

# REPORT FROM AUSTRALIA

## Pacific Basin Futures

*The Tenth Sydney Biennale and the Second Asia-Pacific Triennial celebrated the hybrid nature of the region's burgeoning contemporary art.*

BY JUDITH E. STEIN

Inhabiting a geographically remote continent, Australians have sometimes felt as if they have their feet in the Pacific and their necks craned towards the Atlantic. This Eurocentric contrapposto long characterized the Australian art world. A realignment began in the '70s, when the nation's indigenous artists became newly visible at home and abroad. Expanding beyond their traditionally ephemeral art materials to the more permanent and portable acrylics, Aborigine artists created striking—and marketable—reflections of a culture that was radically different in form and content from Western models. As a partial result, the white Australian arts community developed a new duality of consciousness, marked by an enhanced respect for non-Western cultural traditions. Today, an estimated one third to one half of the country's visual art production is created by indigenous people, who comprise only 1.7 percent of Australia's population.<sup>1</sup>

It is not surprising, then, that Australia is in the vanguard of a worldwide increase in awareness of the Pacific Basin.<sup>2</sup> Japan's Fukuoka Museum was one of the first institutions to showcase the contemporary art of its neighbors, beginning with a 1979 survey of India, China and Japan and continuing with a sequence of Asian art shows held every four or five years. But it is the Australians who have taken the lead in organizing a series of important exhibitions that bring together a broad sampling of art from East, Southeast and South Asia.<sup>3</sup>

What may be surprising is that this initiative was generated in Brisbane, Australia's third largest city, and not in Sydney or Melbourne, the country's better-known cultural hubs. Sydney was already committed to its Biennale, established in 1973 in part to mitigate Australia's physical isolation from Western cultural centers. Although East Asian artists were represented in the premier Biennale and in many subsequent ones, they were not its abiding focus. Brisbane's Queensland Art Gallery saw this vacuum and moved to fill it.



Above, installation view of the Sydney Biennale showing Yinka Shonibare's (England) *How Does a Girl Like You Get to be a Girl Like You?* (foreground), 1995, three costumes made with wax-print cotton textiles, 5½ feet high. Aborigine artist Emily Kngwarreye's silk batiks appear on left wall in background with an embroidered muslin work by Alighiero e Boetti (Italy) on right wall. Below, Kamin Lertchaiprasert (Thailand): Detail from *Problem-Wisdom*, 1995, a floor installation made with 366 papier-mâché sculptures, 42¼ by 6 feet overall (variable); included in the Asia-Pacific Triennial (APT).



In 1990, Queensland Gallery director Doug Hall and deputy director Caroline Turner began planning a series of three major exhibitions and conferences on recent art from Asia and the Pacific. The First Asia-Pacific Triennial (APT), held in 1993, was designed to signal, in Turner's words, "that Australia in its world view is no longer solely a Euro-Americentric country."<sup>4</sup> The initiative garnered a variety of government and private sponsors, and support grew substantially for the

