

Vol 4 N°02 1988 £1.50

September/October 1988

ON SALE IN: USA Netherlands France
Germany Belgium Italy Switzerland



INTERNATIONAL
REPORT

BRISBANE
EMERGING
FROM THE
SHADOWS

TOLD BY AN
PERFORMANCE
EDGE 88 - LONDON

JANET PATTERSON
ARTIST OUTREACH

OS ARTISTS IN PROFILE

DIALOGUE
NICHOLAS
WATERLOO

SPECIAL REPORT
AUSTRALIA'S
DEALER

FEATURE
GALLERY

MACQUARIE

AUSTRALIAN

DAVID ELI

ROSLYN OXLEY

REALITY

ABRAHAM

DEUTSCH

REBECCA HOSSACK

AN AUSTRALIAN IN LONDON



THE REBECCA HOSSACK GALLERY opened in Windmill Street, in the heart of Tambimuttu's 'Fitzrovia', only a short time ago. Already it seems to have become one of London's fashionable fixtures, the result of a sustained effort by a Melbourne doctor's daughter

Joel von Joel: You were born in Melbourne and now run your own gallery in London. In all senses you have come a long way, what made you leave Australia?

Rebecca Hossack: To study law at the Middle Temple! I did two degrees at University, one in Law and one in Arts, I majored in Fine Arts and that was always my first love. When I got to London I thought that I could finally see all the paintings I had only seen on slides... being here I soon realised it was one discipline or the other — I chose Art.

Rebecca Hossack: You imagine a lot of art information in Australia is necessarily second hand — through slides and film. Is there, in fact, a sense of isolation?

As a passionately ardent fan of Australia, I love it and I always felt: 'why go to England?', it is an old country with old ideas. Anything one could do had probably already been done better. If you wanted to be a writer — Shakespeare had done it better; a painter — Turner and Gainsborough had done it better! In Australia I felt very strongly that here was a whole continent with different light, different fauna, different flora; an extraordinarily wild continent which artists and writers could draw on to dazzle the world. Some people in Australia are of that belief. Others feel that they must go to Europe and fit in with the mainstream of art history. I think that is how it is perceived...

Rebecca Hossack: A few Australian artists manage to break away from the influence of that magnificent landscape. It seems to pervade everything painted. Is it possible there has been one of the barriers that stops them (the artists) having a major presence in Europe?

Do you mean they can't break away from the landscape tradition? Arthur Boyd, in the '40s, was doing a very long series of unrelated paintings and most of the good Australian artists went to Paris, saw Europe. Of course the call of the landscape is very powerful and beautiful, it brings them back.

Rebecca Hossack: To speak about Australia is to speak of diverse spaces, distances, senses of identity; and Australian artists have again and again to deal with other people's stereotypes of what the characteristics of Australian art might be. At its crudest, the landscape, the 'outback', the imagined rawness of the 'uncharted' continent, and now Aboriginality, are all become threads in this stereotype. A stereotype made all the more ironic by the fact that the vast majority of Australians live in cities.

Rebecca Hossack: However, you still left, came to the UK. When you contemplated opening your gallery, why not open in Australia?

... I would have loved to. Ironically I don't have enough money to go back there to do it. Ideally, one would like to have a gallery in Australia and in London. It

has got to be difficult to run a gallery in two places — so I am not sure that would ever work... When I went back last year I wasn't impressed by the contemporary style of the white Australians nearly as much as I was by the indigenous art of the Aborigines.

The reassessing of Aboriginal art, due to political guilt, cultural guilt or whatever, has certainly boosted the commercial interest in tribal art and artefacts, these have now filtered into mainstream galleries across the World...

That is right, it is a very exciting thing, the birth of the Papunya Tula movement has been hailed as one of the greatest art movements this century, that happened in the '60s in central Australia. I think you are right in saying there were political reasons...

'To speak about Australia is to speak of diverse spaces, distances, senses of identity; and Australian artists have again and again to deal with other people's stereotypes of what the characteristics of Australian art might be. At its crudest, the landscape, the 'outback', the imagined rawness of the huge 'uncharted' continent, and now Aboriginality, have all become threads in this stereotype. A stereotype made all the more ironic by the fact that the vast majority of Australians live in cities.'

