, you came upon the crowd-pleasing *Secuencia Ridicula* (2002), by MP & MP Rosado (twin brothers from Seville). Here, two telegenic, lifelike, life-size figures of young men sat tantalizingly among the branches of a magnificent ancient fig tree, like a latter-day Tom and Huck (or maybe a Duane Hanson), just out of reach. Farther down the path, and easily overlooked, was another Durham piece, a half-hidden, red PVC pipe that resembled an amiable pet periscope, peering up inquiringly from a dry conduit, another version of the machine in the garden. In the nearby Palm House, a modestly sized greenhouse, was a poetic, ephemeral and idiosyncratic installation of inconsequential found objects, their abundance subdued and quieted into orderly groupings laid on the floor and attached to the walls by Korean-born, Paris-based Koo Jeong-a. And last, on the way toward the Art Gallery of New South Wales, along the curve of the water, was Bulgarian artist Pravidoliub Ivanov's *Water Monuments* (1999/2004). Using the sloping grass lawn as a color field, Ivanov, who has an offbeat sense of humor, sank dozens of candy-colored plastic buckets into the ground,

making either a geometric painting or a domesticated earthwork. At the Royal Botanic Gardens, reason as technology, emotion as nature, and the human presence were some of the issues juggled, reconsidered and reconciled.

Art Gallery of New South Wales

The Art Gallery of New South Wales, which holds the largest collection of aboriginal art in Australia, housed works by 16 artists (Helena Almeida, Pat Brassington, Jeroen de Rijke/Willem de Rooij, Carolyn Eskdale, Mattias Faldbakken, Asta Groting, Emiko Kasahara, Daniel Malone, Thomas Mulcaire and Amanda R. Alves, MP and MP Rosado, Frank Thiel, Daniel von Sturmer and Yin Xiuzhen).

Hung at the entrance to the galleries for temporary exhibitions, Beijing artist Yin Xiuzhen's eye-catching soft sculpture, *International Flight* (2001-04), consisted of two airplanes, each approximately 16 feet long. Their armatures were made of aluminum and covered with a patchwork of used clothes collected during the artist's travels; the planes were suspended over a heap of clothing collected from Sydneysiders. Nearby was an installation of a half-dozen of Yin's *Portable Cities* (2002-04), a series of suitcases that open to reveal miniaturized, cunningly sewn skylines and monuments of Paris, Sydney and Lisbon, among other places. Again fabricated from cast-offs gathered from the inhabitants of the cities depicted, these works came complete with a CD map and sound, each "city" a mostly handmade riff on specific lives and histories. The clothes represented the people who once wore them; the suitcases and airplanes were emblems of relocation and displacement.

Platinum blond wigs stretched out flat into perfect circles and floated on the floor like heavenly lotus pads, accompanied by a number of slick, bubblegum-pink photographs of the cervix--talk about body art--were New York-based Emiko Kasahara's contribution. At the other end of the gallery Frank Thiel (Berlin) showed a series of large, richly colored, luminous photographs of urban sites that read as abstract paintings. The esthetic is a variant, say, of that underlying Andreas Gursky's sprawling panoramas, only more intimate and sensuous.

Daniel Malone (Auckland) was accorded a long corridor on whose walls he painted a lurid Technicolor landscape that merged New Zealand hills with Australian desert, a scene based on a film by Tracy Moffatt, one of Australia's most internationally visible artists. *A Long Drop to Nationhood* (2004), as this work was titled, terminated in an outhouse imported from New Zealand. Malone designated this artifact as the essential common denominator of two closely linked cultures, and he equipped it with a video inside that showed him washing down and fumigating the structure in order to clear Australian customs.

Project for Sydney (2004), by Thomas Mulcaire and Amanda Rodrigues Alves (Cape Town/Sao Paulo), consisted of wall text that read "Sorry" and "No Worries" and stacks of large posters printed with the same words to be handed out to viewers. Unfortunately, these seemed too reminiscent of Felix Gonzalez-Torres's giveaways.

Helena Almeida (Lisbon), whom Carlos has long supported, and who was one of the first artists she thought of when organizing the biennial, was represented by three series of black-and-white photographs of herself, from 2003, 1994 and 1977, ranging in size from over 7 feet to less than 2. Two of the series incorporate an acrylic paint element as well. In the earliest sequence--six images, all taken in her studio--the artist's hand holding a brush is shown painting a spot of blue paint onto an invisible surface. In progression, her hand picks up the painted spot, brings it to her mouth, her face appearing in profile along the edge of the photo, inserts it and presumably swallows it; the series ends with Almeida still in profile, lips tightly closed. Her other self-representations are larger, just under life-size, and are cut-off, frontal images of her body, the focal point her hand; one picture is splashed with red paint over her outspread palm. The third group depicts the artist on the floor, curled up in strangely contorted shapes, like abstract sculpture, with a glimpse of her hand or foot in some of the frames. Almeida's body is her medium; as she once said, "I am the canvas."

