

2004 DRAWING BIENNALE

ROY ANANDA GODWIN BRADBEER ADAM CULLEN FAN DONGWANG DIANNE FOGWELL
NATALYA HUGHES MIKE PARR JAN SENBERGS KEN WHISSON GOSIA WLODARCZAK

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2004 Drawing Biennale

In 1996 the Drill Hall Gallery initiated a drawing biennale, a celebration of the work of artists for whom drawing was central to their practice. Now, eight years later, the Gallery is proud to present its fifth Drawing Biennale.

Though drawing has moved in and out of fashion over the last few decades, its enduring attraction, both to practitioners and those who appreciate and enjoy art, is shown by the fact that many of Australia's most prominent and promising artists have consistently regarded drawing as being at the core of their art. This exhibition brings together a representative body of work by a group of emerging, established and significant artists from all parts of Australia who practise drawing regardless of its position in the cycle of fashion and taste. It allows the visitor to explore two very important issues in drawing: autonomy and definition.

Ken Whisson, one of the leading and most accomplished practitioners of drawing in Australia, regards drawing as outcome, not process. 'For me, drawing is very much a medium or art form in its own right, not an adjunct to painting, no more in fact than it is to music or walking or swimming'. The intuitiveness of drawing can be seen in Whisson's work as he searches for a new metaphysical world view with a rationality that will allow for sensing the full depth and breadth of experience. As the critic and art writer John McDonald put it, 'looking at one of Ken Whisson's works is like studying a diagram of the thinking mind.'²

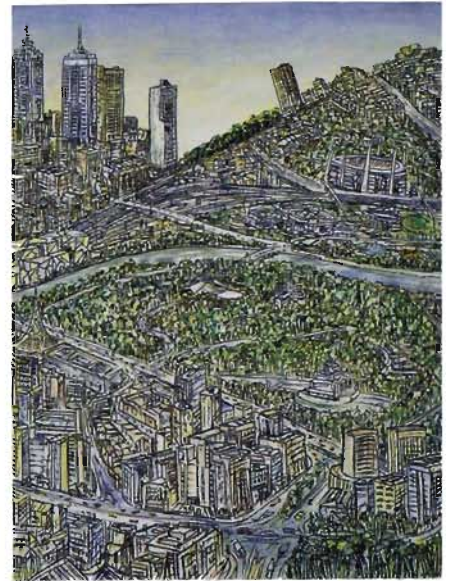
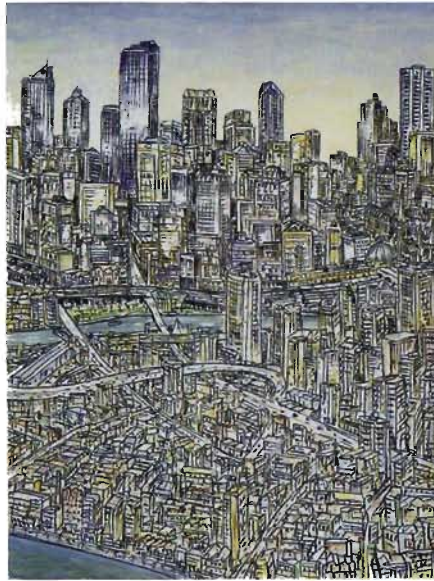
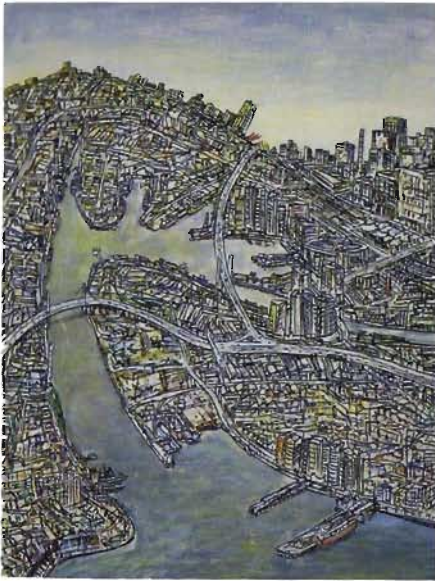
Jan Senbergs, who was a Creative Fellow at the Australian National University in 1975-76, is well known for his cityscapes that articulate his perspective on contemporary urban reality. As Maudie Palmer has written, he 'capitalises on the inspiration drawn from his immediate surroundings. He develops groups of works which explore narratives of real and imagined worlds'. One of the triptychs in this exhibition, *Extended Melbourne*, is a cityscape of the artist's home city. The ANU Art Collection contains a major Senbergs cityscape created in Canberra, entitled *Station*, that hangs in the Research School of Physics.