Recently Joan Bakewell wrote that one of the reasons for your gallery's existence is to bring to England the best of Australian art, is that a definition?

I would like to show the best Australian work certainly, I think the ones I am showing are certainly the cream of the bunch; there are several white Australian artists that I would love to show but they are contracted to other galleries in London.

Your position on the future is... what?

... is a third Australian art and two thirds British art. For example, in September we have the first exhibition of a new series of works by French photographer, Bernard Faucon. Leo Castelli is his dealer in New York, and although this has been shown in Arts Council subsidised exhibitions, he has never shown in a private gallery.

You are very happy to have an active relationship with other galleries, you don't support that fashioned idea that an artist is exclusively yours?

I like my artists to be *exclusively mine* actually, it's a contract. I just feel it makes things easier that way.

You could say that England was like a State in Australian terms. There, artists have a gallery in Melbourne and a totally different gallery and structure in Sydney, neighbouring states. One dealer does not represent an artist over the whole of Australia?

When you go to Australia, each state is a two plane journey. The *Australian Galleries* is the one that has a gallery in both Sydney and Melbourne. They represent the old guard, and they are marvellous and very well run. I also deal with *Macquarie Galleries* in Sydney.

Let's talk about the establishment of your gallery...

It was a lot of work. Australia has many outdoor cafes and is more like Europe than London. Here on Windmill Street it has a wonderful atmosphere with all the Greek restaurants. We are opposite the shops, all the Greek restaurants. We are opposite the shops, all the Greek offices, with *Channel 4* around the corner and also all the other galleries in the area. It is really booming: *Angela Flowers, Annelly Juda, Kai Schubert, Austin Desmond, Curwen, Academy... The Illustrators Gallery*. I remember taking some German people down Cork Street on Saturday afternoon, it was closed and it was raining and it looked very depressing. Here on a Saturday afternoon there are people sitting out having lunch and it is a very conducive atmosphere to buy art...

You have entered this business on your own, must be quite a responsibility. What do you think the ingredients for a successful gallery that has a realistic future...

TIM L...
More Crazy Than C...





BERNARD FAU
Premier Communion

think it is a much more exciting field now. When I first came to this country art was something that very few people talked about socially. Now one cannot go anywhere without it being the main topic of conversation at all sorts of events. Virtually everyone you are met has been to private views, goes to galleries and collects pictures. It has become very glamorous of a sudden.

Do you think it is possible to run a gallery, in the financial climate of the '80s, dealing purely in contemporary work?

A lot of people say it is not, but I believe I am right in saying that Angela Flowers only deals in contemporary works. Of course everyone does a bit of dealing in other things. I deal in Modern Masters and I deal in Old Masters from time to time, but I try and run the gallery purely on the sales of my young artists. Each of our private views is is totally different, sometimes we take a very sophisticated elegant approach and other times we have a very trendy approach... we promote each artist according to themselves.

The next show we are having is of Ann Carrington

who has made these extraordinary things called pirate radios. So we set up competitions on London's radio stations in which people can win Ann's sculptures and we will reach a new and appropriate audience for her work. We certainly wouldn't do that for a Papunya Tula exhibition that we approach the *Sunday Times*. I think it must be that we can never sit down and say 'we have got the formula for it', you have to change totally, each moment. You cannot rest on the laurels of previous success.

and I intend to show a completely different artist each time to different people...

Does the dealer of today have to balance a knowledge of art with an ability to manipulate the media?

We are talking about my sort of dealer... I don't have a lot of capital behind me, I can't afford to have a basement of Modern Masters and so I have to run to stand still. I cannot afford to sit behind my desk looking very elegant and going out to a party, selling a £100,000 picture and then relaxing for the rest of the month. I wish I could!

What is the gallery policy about recruiting artists...

... it is a network. I always listen to artists and I am sure every other dealer does.

Contemporary art is most certainly an international language, how important do you think it is to have a presence in the international arena?