Another New Zealander, Melbourne-based artist Daniel von Sturmer, showed a video installation titled *The Truth Effect* (2003), a blindingly white and immaculately conceived work that was as streamlined and sleek as an iPod. In a techno-formalist commentary on perception, von Sturmer in effect relocated the gallery wall, utilizing a great white horizontal plane on which he propped his "painting," that is, where he projected his pictorial images--five small, white luminous

screens that displayed cleanly defined minimalist forms in motion on a white field. All the images, however, are of ordinary objects--a roll of colored tape, for instance, which turns into a circle within a circle, a figure 8, an infinity loop, refreshing the familiar language of abstract paintings.

Museum of Contemporary Art

Since 2000, the Biennale's main venue has been the financially troubled Museum of Contemporary Art, located off the Circular Quay, one of the city's prime tourist spots. On entering its spacious galleries, one discovered two ambitious photographic displays. "My Weather Diary," by Jari Silomaki (Helsinki), is an ongoing project that was initiated in 2001 and mounted in Sydney as a grid that filled an entire wall, several years of work apparent at a glance. Silomaki takes a picture every day, wherever he happens to be, under different light and weather conditions, often with a low horizon line and without people, then handwrites on the print the name of the place, the date and a laconic observation--that day's major political event, a personal situation, a thought, a feeling. Although the strategy is familiar, the work has an unexpected, cumulative poetry.

The mood of another enigmatic series, "White Goods" (2001-04), by Derek Kreckler (Perth), is more psychologically fraught, as the banal and the satiric mask incipient violence. Clean, crisp Cibachromes, quite large, feature a battered white refrigerator--sometimes two--as the protagonist(s) of his posed dramas. One scene shot at night spotlights a cluster of ordinary folk near a stand of trees; from bare branches dangle two refrigerators, each suspended from a rope. The image suggests a lynching scene, and bears a disturbing resemblance to photos of such events once snapped as souvenirs in the American South.

Nearby was a handsome, stage-setlike installation by Mario Rizzi (Berlin/Rome). A re-creation of C.G. Jung's office, its sound components, activated by motion-sensors at the viewer's approach, murmured excerpts from the diaries of Sabina Spielrein, Jung's lover, and letters written by her, Jung and Freud. A distraught Jung, worried about his relationship with Sabina, his patient, consulted Freud on the matter. The spoken passages record the eventual shift from passion between doctor and patient to an equally intense intimacy based on the exchange of ideas. In *The Sofa of Jung* (2004)--in Jungian analysis there is no "couch"--Rizzi investigates traces of emotions and thoughts, constructing a playlet out of fragments of text and voices.

Annetta Kapon (born in Greece, based in Los Angeles) exhibited *Verbatim* (2000), a deadpan video based on stock phrases of rejection as well as on objects, soft and hard, mostly from the 1990s, with a Duchampian or Magrittean cast. These included a couch with a strangely disconcerting stack of square cushions rising to the ceiling like a chimney, and two 35mm cameras joined at their lenses like the lovers in Brancusi's *Kiss*.

Catherine Richards (Ottawa) stayed close to the theme with her *I was scared to death / I could have died of joy* (2000). Two glowing, gas-filled glass vacuum tubes placed on stainless-steel tables confronted each other from opposite sides of a darkened gallery. One tube encloses a fragile glass model of the right lobe of the brain, while the other encloses a model of the left, each extruding a semblance of spinal column. Together they seem a prototype for what intelligence might look like in the future. They emit different-colored lights--an incandescent pale green for the right and a luminous red-violet for the left. When the tubes are touched by a viewer, the lights pulsate as if to describe thought and emotion, an "extended mind."

Melik Ohanian (Paris) presented a hypnotic 40-minute film, *White Wall Traveling* (1997). It consists of a slow tracking shot that takes in the then-deserted Liverpool docks (during the filming, a bitter, much discussed strike was in progress that some feared signaled the death of an industry) to create an utterly convincing space, a triumph of verismo. This brilliant reverie was flawed only by the introduction of text, like subtitles, taken from interviews with dockworkers. These words might better have been presented in voiceover, so as not to interrupt the compelling visuality of the whole. Ohanian here framed a social commentary about a world in transition in rigorously esthetic terms, making it into an almost purely perceptual experience that was also deeply moving.