Beyond the technique of making marks on paper, drawing is intimately linked to individual perception and expression. Beyond drawing as representation is drawing as signification. The work of Mike Parr, who draws self-portraits in a ceaseless

process of exploration, should be seen in this context. His very graphic installation *Infected Blanket* includes a set of fifteen printed drawings on sheets of stained Hahnemuhle paper bonded to canvas. Like much of the artist's recent graphic work it uses print mediums to explore drawing rather than using drawings to produce prints.

Any exhibition devoted to drawing will raise the question as to whether drawing is part of a process or a finished outcome. Certainly, drawing has formed the first recording of an idea for other means of artistic expression, such as painting, sculpture and architecture. Drawing can have both an independent place within an artist's overall output or be a step towards a more developed statement. As the works in this exhibition show, drawing can be a beginning, a process or an end. Adam Cullen's sketchbooks, with their rapid caricature style drawings, are a case in point. Cullen's impulsive drawings are instantly impactful representations of contemporary Australian society and can be seen either as finished works or stages towards a deeper statement by the artist. Fan Dongwang produced six explosively colourful drawings for this exhibition on the theme of dragon heads and was then invited to include two paintings so that his drawings can be seen as finished works or, when viewed next to the paintings, as process.

The style and approach of the ten artists in this exhibition show the range and depth of work that comes under the rubric of drawing, from the computer produced drawings of the young Queensland artist, Natalya Hughes, in light, whimsical pinpricks with their resonances of Aubrey Beardsley and Japanese *ukiyo-e* prints, to the figurative images of Godwin Bradbeer, who has used the human body as the subject of his art for most of his career. His *Imago* drawings in this exhibition are the outcome of a sustained series of depictions of the human face over the last five years that started as a white disc or ovoid of burnished chinagraph. Without model, photograph or consciously predetermined identity, Bradbeer then seeks out a face. Other drawings in the *Imago* series are dark or light, male or female, cosmetically figurative or abstract. Bradbeer's work in this exhibition is moving towards youthful eastern beauty, as though the artist is nostalgic for the classicism of eastern culture.



Jan Senbergs, *Extended Melbourne*, 2004, triptych, pastel and acrylic wash on paper, 3 sheets 160 x 121 cm each. Courtesy the artist

This diversity of style and approach is reflected in the variety of surfaces on which the artists draw. The Canberra artist, Dianne Fogwell, trained as a printmaker, draws directly onto the plate. Roy Ananda, a young South Australian artist, draws on the surface of a timber cube as a sculptural process. His *Drawing Cube* in this exhibition is a work in progress concerned with the very physical act of drawing and employing a drawing sensibility in 3-dimensional terms. The first state was exhibited at the Adelaide Central Gallery, the second at the Contemporary Art Centre of South Australia, and the third at the 2003 Adelaide Art Festival. In this, the fourth state, the cube is both the site of and the material for drawing.

The unique characteristic of drawing is that it is the original mark that goes directly from thought to reality, the shortest line from idea to image. It is at once the most fundamental and the most spontaneous form of creative expression. The directness and the intuitiveness of the medium can be seen in the drawings of Gosia Włodarczak, with their intense line work. Włodarczak does not think about the final outcome of the process of drawing. 'My hand and circumstances somehow accidentally

form it. I respect the drawing substance as an independent entity⁴.