1996 APT. The search for funding for the final exhibition, set for 1999, is well under way.

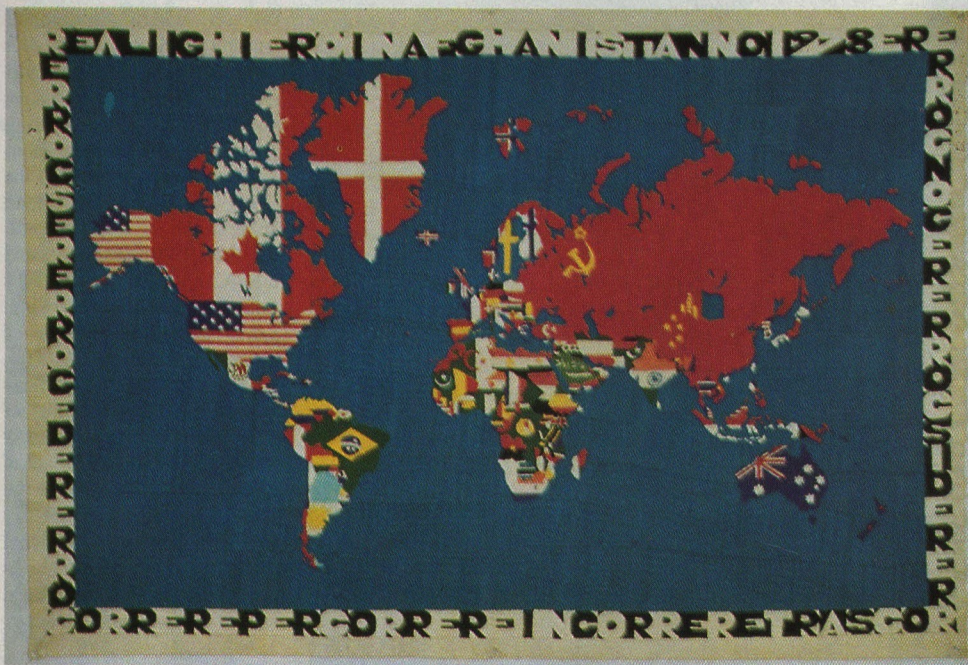
Some commentators have discerned an enlightened self-interest at work among the venture's financial supporters, many of which are corporations that recognize the growing importance of Australia's regional trading partners. Also, the nation's Asian and Pacific population is burgeoning, representing a major shift in the immigration policies that excluded most Asians (and Africans) prior to the 1970s. The proclamation "We are an Asian nation," originating with the recent Labor government and now advocated by the present Conservative regime, likewise presents a national change of viewpoint. Be that as it may, politicians and museum administrators alike are mindful of Australia's new cultural diversity and of the increasing presence of Asian tourists. Throughout the Asia-Pacific region, contemporary art is a new source of national pride, and museums are mushrooming. Indeed, the Brisbane shows have come none too soon.

As a first-time visitor to Australia this past fall, I took advantage of fortuitous scheduling and flew in to catch, within the space of one week, the Tenth Sydney Biennale on its final day and the opening of the Second Asia-Pacific Triennial. Although I wasn't able to glean the nuances of the country's art politics in that time, it was nonetheless clear that the Brisbane initiative is swaying the national funding of contemporary art. Sydney Biennale board chair Suzanne Davies frankly acknowledges in her catalogue preface that the Biennale planners had been subject to "significant pressure in terms of government funding support to narrow [its] focus solely to the Asia Pacific region."<sup>5</sup> Despite such pressure, the Biennale maintained its commitment to global representation, fulfilling its responsibility "to preview the spectrum of contemporary art from every corner of the world," in the words of its founding governor, Franco Belgiorno-Nettis.<sup>6</sup>





Francesco Clemente (Italy): From the series "Story of My Country," 1990, india ink and gouache on Orissa paper, five sets of 18 paintings, each 23 by 46 inches. Courtesy Anthony d'Offay Gallery, London.



Alighiero e Boetti (Italy): Mettere al mondo il mondo, 1978, embroidery on muslin, 32 by 45 inches. Collection Martin Kunz.

Twenty-five years ago, the Biennale made its debut at the brand-new opera house, the city's cultural landmark and a venue that underscored the contemporaneity of the art on view. In 1976, the Art Gallery of New South Wales became the major venue of the independently governed venture. Considered by many international observers to be second only to Venice in quality and prestige, the Sydney Biennale typically has been a large, loose survey of current practice selected by a guest curator. A high percentage of the art has never previously been seen in Australia. A catalytic presence, the Biennale usually generates satellite exhibitions and events at other sites around Sydney.

This year's artistic director was Australian-born Lynne Cooke, curator of New York's Dia Center for the Arts. She is the first woman ever appointed to this position. Free of predetermined restrictions on the geographic direction of her gaze, Cooke organized a smaller-than-usual and tightly curated show, picking 48 culturally diverse artists from five continents who exemplified her theme of reproduction technologies. Initially

interested in such high-tech options as computers, laser disks and CD-ROMs, she redefined her subject to focus on artists working with older, revalued technologies ranging from knitting machines to X rays. In response to an interviewer's request that she expand on her rationale, Cooke pointed to the particular resonance of reproductive technologies for Australia: "You could look at a significant part of the history of Australian art as responses to or rejection of work made elsewhere and encountered through reproductions."<sup>7</sup>

Given the slow progress of funding and the vexing technical challenges that some of her preliminary choices would have faced in showing in Australia, Cooke pared her selection to a smaller, coherent roster dominated by artists who use photography and film. By choosing fewer artists, she could increase the number of works each exhibited, thereby enhancing their introduction to new audiences.<sup>8</sup> Elisabeth Sussman, a curator at the Whitney Museum of American Art, served as her co-selector of the Australian artists.