For the most part, the few overtly political works seemed isolated and halfhearted. Aboriginal artist Gordon Hookey's raucous, anti-government multimedia installation *Paranoia Annoy Ya* (2004) was crowded together with Angolan

Fernando Alvim's *A Flag Life* (2000-01), a series of five handmade flags that symbolize the life and times of an African nation. Alvim presents the Angolan flag, accompanied by four others with letters stitched onto a black ground: the loved flag, the hated flag, the murdered flag, the ex-flag.

Also squeezed into this area was an installation by Monica Nador (Sao Paulo). In *Untitled: Paredes Pinturas Project* (2004), festive, brightly colored, boldly patterned wall paintings made from designs copied from inexpensive household items were paired with photographs of similarly decorated interior walls and facades of houses. These were the homes of impoverished rural migrants who live in an area near Silo Paulo. Nador asked these people how they would like their walls to look, then painted them accordingly. When asked about her seemingly utopian, communal vision, Nador said simply that Brazil is poor, and she wanted to make art for her people.

On the next level were the lyrical, expansive "Parwalla" paintings (1999-2002) of Elizabeth Nyumi Nungurrayi, an aboriginal artist. Composed of pointillist dots, commas and lines arranged in a loose pattern that refers to the desert region where she grew up, these are the largest canvases she had ever painted. The textured subtleties of her pastel pinks, yellows, reds, whites and ochers dashed here and there with blue were a variation on the sterner, more parched palette of her community.

In the next space was AES+F, a collective from Moscow, which contributed several striking inkjet prints on canvas that were literally the poster children of the Biennale: a cadre of mixed race and multiethnic, scantily clad, prepubescent teens who, armed with handheld futuristic weapons, clearly have more than video games on their mind as they reconnoiter barren territory, digitally inserted fighter planes flying in close support.

Video

Then came a number of videos that began with *La Tache aveugle* (1978-90), by James Coleman (Dublin), another of Carlos's initial choices. Projected onto the wall of one of the museum's largest galleries, this absorbing work consisted of 13 frames from James Whale's film *The Invisible Man* (1933). Many viewers were puzzled at first by the work's almost unchanging image, which would seem to have little need for all the technical apparatus devoted to its display. What had originally passed in a half second of screen time was now on continuous loop and slowed to a virtual standstill. This 13-frame shot, which resembled a painting, became a laconic but absorbing examination of the structure and principles of cinematic narrative and history. Coleman's influence on a number of notable younger artists, such as Douglas Gordon and Stan Douglas, is apparent.

Bruce Nauman (New Mexico) was represented by a single-channel video installation, a version of his *Mapping the Studio* (2001), on loan from the National Gallery of Australia, Canberra. He has shown several versions of this work previously, including a quietly spectacular, nearly six-hour long, seven-projection installation in New York at the Dia Center for the Arts in 2002. As a dedicated slice of real time, *Mapping* functions in exactly the opposite fashion from Coleman's piece. By using an infrared camera to film his studio at night, when mice and other desert wildlife from time to time make an unannounced appearance, Nauman presents a skeptical voyeurism that examines the nature of chance, ambiguity and art-making. *Mapping* is a hermetic but hypnotic construct that is simultaneously candid, contrived and mesmerizing.

The Point of Departure (2004), a sensuously seductive 26-minute film by the collaborative team of de Rijke/de Rooij (Amsterdam), was installed in a gallery similar to Coleman's. The artists scheduled it to run once every hour, with a half-hour interval so that the viewer could also experience the architectural space as part of the work. The subject is a carpet, which the camera eye examines in obsessive detail--from a web of its individual threads to a slow pan of the entire surface, section by section. The pattern is seen first as aggregates to assemble in the mind, information acquired bit by bit, as in reality. In the end, the camera pulls far back to reveal the entire, vividly colored Azerbaijani rug, which is rotated until only a thin line remains, then flipped to reveal the underside. Receding quickly, it diminishes in size until it disappears, like the magic carpet it is. Metaphorically it has just traversed three centuries of Dutch art--well known, of course, for its prodigies of descriptive detail--leaving intimations of colonial and postcolonial subtexts in its wake.