Having considered the diversity of the works in this exhibition, one must ask what it is that unites them. It is not form, subject or technique but approach – an approach characterised by an openness to experimental and conceptual ways of thinking about drawing, and an engagement with drawing as a strategy for the expression of self. As the American writer and art critic Beverly Adams has noted, 'drawing represents a basis for a kind of true artistic freedom. One that is personal, incorruptible and inimitable if done from the heart.'⁵

Nancy Sever

¹ Artist's statement, cited in Arthur McIntyre, *Australian Contemporary Drawing*, Boolarong Publications, Brisbane, 1988, p. 136

² John McDonald, *Ken Whisson: Paintings and Drawings. 1947-1999*, Niagara Publishing, Melbourne, 2001, p. 17

³ Maudie Palmer, *Jan Senbergs. Imagined Sites. Imagined Reality*, exhibition catalogue, Museum of Modern Art Heide, 1994, p. 7

⁴ Artist's statement provided to the writer. June 2004.

⁵ Beverly Adams 'Drawing beyond the margins' in M.C. Ramirez (ed), *Re-Aligning Vision*, University of Texas, Austin, 1997, p. 87

Drawing: it is as simple as that

Recently, Craig Ruddy's impressive charcoal and graphite portrait, *David Gulpilil, two worlds*, created controversy when it was named the winning entry of this year's Archibald Prize. As the Archibald is traditionally a painting prize, one irate entrant threatened legal action against the Art Gallery of New South Wales claiming that the winning portrait was not a valid entry as it was not a painting: 'This is a drawing, it is as simple as that.'

Is it really that simple?

*Drawing is an enormously wide-ranging, infinitely varying and subtle activity ... it is one of the most potent, intuitive and yet highly evolved weapons that can be used to comprehend the unknown.*²

We all know how to draw. It is simple. It is one of the very first skills we learn in life. Our first drawings are poignant – fresh, emotive, and powerful. To begin with we draw red houses, blue trees, a couple of stick figures playing under a happy sun, and perhaps, a pair of boogey men and a werewolf lurking beneath our bed. These drawings speak directly of our surroundings, identifying our enjoyment and exposing our fears. We are quick to develop emotional associations with line and colour, and we use these associations to express a particular idea or to explain a certain feeling. Drawing, then, becomes a mechanism for our own learning – a method of investigation for the understanding and contemplation of a world in which everything is somewhat unknown.

Our first drawings hold the essence of what good drawing is all about – discovery, interpretation, and a quest for insight. Good drawing is unguarded: there is a sense that the ideas have flowed directly from the artist's mind without interruption; that somehow drawing's immediacy holds an honesty that is lost by the composed and planned structure of painting or sculpture. It is often considered a very personal art, an artform which creates 'a sense of intimacy with the artist's first thoughts'³.

Adam Cullen's sketchbooks included in the *2004 Drawing Biennale* are a great example of drawing's directness, and of how directness holds an element of potency. Cullen's sketchbooks are filled with simple, effective sketches of everyday objects, imaginary demons (much like the boogey men and werewolves from our childhood) and reinforced with segments of text. There is an immediacy to Cullen's sketches - thoughts transcribed in a matter of seconds,

rendered with haste – page after page of biro drawn oddities, scrawled with a certain intensity of line. What is it that he is trying to comprehend? He seems to be absorbing information, bringing it together to see if it has a voice – an aggressive voice, depicted by a barrage of imagery and ideas. Is it possible to make sense of any of this? Cullen's drawings raise more questions than answers.

*A drawing is an experiment which opens further possibilities.*⁴

In order to understand we must ask questions. Mike Parr has been questioning the human condition through his series of drawn self-portraits for over twenty years. As an extension of his performance, for which he has pushed his physical self to the limits of human endurance, Parr continues to contort and mistreat his own image in his drawing. His drawing, in the case of *Infected Blanket* translated through etching, is an exploration, a protest, and an attack on the human condition from every possible angle. Parr's contrasting marks vary like our changing moods: sometimes subtle, light or gentle; at other times volatile, underlined by a sinister hint of violence. His inquiry into the subject is familiar to us, just as drawing is familiar to us, it communicates to us, but its conclusion, like Cullen's, is open-ended. Parr enjoys this uncertainty: 'drawing fascinates me because of what it can't say'⁵.