Because the two subsidiary venues of Artspace and

**Lynne Cooke, the first woman to curate the Sydney Biennale, focused tightly on art dealing with reproduction through older, revalued methods—from photos and films to textile production.**

the Ivan Dougherty Gallery at the University of New South Wales had closed the day before I arrived, I missed seeing works that had galvanized some of my acquaintances, for example, the Scottish artist Douglas Gordon's *Twenty-four Hour Psycho* (1993), a screening of Hitchcock's infamous classic slowed down to last an entire day. Nor did I see the selection of recent "Self Portraits as Movie Actresses" by Yasumasa Morimura, the only artist who was represented in both the Sydney Biennale and in the Asia-Pacific Triennial this year.

In Cooke's installation at the Art Gallery of New South Wales, thoughtful juxtapositions abounded. It was here that she focused on permutations of textile technology. Majestic-scale silk batiks by the octogenarian Aborigine Emily Kngwarreye were installed near sumptuous examples by the younger American-Indonesian collaborators Nia Fliam and Agus Ismoyo, whose work is informed by Hindu-Javanese culture. In close proximity were New Yorker Philip Taaffe's paintings that incorporate monotype printing of decorative motifs, and cloth sculpture by African-born, London-based Yinka Shonibare. A discovery for me, Shonibare uses vividly patterned West African textiles from which he fashions incongruous Victorian-style gowns. Because the cloth is based on Indonesian designs and batik practices and was originally exported from Holland and England, these garments are encoded with a convoluted Euro-Asian colonial history.

Through adroit placements, Cooke coaxed viewers to consider such unstated subthemes as the collaborative process and the nature of originality. Five scale models of recent projects by the Swiss architectural partners Jacques Herzog & Pierre de Meuron were placed in a gallery with Thomas Ruff's "portrait" photographs of the constructed buildings. In other rooms, I pondered whether Alighiero e Boetti's muslin embroideries, which had been worked by Afghan embroiderers in the '70s and '80s, were conceptually different from Francesco Clemente's "Story of My Country" (1990), five sets of 18 paintings, 23 by 46 inches each, which were realized by an Indian miniature painter to whom Clemente had narrated his subjects.

As with New York's Whitney Biennial, Biennale-bashing is a time-honored pursuit in Sydney. The negative thrust of a few local commentaries seemed to color the response of some Sydneysiders, overshadowing the vast majority of highly complimentary discussions in the national and international press. Some were irked that Cooke's catalogue and show title, *Jurassic Technologies Revenant*, sent them to the dictionary. A few complained that the publication was a week late.<sup>9</sup> Others grouched that only three participants were Australians, noting that the Biennale affords a rare opportunity for international validation. This response may be an understandable over-correction of an earlier pose dubbed "cultural cringe." By most



accounts, cowering before imported artistic talent and disregarding homegrown varieties is a thing of the past, overcome by the national self-confidence that followed the international acclaim given Australian filmmakers and music groups.

The Asia-Pacific Triennial commenced in Brisbane five days later. During the vernissage festivities, Australian friends recounted for me the unique exhilaration engendered by the APT's debut three years before. There had been a sense of being present at a historic moment, when "dialogue was opened, friendships struck, curiosity awakened and misconceptions jettisoned."<sup>10</sup> I sat enthralled at the opening ceremonies, watching an ensemble of Pacific Islanders interpret ancient rituals and a trio of Aboriginal dancers adroitly mimic emus, snakes and kangaroos. But a foreign friend was disappointed that the program featured such traditionally conceived entertainment and not more current performance art.

His comment fingered the central challenge facing



Installation view of Swiss partners Jacques Herzog & Pierre de Meuron's models of recent architectural projects, with German photographer Thomas Ruff's "Portraits" of the constructed buildings on wall.



Above, Philip Taaffe (United States): Installation view of *White Volta* (left) and *Tsuba Forest* (right), both 1995-96, mixed mediums on canvas, 103 by 124 and 103 by 130 inches. Courtesy Gagolian Gallery, New York. Below, Emily Ngwarreye (Australia): Installation view of silk batik works from the late '80s. All collection *The Holmes à Court*, courtesy Heytesbury, Perth. Works this spread were included in the Sydney Biennale.



the Triennial organizers—to identify relevant contemporary art in countries with both traditional and modern cultures. That Asia-Pacific art *can* address multiple cultural realities was vividly demonstrated by the work on view in the gallery. The following day, I caught part of a performance titled *Ples Namel* (Our Place), enacted by Papua New Guineans in the Queensland Gallery's garden. Just behind an empty vertical picture frame stood Anna Mel, wearing a grass skirt and garlanded with shells and beads. Her husband, Michael Mel, invited the audience members to confront their notions of the exotic by stepping through this postmodernist threshold one at a time to decorate her with finger paints. Not unlike *The Year of the White Bear*—the costumed, interactive performance that Latino artists Coco Fusco and Guillermo Gomez-Peña staged at the 1993 Whitney Biennial—*Ples Namel* played with the cultural edge between "self" and "other."