Javier Tellez (Venezuelan-born, New York-based) made *The Passion of Joan of Arc* (Rozelle Hospital), 2004, in Sydney,

with the help of 12 women patients at Rozelle Psychiatric Hospital. For the installation, Tellez set up two opposing projections. One was the silent film *La Passion de Jeanne d'Arc* (1927-28), by the brilliant Danish director Carl Dreyer, played in a revised version with new intertitles written together with Tellez's collaborators. The other projection was a sequence of interviews with each of the 12 women: the camera close up, the subjects' subtly and not so subtly disturbed faces enhanced by the anguished, expressive visage--and extraordinary eyes--of Renee Falconetti, who played Joan. Thematically, it was one of the Biennale's most persuasive moments and certainly Tellez's most complex project to date. It avoided all the usual bromides about the inmates of such institutions being saner than their keepers, instead providing an unsentimental, steadfast look at these women's essential humanity. Despite their aberrations, they are, to paraphrase Baudelaire, our semblables, our soeurs. Carlos said that "the women clapped when it was over and told Tellez that it had been the best experience of their lives."

Susan Norrie (Sydney) began her career as a painter before moving into other mediums. She showed the short, quietly haunting *ENOLA* (2004) on a small screen, the viewers seated around it on chairs sized for kindergarteners. (*Enola Gay* was, of course, the name of the aircraft that dropped the atomic bomb on Hiroshima.) The DVD, digitally manipulated and looped, scans a cobbled-together world of iconic monuments and empty, eerie vistas that are at once familiar and not, a futuristic film in 1960s nouvelle vague mode. The somewhat retro mise-en-scene is a dreamlike, mysterious space where meaning and history are flattened, uncertain. As a young Japanese woman shades her eyes, airplanes slowly come and go around her, as if searching for something in the distance, adding an undercurrent of yearning to Norrie's sober, affectless scenario.

The peripatetic Francis Alys (born in Antwerp, lives in Mexico City) showed *Bolero*, an installation of paintings, drawings on tables, and a video animation, inspired by one of his signature walks, that appropriately enough features a shoe. His other entry was *Untitled* (the sculpture that nobody wanted), 2004. This piece required that an object made by Alys be transferred every day by a designated walker from the MCA to the Art Gallery of NSW and back again, for the duration of the Biennale. For Alys, these walks are to be seen as guides to the city he is in, and his interventions "another fragment" of the story he is inventing of this city, a space that for him is always provisional.

Much to Carlos's credit, the Biennale's video component was chosen with restraint. For once, it was not a test of endurance, the viewing conditions were exemplary, and many of the works brilliant, well worth the time spent on them.

And Others

Pat Brassington, a late bloomer and eccentric, pre-Matthew Barney surrealist from Hobart in Tasmania, showed nine pigment photographs at the MCA, most from the '90s, which are more viscerally weird and direct than was her more elaborate installation at the Art Gallery of NSW. Pretty in pink, white and black, they depict, in slight distortion, bodies, faces and objects--some not recognizable--that conjure up disquieting thoughts of unnatural acts through means of fairly simple photographic manipulations. Yet the images spook--for example, a red-lipped open mouth, its protruding, grooved, carmine tongue surrounded by dead white ground, as if the flesh had melted down, or the bent, skinny legs in saggy white tights stuffed into shoes that resemble the devil's black hoofs.

Diti Almog (born in Haifa, lives in New York) was represented by a suite of paintings that are a complex study of the nature of painting and perception. Acrylic on aircraft plywood, the seven modestly sized works from 2003-04 depict spare interiors with glimpses of landscape and what seem to be the same paintings we are looking at on the walls, although from other points of view. The hanging itself is replicated in the paintings. These works are also a tribute to stillness, silence and light, and in this they recall the tone and timelessness of Edward Hopper, from inside one of his lonely, light-struck houses by the sea.

Drum Set (2003) by Michael Sailstorfer (Munich) is just that, but constructed from the slightly scarred, green and white body parts of a German police van. *Herterichstrasse 119* (2001) consists of a rather uncomfortable-looking wooden bench/couch that was made from materials retrieved from the demolition of the house of the title. A photograph of the late, lamented structure hangs over the couch--a compromised, much critiqued location.