*We are entering a field in which excitement and uncertainty are mingled, where the reward may be uncomfortable self-knowledge rather than reassurance.*⁶

Godwin Bradbeer too seeks to investigate his own nature through drawing: 'I try to draw what I am.'⁷ Rather than using self-portraiture, Bradbeer queries human nature through the depiction of generic human form. His drawing tests the resilience of humanity, exposing both its vulnerability and its beauty. His imagery is dark, harrowing and foreboding, yet there is an inherent weightlessness, a translucency that questions its very existence. Through his drawing Bradbeer has found humanity to be 'seriously challenged' - there have been moments when the beauty that he has sought to depict in the human form was no longer present.⁸ Drawing is an uncertain art with uncertain outcomes.

*drawing[s] ...are able both to expose and obscure, reveal and conceal...*⁹

Natalya Hughes uses computer technology to create and interpret beauty as part of her drawing process. Her computer and pin prick drawings begin with elements of *ukiyo-e* prints or Aubrey

Beardsley images, and in opposition to Bradbeer's depiction of human form, Hughes removes the figure to focus on ornamentation. She is left with a ghostly void, outlined and defined by texture and pattern alone. There is a suggestion of form, fleeting and impermanent, just beyond our grasp.

Dianne Fogwell's drawing holds a similar sensibility. Her work looks to explain her surrounds by creating parallel worlds - personally responsive worlds in which every detail has been finely attended to. They are surreal landscapes which are both escapist and confining at the same time. Fogwell reveals a depth and texture in these worlds that is emotive. We are invited to walk the trail of her journey and are happily distracted in a realm of fascinating detail.

Jan Senbergs reveals beauty in the most unlikely places. His drawings, of factories, industrial zones, urban sprawl and mechanical decay, depict the structural splendor of human and industrial progress. We find an enjoyment in their disorganization, yet we are surprised by the picturesque natural order that Senbergs' observation exposes.

*Drawing is often a particularly spontaneous practice which records some sensory perception, and is of an investigatory nature.*¹⁰

Gosia Wlodarczak's drawings at first appear to be something like one of Mike Parr's self portraits exploded into a million fragments and viewed through a microscope. The detail is both chaotic and obsessive. Individual thoughts are layered finely on top of one another to create a frenzied mesh that is built on a foundation of meticulous investigation into the artist's surrounds. Wlodarczak is in some way mapping moments of existence¹¹, documenting the forms around her as they appear for an instant. Her drawings are layers of form linked together to build an impression of the world around her, a world that is in many ways still as incomprehensible as when we were first learning to draw.

Similar to Wlodarczak, Ken Whisson has created a visual language to interpret his personal environment. His use of line, its weight, the division of space, and the balance of objects is unique. With only a delightfully minimal amount of line, Whisson is able to create a great deal of movement. The visual perspective shifts between objects in his drawing, layered, like Wlodarczak's, but not chaotic: his subjects visually intersect, sometimes they overlap, but

they do not interfere with each other's space. Whisson's drawings are insightful investigations to his surrounds, yet once again they are not definitive, they remain enigmatic.

Fan Dongwang's drawings reflect the subject matter of his painting. He juxtaposes cultural elements from his birth land, China, with images from western art history and cultural identity. His drawings are a means of communication between these cultures and a method of comprehending their similarities and differences.

*As both concept and craft, drawing is remarkably resilient, residing as closely as any art to the immediacy of the mind, with its recalcitrant and inventive resistance to summation and closure.*¹²

Finally, Roy Ananda's *Drawing Cube* is an investigation into the possibilities of drawing itself. His three-dimensional drawing evolves and de-evolves from state to state. It is an adventure which is guided by the limitless confines of drawing. The *Drawing Cube* is a continuous exploration in which drawing gives birth to new ideas, reassesses them, transforms them, and resurrects them - it is a conduit that allows the artist to actively seek out what drawing can be.