The opening day was to have been marked by a spectacular "fire drawing," incorporating 18,000 meters of gunpowder fuse, by the Tokyo-based Chinese artist Guo Qiang Cai. Using imagery which conflated the undulating forms of the Chinese dragon, the Australian Aboriginal rainbow serpent and the divagating course of the nearby Brisbane River, Cai had planned to have the fireworks descend from the sky via helium balloons and snake along the river past two bridges and a freeway. But the day before, an unrelated and fortunately nonfatal mishap at a local pyrotechnic-displays factory destroyed the materials he had spent months perfecting. Nonetheless, he was represented in the APT by a vast nine-part gunpowder drawing on Japanese paper, mounted across a gallery corner in a gently enveloping curve. Working on site with a battalion of assistants, Cai manipulated his explosive material to create a sensuous creature flaunting feathery capillaries of black, sepia and smoky gray.

The second APT, larger and more inclusive than the first, provided me with a crash course in the Asia-Pacific region and its art. Scanning the map included in the catalogue, I saw that Papua New Guinea is much closer to Australia than I had remembered, and I found the lesser-known Pacific islands of New Caledonia and Vanuatu situated off Australia's east coast. APT artists came from these locales, as well as from China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Japan, South Korea, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Vietnam and New Zealand, which is also cited by its Maori





**Campfire Group (Australia): "Boardroom" photograph of the group's members wearing "Aboriginal Design sunglasses" included in the installation/performance *All Stock Must Go!*, 1996. Photo Robert Mercer.**

name, Aotearoa. Apart from work by the few Japanese and Chinese artists who had previously exhibited in Venice and New York, the art was entirely new to me.

In nearly as many ways as there were exhibitors, artists negotiated a balance for themselves between indigenous and Western themes, materials and methods. Malaysian-born, American-educated Hoy Cheong Wong epitomized this blend of influences. His "Migrants" series (1994-96) is a five-panel charcoal-and-photostat collage on hanging paper scrolls. In a gallery talk, Wong linked his figurative preference to the narrative tradition in Malaysia and Indonesia, and explained his choice of medium as a political decision to practice the marginalized activity of drawing. Juxtaposing images of plants and people, he created a thematic parallel between the colonialists' importation of Amazon rubber trees and the migration of foreign plantation workers. Adapting a format inspired in part by Frida Kahlo's three-generational family tree, Wong, an ethnic Chinese, particularized Malaysia's history with vignettes of his father's working-class origin and his mother's culturally elite background.

Unexpectedly, Wong's figures were worked with dark and light patches that "push and pull" the picture plane in the manner expounded by Hans Hofmann, with whom Wong's American instructors had studied. It is Wong's belief that Hofmann's theories connect to both the history of Western painting and to other dichotomous worldviews such as Hegelian dialectics or Chinese cosmology's yin/yang. He also acknowledged that his present picture-plane format, incorporating small, rectangular inserts, was modeled in part on the "icon" configuration of his new computer.

Other participants also addressed sociopolitical subjects, both directly and obliquely. Sanggawa, the two-year-old collective of five Filipino men and women, showed figurative paintings such as *Sinning in the Rain* (1994), a gutsy and darkly hilarious satire that lampoons recognizable government and religious figures. Singapore artist Zai Kuning was less direct. His chilling room installation contained 200 monochromatic wax objects arranged in rows on the floor. Enigmatic bundles with crudely stitched gashes hung against an aluminum wall, hinting at past violence. Water trickled from each of these sinister packages, pooling below in a shallow floor pan filled with rusting knives, wrenches, drill bits and pliers. It was a scene of orderliness tinged with terror.

Some of the installations were visual cognates of work I already knew, yet they embodied distinctive content and/or working processes. Kamin Lertchaiprasert's large floor assembly of small sculptures, called *Problem-Wisdom* (1995), was laid out like an Allan McCollum object collection. In fact, this Thai artist's works are props from an extended, meditative performance. Every day for a year, he read the newspaper and cut out one article on a distressing subject. Daily, he worked the remaining newsprint into a papier-mâché object symbolic of the

problem, using the clipping as its surface. After amassing 366 of these, he spent the second year silently deliberating the issues addressed by each piece, and then day by day he wrote his insights directly on the sculpture. For those unable to read Thai, however, this text had only a decorative significance.