I really do think it is worth it. I have only done the Art Fair in Los Angeles, but I would like to attend Chicago and Basle, it is very wonderful for the artists to get an overseas exposure. But that is a different question from becoming an international gallery. Art Fairs do not make one an international artist or gallery as such, that is a much more political and different question.

Art Fairs, Biennales, international exhibitions are all based on the assumption that art can transcend its maker or place. The paintings in our Aboriginal art exhibition came from a very specific geographical and social context; however, the success of the exhibition in London, where the light, landscape and social customs are so different, tends to prove this point.

How important do you think it is, for a contemporary art gallery no matter where situated, to be part of that international milieu?

Californian artists are very much collected in California, New York artists are collected in New York and often never seen in other places or other countries. I don't think that invalidates in any way the integrity or the ability of those artists. Whether one uses a home bank in a little country town or a big international bank I think often the quality of the service can be just as good. I love unique and individual things and by definition unique and individual things can't but be specific to one place. By the same token one could go to a small state in Australia and probably find a very good artist who will never make it internationally but who *could have* had the political machinery been right.

But doesn't this really illustrate a problem you are going to have showing Australian art here in Windmill Street?

No, I don't think it will — because I am going to make these artists do very well in London and if I take them to America, as I hope to, then they will do very well in America... and wherever else. But I don't know whether that is *international*, having shown in four different countries.

Is there, in fact, a finite amount of money available



for contemporary art in Britain and sooner or later individuals who want to buy paintings are going to have bought them...

... it is almost like a game of chance and it is always a miracle to me how many people find the gallery, walk in the door and buy a picture. When you think of how many hundreds of galleries and how many thousands of pictures are available — yet you get *that* individual and *that* work of art together in the same place at the same time — it never ceases to amaze me. I think I *have* got wonderful artists and I feel vindicated because so many people come off the street and make major purchases.

The Australian system is very interesting. One picks up the phone from Melbourne to Sydney and you say: look I have got Fred, can you handle Fred in Sydney? The idea of co-habiting with another dealer who is experienced in a particular area doesn't seem to occur to most British galleries.

You are absolutely right. In fact I was hoping to do that in Cologne with Tim Abdullah and Stuart Gerstman (of Melbourne) but they had to close down in Germany...

That was an interesting case in point because they were dedicated to giving exposure to Australian art in Cologne and found it pretty difficult...

I was terrified by their example. The night before *my* Papunya show opened they had just had one in Cologne. I heard that not one single picture had sold. I thought this doesn't auger very well for my show. In the event we did extremely well. But I agree with what you say, one cannot be in two places at once and one must rely on the local knowledge of the dealer network because each dealer does have their special clients. It certainly would be good to introduce our clients to German artists and have a German connection and vice versa.

You appear to avoid group shows?

STEPHEN MASTERSON EX
Gallery Ir

You don't have to try as hard with a group everyone can slightly relax and leave it to one person to really pull in the crowd. I think it is important to see the entire period of work of an artist, if he has been working for a show for two years. I do not like theme shows — I think it is a bit like roses in art, flowers in art, babies in art, or birds in art, white paintings, or horses in art... what does it mean?

Is it important to have some sense of art history?

I think it is important. Post-modernism and geometricism in particular require a knowledge of what ideas, images and concepts were used in previous centuries, in order to give meaning and context to the present work.

What about links with home, do you feel that British now...?

No, I never wanted to come here in the first place. It is by a strange and curious set of circumstances that this has ended up happening — it is a dream I never dared dream. I feel I have aged 10 years since I opened the gallery. In the first six months the gallery has been open, but I love Australia and I do actually feel that it is a wonderful country... When I first came here I was very funny — I had all Australian potter Australian bright coloured clothes. I wanted everyone to see how fresh Australia was. It is beautiful, now of course I don't feel that so much.

It is bloody hard work and each show in Australia is going to be five times as hard as in London. I think it will be worth it!

The **Rebecca Hossack Gallery** is at 35 Windmill Street, London W1 (01-409 3599). 1988 exhibitions are by Ann Carrington (31 Aug - 24 Sept), Bernard Easton (28 Sept - 22 Oct), Colin Johnstone (26 Oct - 19 Nov), and Shaun Brosnan (30 Nov - 30 Dec)