So, drawing is many things; it is our first impression; it is inquiry; it is experiment; it is uncertainty; it is adventure; it is complex; it is beyond definition; it *is* as simple as that.

Tony Oates

¹ Tony Johansen quoted by Malcolm Brown, 'Artist brushed off at Archibald winner', *Sydney Morning Herald*, May 13 2004

² James Gleeson, 'The draftsman as artist', in *The Drawings of William Dobell in the Australian National Gallery*, Australian National Gallery, Canberra, 1992, p. 6

³ Timothy Morrell, 'Big drawings', in *Art and Australia*, vol 23 n 3, 1986, p. 366

⁴ Lou Klepac 'Introduction' in *Contemporary Drawing, 1977 Perth International Survey of Drawing*, exhibition catalogue, Western Australian Art Gallery, Perth, 1977, p. 7

⁵ Letter by Mike Parr dated January 1990 in *Prints by Mike Parr*, exhibition catalogue, Australian National Gallery, Canberra, 1990, unpaginated

⁶ Tony Godfrey, *Drawing Today*, Phaidon Press, New York, 1990, p. 17

⁷ Godwin Bradbeer quoted in 'Mark Penning's interview with Godwin Bradbeer', in *Godwin Bradbeer*, exhibition catalogue, John Batten Gallery Hong Kong, 1999, unpaginated

⁸ *ibid.*

⁹ Ian McKeever quoted in Tony Godfrey, *op. cit.*, p. 33

¹⁰ Nancy Sever and Morris Low, 'Introduction', *The Australian Drawing Biennale*, exhibition catalogue, ANU Drill Hall Gallery, Canberra, 1998, p. 7

¹¹ David Bromfield, *NOW: Gosia Wlodarczak drawing*, Brown Art Consultants, Perth, 2004, p. 11

¹² Gary Garrels, 'Preface', in Laura Hopfman, *Drawing Now: Eight Propositions*, Museum of Modern Art, New York, 2002, p. 6

Fan Dongwang: *Face of the Dragon*

When I first saw Dr Fan Dongwang's powerful drawings my thoughts went immediately to the mysterious animal masks that adorn many of the magnificent bronze ritual vessels from ancient China which I was fortunate to help bring to Australia in an exhibition in 1990.¹ The zoomorphic mask decorations in raised relief, the result of superb casting technique, represented both nature and supernatural forces. Their mystery and power speak to viewers across thousands of years. Fan Dongwang's drawings capture much of the same sense of mystery and power. Of course they are also absolutely of NOW. These vividly coloured depictions of the traditional Chinese symbol of the dragon remind one equally of Western Pop art, billboards or 3D computer generated images.

In the West the dragon is often a fearsome creature of evil; in China it represents both virtue and the mandate of heaven. The artist draws the dragon in meticulous and intricate detail, creating a three-dimensional effect on a two-dimensional plane. He evokes the incredible skills of ancient craftsmen in bronze, jade or ivory (he studied ivory carving in China) but the bright, almost fluorescent colours provide a kaleidoscopic effect. The result is at once fantastic, almost carnivalesque or cartoon-like, but still radiating the essential attributes of the Chinese dragon, beauty and power. One of the characteristics of ancient *Shang* bronzes was the high relief for the eyes, which is also echoed on the eyes of Fan's drawings. He depicts the dragon always with both eyes turned to the viewer, sometimes confrontingly full-face, sometimes with the eyes turned to the viewer but in an impossible relationship to the rest of the head, Picasso-like, but never in exact profile. The artist says: 'By cropping the dragon's body and focusing solely on its head, I have adopted a Western post-modern mode of fragmentation. This is different to the Chinese approach that emphasises the wholeness of the image.'²