Viewers confronting unfamiliar work could supplement their looking in several ways. Wall stations with laminated didactic sheets offered short, well-written discussions on each artist or artist group. The 152-page catalogue included a mind-boggling 77 writers from East, South and Southeast Asia and the Pacific Basin, who contributed introductory essays and one-page expositions on every exhibitor.<sup>11</sup> As is inevitable with such a multiplicity of voices, not all the contributions were equally cogent. The artists themselves were given their say in a supplementary booklet of artists' statements that was tucked into the catalogue's back cover.

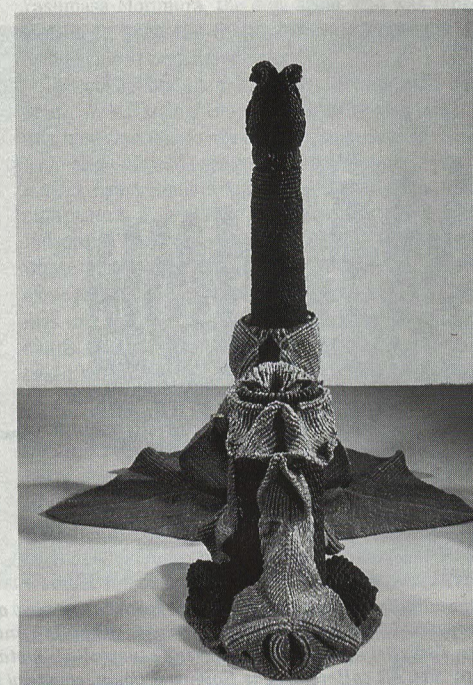
More than 100 artists participated in the 1996

**Michael Mel and Anna Mel (Papua New Guinea) performing Ples Namel (Our Place), 1996, in the garden of Queensland Art Gallery.**



Triennial. Committed to a selection process not dominated by Australians, the APT organizers structured a system of 15 collaborative teams encompassing 42 curators, Australian and international. For example, the Thai curator Apinan Poshyananda and two Queensland Gallery staff members, Timothy Morrell and Margo Neale (she is of Aboriginal descent and curator of Indigenous Australian Art), made up the team that chose the Australian representation of four artists and one artist group.

The Campfire Group, a cheeky Australian collective, created *All Stock Must Go!*, an installation and performance event about the commodification of Aboriginal culture that, in Neale's words, "makes as much fun of itself as it does the 'industries' it represents."<sup>12</sup> The group set up shop in a dilapidated cattle truck parked outside the museum entrance, hawking an enticing array of souvenir T-shirts and dot-painted handicrafts. All financial transactions became performances, video-taped and broadcast live on a monitor inside the gallery.



**Mrinalini Mukherjee (India): Vana Shringar, 1992, hemp, 56 inches high.**

The installation included a boardroom photo of the group, wearing the shades they flogged with the slogan "See Australia through Aboriginal eyes" with our Aboriginal Design sunglasses." The bow-tied waiter in attendance in the photo was Queensland Gallery director Doug Hall.

Occupying most of the Queensland's gallery space, the Triennial was not assembled by country of origin but simply by esthetics. New Zealand's Waka collective filed an uncontested "water claim" for the spacious Watermall in the heart of the museum. This group of 11 artists of Maori, Polynesian, European and Asian decent takes its name from the Maori word for canoe, a national symbol of cultural diversity. While the male artists installed a previously constructed sculpture in the pool, most of the women worked on-site at the water's edge, consciously paralleling the traditional Maori division of labor in which men built the canoes and women supplied the finishing and navigational touches.



**An Australian group in the Triennial spoofed the commodification of Aboriginal culture by hawking dot-painted sunglasses; a New Zealand group worked according to Maori division of labor.**

**A**lthough the 1993 APT took as its theme "Tradition and Change," this Triennial disclaimed any overarching topic, concentrating on what Turner, the gallery's deputy director, called "present encounters." One subject that repeatedly surfaced was global consumer culture and its ecological ramifications. Excessive consumerism was targeted by Japanese artist Yasumasa Morimura in *Blinded by the Light* (1991), a large-scale photographic interpretation of Bruegel's *The Parable of the Blind*. As is his wont, Morimura used himself as the model for all roles in this uproarious parody of one family's frenzies during the 1980s Japanese bubble economy.

