

No Right Turn Launch Speech

Rachel Kent – Senior Curator. Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney

Tonight is a very special evening as we come together to celebrate the launch of not one, or two, but three exhibitions here at Penrith Regional Gallery & The Lewers Bequest. It gives me real pleasure to introduce the exhibition **No Right Turn**, an ambitious project exploring the multi-faceted phenomenon of drawing today through the work of 14 western Sydney artists; **Berlin Burghers Microwave Monet**, a solo exhibition of new video works by western Sydney artist Justene Williams; and **Blacklock & Edwards**, artworks and carpet designs by Aboriginal artists Fabri Blacklock and Chris Edwards.

No Right Turn and **Berlin Burghers** are curated by Dr Shirley Daborn and Penrith Director Anne Loxley respectively, who each provide insightful, critical essays to contextualise the exhibitions; I strongly recommend these to you. Indigenous curator and artist Zona Wilkinson has curated **Blacklock & Edwards**, introducing and expanding this inspirational fusion of art, design, tradition and contemporary culture.

Shirley Daborn introduces her essay, entitled 'The Indefinable Art of Drawing', by questioning the meaning of this slippery, chameleon-like medium today. Acknowledged historically as the basis for the other (supposedly) 'higher' art forms of architecture, painting and sculpture, drawing is re-considered in the present. In doing so, it is presented as a primary – not secondary – art form in its own right. There has been a compelling revision of ideas about drawing in recent years, from major exhibitions of contemporary drawing at the Tate in London, and in New York's MOMA, as well as smaller, experimental and investigative projects across local galleries and artist-run spaces. The diversity of drawing practices and approaches is reflected through the art works in **No Right Turn**, which interpret it through a range of means and forms. Abstract and representative, solid and translucent, on paper and across a host of alternative other media: drawing is here an 'open door' to the world in which representation is considered and made anew.

Grounded in photography, Justene Williams describes her performative video works as hovering between "notions of abstraction and figuration". Using technical modes such as fast forward and repetitive flickering (or a kind of visual stop-start) and elaborate hand-constructed sets, these compelling, ambiguous video works draw inspiration from auto biographical photographs of the artist during her travels, at different points through her life. Williams describes her holiday snaps as "pretty ordinary" but observes of the wider video performances: "it's the idea that a history is twisted, covered, clouded, forgotten, sweetened or made up".

Exhibiting professionally since 1991, Williams is one of a generation of Sydney artists who have forged a reputation locally and beyond for their challenging works which engage with direct, communicative modes such as the camera and video. Reality TV, MTV, Facebook and Twitter are all communicative media that have shaped today's world in swift, readily accessible ways – as does the Internet, and the ease of physical travel through flight. Williams's works tap actively into this culture of speed, directness and accessibility, providing new ways for us to encounter the human body, and with it the artist's psyche.

Blacklock & Edwards is a compelling and beautiful exhibition of carpets and other artworks by Fabri Blacklock and Chris Edwards. These works express a profound sense of tradition and continuity, as well as transformation and reinvention through their innovative designs and approach to material and colour. The richness of the land forms rich inspiration for the works with their focus on earth and water, animals, and the elements around us. Fabri Blacklock has described her heritage from the Biripi People of Port Macquarie in northern NSW. She speaks of the tidal systems associated with the sourcing of fish for tucker through her designs; and the shifting sands that create the coastal landscape of the region. Chris Edwards, from the

Gumbaynggir people of Nambucca Heads in northern NSW, cites his River series as illustrating the complex water systems and local knowledge used by his people to harvest fish for tucker. He speaks of the importance of place, in this case Oyster Creek, and its spiritual caretaker. Curator Zona Wilkinson concludes, "taking Aboriginal stories in such diverse mediums to the Australian and international main stage, I feel inspired for and with our young people".

Opening one (or in this case three!) contemporary exhibitions is a pleasure and an honour. Tonight is though particularly important for me as a representative of as the Museum of Contemporary Art in Sydney, because the MCA shares a unique relationship with Penrith Regional Gallery & The Lewers Bequest, its projects and dedicated team. The two institutions have collaborated through the ongoing C3West initiative linking culture and industry in western Sydney; co-produced the recent exhibition *Sylvie Blocher: What Is Missing?*; and today further that relationship through the exchange of ideas, projects and speaking opportunities. I'd like to acknowledge and thank all of the artists and curators involved in tonight's three exhibitions; and to thank once again Penrith for staging such an innovative and diverse line-up for western Sydney and beyond to see and enjoy. Thank you.

[Notes by Rachel Kent, Senior Curator, Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney, 16/4/10]