Fan Dongwang was born in Shanghai in 1958, eight years before the onset of the Cultural Revolution. For Fan this meant the loss of ten years of education.³ The other impact of the Cultural Revolution and its aftermath for Fan's generation was often a traumatic loss of faith. For many, the repudiation in 1980 of Mao's doctrine of 'politics in command' in favour of Deng Xiaoping's 'economics in command' left them without a committed faith, for many artists in anything outside their art. Fan Dongwang's response to the dramatic changes in China and the limitations of

his early education was to avidly pursue scholarship and artistic excellence. He has also pursued an intense interest in multiple perspectives, differing belief systems, cross-cultural translation and communication which led him to travel to Tibet and the Islamic areas of China's west as a young man⁴. At the Shanghai School of Arts and Crafts, which he attended in the late 1970s, training still concentrated on traditional arts. He was fortunate to be a student of painter Yu Youhan, who became in the 1980s a key figure in 'Political Pop' and a major influence on the development of a new *avant-garde* in China. Another teacher was the late Chen Zhen who emigrated to France and gained fame internationally. Fan received a Diploma from the Shanghai School of Arts and Crafts in 1980 and went on to achieve high academic distinctions, receiving a Masters (Media Art) from the College of Fine Arts, University of NSW in 1995 and a Doctorate of Creative Art from the University of Wollongong in 1999 at the age of 41. His thesis was an analysis of visual perspective in different cultures.⁵ It was the achievement of a devoted scholar and one that involved considerable personal sacrifice. It also involved leaving China to study English in Australia in 1990. Later he migrated to Australia under the Distinguished Talent Scheme and has made a significant contribution artistically in his adopted country.

In 1998 he revisited Shanghai, now perhaps the most futuristic city in the world. He invited a group of Shanghai artists, including his famous teacher and friend Yu Youhan, to Australia to take part in a major project with him at the Casula Powerhouse. The exhibition, *Shanghai Star* toured ten Australian regional galleries to considerable acclaim in 2002-2004. His own works in the exhibition used symbols such as the dragon (a symbol Mao had discouraged as representing the old forces of Imperial rule) in order to assist viewers to see them in a new light.⁶ In this exhibition at the Drill Hall Gallery, the artist states that he explicitly uses the dragon to explore his own ambivalent identity as a Chinese-Australian as well as the new emerging Chinese identity in the twenty first century.⁷ 'It is through these beautiful and powerful symbols ... that the past continues to have a bearing on the present as well as the future'.⁸ Fan Dongwang has superimposed his own vision on tradition. He conceives the works as 'window' frames or the multiple 'windows' opening on a computer. The drawings become a means of providing different perspectives and ways of seeing.

Caroline Turner

¹Treasures from the Shanghai Museum, Queensland Art Gallery, 1990. The Shanghai Museum has one of the world's best collections of these vessels from the eighteenth to the third century BCE. The bronze vessels are considered one of the great artistic achievements of this highly technologically advanced civilisation.

² Artist statement for exhibition, May 2004.

³ His doctor father discouraged the reading of his medical textbooks. However, he had an uncle, an artist, who had art books from the twenties and thirties with reproductions of artists such as Picasso. Interview with the author 4 June 2004.

⁴ Interview with the author 4 June 2004. The artist has, for example, exhibited in the Blake Prize for religious art in Australia. His previous exhibitions of paintings have included interesting juxtapositions of Chinese and Western art images as diverse as Chinese robed and bearded scholars, twentieth century Red Guards, Renaissance saints, and elements drawn from his son's transformer toys.

⁵ Artist *curriculum vitae* provided to author; Interview with the author 4 June 2004.

⁶ Communication with the author 4 March 2003. For discussion of this exhibition see Bernice Murphy, 'Constellations from Shanghai', *Shanghai Star* National Touring Exhibition, Casula Powerhouse Arts Centre, 2001; Russell Storer, 'Shanghai Star: Li Shan, Yu Youhan and Fan Dongwang', *Art AsiaPacific*, Issue 34, 2002. For a longer discussion of the artist's work see Diana Wood Conroy, 'Fan Dongwang: Shifting Perspectives between China and Australia', in *Fan Dongwang, Catalogue of Works*, 2002.

⁷ Artist statement for exhibition, May 2004.

⁸ Interview with the author 4 June 2004.



Fan Dongwang, *Dragon #5 (Green)*, 2004, pencil on paper, 76 x 76 cm. Courtesy the artist