Working as an artist in the far leaner circumstances of postwar Hanoi, the Vietnamese sculptor Dan Tan Vu found fresh uses for discarded cigarette boxes and cartons. He transformed them into fanciful creatures in *Monsters, Devils and Angels*, an installation inspired in part by Buddhist paper offerings. Australian Fiona Hall shared his ecological "waste not, want not" mind-set in her reflective installation *Give the Dog a Bone*, which included a shopping bag knit from strips of aluminum Coke cans. A large, spotlighted plastic Coke bottle pointedly embodied the evils of consumerism and Western cultural imperialism in *Nation for Sale*, a room-size grid of glass-topped light boxes containing plastic toys, weapons and jars of various substances, by the Indonesian sculptor and performance artist Arahmaiani.

The Indian figurative painter and ecofeminist Nalini Malani assembled *Body as Site*, a meditative room installation of large mixed-medium wall drawings and fluid, expressionist renderings on milk-carton paper. In her artist's statement, Malani described the act of painting these women's bodies as an "incantatory ritual" that allowed her to record and then erase the marks of the world's devastations and ills. Her concern for



*Above, sculpture installation by the Waka collective, a group of 11 artists of Maori, Polynesian, European and Asian descent, in the Watermill of the Queensland Art Gallery. Photo Richard Stringer.*

*Below, Chen Yan Yin (China): Installation view of Discrepancy Between One Idea, 1996, roses and IV drip bottles. Works this spread were included in the APT.*



*Suk-Nam Yun (South Korea): Pink Sofa, 1996, mixed mediums, dimensions variable. Collection the artist.*

the environment was shared by the self-taught Taiwanese painter Ming-Tse Lee. His delicately colored, finely rendered panoramic composition, *A Day in the Life of the Artist* (1994), resembled a traditional scroll painting. Influenced by the model of the Chinese scholar-artists who addressed spiritual and moral issues in their paintings and poems, Lee depicted himself at his bath, regarding a despoiled landscape in which corruption and pollution have the upper hand.

Several artists from countries with dual cultures adroitly straddled the line between traditional crafts and sculptural objects. The Java-born, New York-schooled Anusapati honored the disappearing skills of Indonesian village woodworking in his series of handsome, rough-hewn sculptures that looked like large-scale artifacts. Hemp, often associated with the fabrication of string cots and onion bags in India, was the chosen medium of New Delhi sculptor Mrinalini Mukherjee in her sensuous series of monumental, free-standing woven constructions that resembled plantings

in an enchanted and eroticized arboretum.

Putting into effect its stated goal of building "long-term relationships based on mutual respect,"<sup>13</sup> the Queensland Gallery hosted a three-day conference featuring more than 50 of the exhibitors and catalogue contributors. Via a preexisting "Flying Arts" program, they flew artists to far-flung venues for workshops and classes with community groups. Perhaps the most tangible evidence of support was the purchase of more than 20 works for the permanent collection, some acquired in advance of the opening and some later. These acquisitions include several I've already mentioned—Anusapati's wood sculptures, Cai's gunpowder drawings, Lertchaiprasert's papier-mâché installation, Malani's works on paper, Morimura's large photograph and portions of Wong's "Migrant" series.

Among the additional purchases, some of my favorites include: the Chinese painter Xiaogang Zhang's haunting *Three Comrades* (1994), inspired by old portrait photographs; the Indonesian Nindityo Adipurnomo's



**Artists from countries with dual cultures labored to reconcile traditional crafts and sculptural objects, while Triennial organizers struggled to avoid the pitfall of decontextualized readings.**



**Hoy Cheong Wong (Malaysia):** *She Was Married at Fourteen and Had Fourteen Children*, from the "Migrant" series, 1994-95, charcoal and photostat collage on hanging paper scroll, 74½ by 59 inches. National Art Gallery, Malaysia.

*Introversion (April the Twenty-First)*, 1995-96, a sculptural extrapolation of Javanese women's hairpieces; Korean feminist pioneer Suk-Nam Yun's prickly *Pink Sofa*; and three diverse Japanese works—Takashi

Murakami's huge painted "portrait" of his invented pop-culture cartoon character, Mr. Dob; Kimio Tsuchiya's understated sculpture using glass and natural materials; and Emiko Kasahara's playful and urbane marble objects that resemble oil lamps, doves and pudenda all at once.