At Artspace, in a former gunnery training center, were works by Loulou Cherinet, Lim Tzay Chuen, Frederic Post and Heimo Zobernig. Lim Tzay Chuen (Singapore), a self-described "culture sub-contractor," invited local artists to compete for his space in what amounted to another version of institutional critique. It was this piece that explained the mysterious listing "one unknown artist" in Biennale press releases. A group called Sydney Circular claimed the space as Lira specified--by submitting the most ripped-out first pages of Carlos's essay in the catalogue by the deadline. (At AUD \$55 each, the catalogues did not come cheap.) However, Sydney Circular refused to put anything into the space, protesting that Lira's project trivialized participation in the Biennale, and conditionally offered it back to him. Lira, in turn, refused their proposal, although he might have renegotiated--an opportunity lost for both sides. What was potentially interesting fell rather flat; alas, two critiques do not an artwork make. (Perhaps the Biennale chairman's enterprising 13-year-old daughter, the only other candidate in contention, should have won by default.)

Whatever the limitations of this Biennale of Sydney--and all events of this kind are a mixed bag--it offered an abundance of substantial, serious and tasteful works of informed visuality that were also satisfying to behold. Because the pace was slowed down, the effect lingered; in that sense and others, it was a Biennale to remember.

COMMERCIAL VENUES

Sydney's contemporary art galleries--many in the Paddington area--took advantage of the Biennale to showcase their artists with concurrent openings. Several exhibitions were group shows and featured artists participating in the biennial, such as Sherman Galleries' "Mix-Ed," a photographic and video presentation. In it were Xing Danwen (Beijing), who showed her distinctive "allover" photographs of densely packed industrial detritus that were related to her Biennale series of "E-trash" (which had previously appeared in the Whitney Museum's "American Effect" show in 2003), and Daniel von Sturmer, with his brilliant short video of crumpling paper; young Australian video and film artists Daniel Crooks and Shaun Gladwell--who were not in the Biennale--also contributed freewheeling work in which glorious Australian sky seemed to be the subject. Other artists from the Biennale showed up in other spaces, such as Daniel Malone at Mori Gallery, with a continuation of his installation at the Art Gallery of NSW, in the company of Raquel Ormella, Simon Yates and Michael Zavros. At Roslyn Oxley9 (considered to be, with Sherman Galleries, Sydney's top contemporary commercial venue) were TV Moore's two-channel video installation, *The Dead Zone* (2003), of a young man running barefoot in slow motion through Sydney's deserted main business district, and Dale Frank's gorgeously colored, poured and layered abstract paintings made from industrial mediums. Grant Pirrie showed Patrick Pound's new series of digital, soft-focus photographs, and Darren Knight presented Berlin-based Michael Stevenson (who represented New Zealand at the Venice Biennale in 2003). Stevenson's beautifully presented project was a fascinating study of the famously eccentric Australian artist Ian Fairweather's improbable voyage to the small island of Roti, near Timor--a journey he made in a small makeshift raft, a replica of which was included in the show.

Gitte Weise Gallery exhibited Sarah Ryan's trademark lenticular photographs, as well as James Dorahy's installation titled patronymic. Annandale Galleries, in another part of Sydney, showed a great roomful of delicate, flat sculptures by Israeli artist Zadok Ben-David. These works, which resemble paper cutouts, vary in scale from life-size to miniaturized figures and trees, with the latter the most appealing. Kaliman Gallery also had a group show, which included three new gallery artists, Sally Ross, Maria Cruz and David Griggs. The latter's installation--a DVD loop that re-created a car trip on the Thai-Burmese border, along with part of the actual get-away vehicle that transported the escapees--provoked thoughts about the dangers and frustrations of crossing borders. Asia-Australia Arts Centre's 4A Gallery also sponsored a group show, an official Biennale parallel event. The ambitious "Asian Traffic," with 15 local Asian-Australian artists and 15 international Asian artists that included Shen Shaomin, Mella Jaarsma, Owen Leong and Song Dong, was a multi-faceted endeavor--a four-month long exhibition in six installments, changing exhibitions approximately every 18 days, with ancillary events. Its purpose was to consider contemporary art practice and exchange in an Asia/Australia context, "trafficking" along an esthetic route that circulates through Australia and the developing cultural centers of the East.

Sydney and its Biennale, relatively remote from European and North American art capitals, should find itself re-evaluating its geography. Once considered marginalized, it is now ideally situated at a newly vibrant international crossroad, the Pacific nexus, where strong, cross-pollinated regional talent may be the future. The recently announced artistic director for

the next Biennale of Sydney Charles Merewether's reportedly already there.

The Biennale of Sydney [June 4-Aug. 15] was on view at multiple locations in Sydney, including the Art Gallery of New South Wales, the Museum of Contemporary Art, Artspace, the Museum of Sydney, the Royal Botanic Gardens and the Sydney Opera House.

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