Other unforgettable works in the Triennial were the Chinese Yan Yin Chen's odorous installation of 600 recumbent roses tethered to a battery of IV drip bottles; Korean Joon Kim's foam-and-silk forearms and beefy biceps with tattoo-needed designs; and the Aborigine Destiny Deacon's wholesale reconstruction of her Melbourne living room, which focused attention on what Aussies call "blak" humor via her collection of miscellaneous racist kitsch. Brisbane-based Luke Roberts's replication of a corporate foyer leading to the consulate of the mythical land of Mu was another tour de force. The campy spirit of his alter ego, "Pope Alice," a send-up of Imelda Marcos (among others), infused all of the pun-labeled, cockamamie objects in the adjacent "Margaret Mead Memorial Sandpit and Museum Outlet," including a sign describing "My Brilliant Korea," a Bart Simpson doll identified as "Western Cult Figure," and a priapic "Elephant Man" made from a wooden figurine strategically draped with a toy elephant's trunk.

**T**he Australians have not been alone in centering attention on contemporary Asian and Pacific art. Within a week of the APT opening, New York's Asia Society unveiled the three-venue exhibition "Contemporary Art in Asia: Traditions/Tensions," [see *A.i.A.*, Feb. '97]. This American initiative included seven artists and artist groups who were part of the concurrent Triennial, and two who participated in the 1993 APT.<sup>14</sup> As cultural commentators vie to determine which of these exhibitions has been the "most genuinely postcolonial,"<sup>15</sup> the artists themselves are benefiting from increased exposure. For example, APT artist Cai, who had shown at the 1995 Venice Biennale, was one of six contenders for the Hugo Boss Award this fall (as was the better-known Morimura). Cai's video of fireworks at the Great Wall, shown at the Triennial, was also seen and much admired by New Yorkers visiting the group show of Boss finalists at the Guggenheim Museum, SoHo [see *A.i.A.*, Apr. '97]. Denmark's Louisiana Museum of Modern Art gave him his first solo show in the West [Mar. 8-Apr. 27].

Mindful that such expansive, pioneering shows as the



**Yasumasa Morimura (Japan):** *Blinded by the Light*, 1991, color print with varnished surface on plywood, 81 by 143½ inches.



**Above, Takashi Murakami (Japan):** *And then, and then and then and then and then*, 1994, synthetic polymer paint on canvas, 110 by 118 inches. Courtesy Tomio Koyama Gallery, Tokyo.

**Below, Xiaogang Zhang (China):** *Three Comrades*, 1994, from the "Bloodline: The Big Family" series, oil on canvas, 59 by 70½ inches. Collection the artist.



1989 "Magiciens de la Terre" [see *A.i.A.*, May and July '89] were charged with decontextualized misreadings, the APT's organizers have been exemplars of sensitive exhibition planning. Nonetheless, an exhibition that brings together art made in widely disparate circumstances and under diverse political regimes engenders its own questions. At the APT conference's plenary session, Australian John Clark, the preeminent scholar of modern Asian art, asked from the floor: "What do the artists think about the disjunction between a self-proclaimedly tolerant selection process [for] art objects, and the intolerant political context in which their work is produced? Are we not likely as viewers to engage in a mere spectatorship of acts of resistance without engaging their deeper implications? Does this not relate to the wider issue of creating a curatorial category of the contemporary without the constraints of history, social history, religious belief or gender situation? Are we satisfied that this category is constituted, as we have heard acknowledged here, by curators with little knowledge of these?"

As the Western art world grapples with these salient issues, it is clear that the Queensland Gallery's Asia-Pacific Triennial series is affecting the global discourse of contemporary art. Apinan Poshyananda, the Thai curator, recently pointed to the spreading influence of the Triennial: "The APT has been a catalyst which has drawn Asian artists, curators and art historians together to scrutinize seriously art within the region. It is obvious that the impact of the APT has brushed on art organizations in Japan and Singapore."<sup>16</sup> In his paper presented at the APT conference, David Elliott, recently



appointed head of Stockholm's Moderna Museet, heralded the attention now accorded art from the Asia-Pacific region, concluding "Vive la différence, but let difference be a cause for celebration, and never be a limit on its own nature." □

1. Margo Neale, "Campfire Group: All Stock Must Go!" *The Second Asia-Pacific Triennial*, Brisbane, Australia, Queensland Art Gallery, 1996, p. 110.

2. To use the term "basin" rather than the better-known "rim" is to more accurately describe the geographic reality of the Pacific peoples; see Margo Neale, "A Pacific Story, Screw the Rim: We Live in the Basin," *The Second Asia-Pacific Triennial*, pp. 56-57.

3. *Grolier's Encyclopedia* defines these geographical and political-cultural subdivisions: East Asia signifies most of the People's Republic of China, plus Japan, North Korea, South Korea and Taiwan; Southeast Asia comprises Brunei, Myanmar, Indonesia, Cambodia, Laos, Malaysia, Papua New Guinea, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam; South Asia includes Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.

4. Caroline Turner, "Introduction—From Extraregionalism to Intraregionalism?" *The First Asia-Pacific Triennial*, Brisbane,



**Nalini Malani (India):** *Body as Site*, 1996, a room installation with wall drawings, mixed mediums.



**Above, Nindityo Adipurnomo (Indonesia):** *Installation detail of Introversion (April the Twenty-First)*, 1995-96, mixed mediums, 21 pieces, each 29½ by 17½ by 6 inches.

**Below, Dan Tan Vu (Vietnam):** *Installation detail from Monsters, Devils and Angels*, 1996, ink, gouache and synthetic polymer paint on recycled cardboard, 36 pieces, each approx. 11¼ by 13¼ by 2 inches. Collection the artist. Works this spread were included in the APT.



Australia, Queensland Art Gallery, 1993, p. 8.

5. Suzanne Davies, "Preface," *Jurassic Technologies Revenant*, Tenth Biennale of Sydney exhibition catalogue, 1996, p. 11.

6. Franco Belgiorno-Nettis, "Foreword," *Jurassic Technologies Revenant*, p. 10.

7. Lynne Cooke, in "Dena Shottenkirk Speaks with Lynne Cooke," *C Magazine*, July-September 1996, p. 23.

8. That more than a third of the exhibitors were invited to come to Australia to lecture at local and national venues also deepened this Biennale's educational potential.

9. In my view, the catalogue proved to be worth the wait, less for its critical essays than for the hidden jewels in its back matter—extremely readable and well-researched discussion of each artist by Vivian Bobka and Donald Williams.

10. Julie Ewington, "The Asia Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art," *Art and Asia Pacific*, vol. 1, no. 2, 1994, p. 11.

11. Although translators' names were cited on the book's final page, readers of this all-English publication were left to guess at just which of the texts were originally written in other languages.

12. Margo Neale, "Campfire Group," p. 110.

13. Caroline Turner, "Present Encounters: Mirror of the Future," *The Second Asia-Pacific Triennial*, p. 11.

14. The seven from the second APT are: Koreans Jeong Hwa Choi and Suk-Nam Yun; Nalini Malani of India; Indonesians Nindityo Adipurnomo and Arahmaiani; the Sanggawa collective of the Philippines; and Chatchai Puipia of Thailand. The two from the first APT are: Montien Boonma of Thailand and Duck-Hyun Cho of Korea.

15. Thomas McEvilley, "Exhibition Strategies in the Postcolonial Era," in *Contemporary Art in Asia: Traditions/Tensions*, New York, Asia Society Galleries, 1996, p. 58. McEvilley argues that the "Traditions/Tensions" exhibition is at the forefront of the recent postcolonial exhibitions. But all of the characteristics he finds praiseworthy about it—the absence of "white Western male authorities," the focus on geographically disparate countries linked by the "recent global importance of their burgeoning capitalist economies," and a frank acknowledgement of the art's hybridity—are also true of the APT (which opened after his essay was written).

16. Apinan Poshyananda, quoted in Timothy Morrell, "Cultural Crossfire," *Art and Asia Pacific*, vol. 3, no. 4, 1996, p. 47.

"*Jurassic Technologies Revenant*," the Tenth Biennale of Sydney, ran from July 27 to Sept. 22, 1996, at the Art Gallery of New South Wales, Artspace and the Ivan Dougherty Gallery in Sydney. The homepage address for the Biennale is: <http://www/sydneybiennale.geko.net.au/index.html>. The Second Asia-Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art, organized by the Queensland Art Gallery in Brisbane, ran from Sept. 27, 1996, to Jan. 19, 1997. Its Internet address is: <http://www.slq.qld.gov.au/qag/apl/welcome.htm>.

Author: Judith Stein is a Philadelphia-based critic and curator whose travels were facilitated by a Pew Fellowship in the Arts.