crossings

Crossings is an experimental collaboration between Brisbane Ethnic Music and Arts Centre Inc. and the Institute of Modern Art.
Crossings exhibits eleven collaborative works by seventeen visual artists of non english speaking background.

CURATORS

Nicholas Tsoutas
Elena Gallegos-Pereira

METRO ARTS GALLERY 2
JULY 2-14 1993
BRISBANE QUEENSLAND

CROSSINGS: A NEW CULTURAL PRACTICE

Chris Bowen, Director
Brisbane Ethnic Music and Arts Centre Inc.

This exhibition is the result of a collaboration between Brisbane Ethnic Music and Arts Centre (BEMAC) and the Institute of Modern Art (IMA). To my knowledge, it marks the first time in this State that publicly funded organisations have staged an exhibition focusing on a central theme of cultural diversity.

That this has taken so long, given that Australia is one of the most culturally diverse countries in the world (second only to Israel in fact) may seem surprising. Indeed to some it is an indictment of the narrow view of our dominant Anglo-Celtic culture. But Australia generally, has been slow to acknowledge the artistic possibilities of cultural diversity. And of course, Queensland has not been at the forefront of change in this regard.

The intriguing question is why? Is it that the Anglo tradition produces better art? That of course is a nonsense. Is it because the Anglo culture just happened to hit these shores before any other immigrant group, and for some reason has not wanted to share it with anyone else? I believe the answer to this is yes. And when we do deal with the other immigrant cultures in this country, we see them as just that, the others. As the bonsai olive tree on this catalogue's cover suggests, they are to be kept under control and enjoyed purely for their exotica. In other words they have no real contribution to make.

The unfortunate results of this phenomena are twofold. Firstly, we have denied ourselves a richer artistic expression by only drawing on part of the creative human resource available in Australia. Secondly, we have denied individual Australians of non English speaking background opportunities for expression. Of course it can be argued this is untrue, and Australia is undoubtedly an international leader in addressing many issues of discrimination and equality of opportunity. But, like it or not, the denial of the right to participate by a culture that refuses to share its power runs deep. And the artistic impact of this is in lost dreams, thwarted aspirations and restricted creativity.

This show, which brings together seventeen artists from a diverse range of backgrounds and practises, seeks to address this issue. Curated jointly by Nicholas Tsoutas, Director of the IMA, and Elena Gallegos, artist-in-residence at BEMAC, the exhibition was conceived to provide artists of non English speaking background with a chance to work and exhibit together. We hope this is the beginning of a journey to develop a stronger Australian artistic practice. A practice that utilises more fully the creative human resource of this country. From all manner of backgrounds.

MAKING A DIFFERENCE

Linda Carroli

Working as non-English speaking background artists to develop a collaborative exhibition has meant the boundaries of culture, art and professionalism had to be redrawn and crossed. Through the BEMAC collaborative Exhibition Project a group of artists found that the problems and joys of collaborative approaches to the production of art are multi-fold.

In a series of meetings, the group's conflicting expectations and trepidations converged. Subsequently, it took time before the participants felt comfortable with each other and then with the process. Those perennial concerns about the conflict between process and product have been consistently articulated. For some, the project became too product oriented, while the process suffered. The practicalities of completing the project within a particular time frame compounded the view that process was being stifled.

It's not surprising that "process" is important to this group. It has been a learning experience for them. Many have faced it with a degree of fear and misgivings about personal skills and competencies.

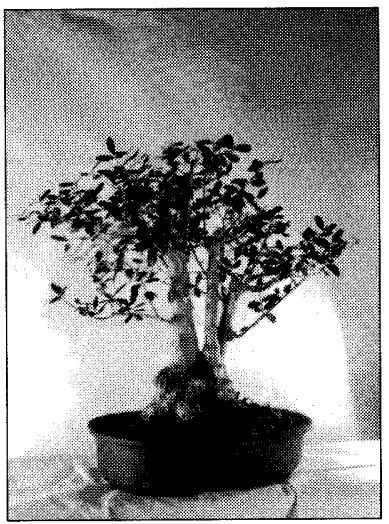
Even so, there's a belief that this process has broken new ground. The group has faith in its ability and commitment to continue working collaboratively and to continue to explore new ways of generating ideas and art. It was like creating a new community, a new sense of purpose and a sense of collective power which redressed the issue of underrepresentation of non-English speaking background artists.

This is tied to issues of identity and difference which colour this project at many levels. A consistent defining and refining process has been integral to its progress. In turn, this has seen duel processes of cultural affirmation and personal affirmation.

However, the identity issue takes on another layer, which not only addresses "collaboration", but "collaboration across cultures". The project has provided an opportunity whereby an understanding of cross-cultural collaboration can be pursued through a creative process which is both personal and socially relevant and which recontextualises issues of cultural diversity within paradigms of cultural production ...or perhaps that goes the other way around.

The fusion of process and issues assisted in developing a commitment to collaboration and establishing common ground. The result has been a great deal of discussion and soul-searching about what terms like "NESB", "ethnic" and "culture" really mean. Everyone admits to hating terms like "NESB" which ultimately marginalise people,

their art and their concerns. This necessitates looking beyond the definitions imposed by bureaucracies. There's a further difficulty in addressing oneself and one's relation to others in terms of these abstractions.



Differences become apparent through the range of themes and issues proposed for the exhibition. It's another case of personal issues rendered public and political. This "politicisation" is evident in the processes deployed through the project which focus on respecting difference, adapting to others' needs and compromising to reach mutually satisfying resolutions and decisions. These processes dictate how the project develops.

The bottom-line for many of the artists is the "art is about politics and politics is reflected in art". However, there are others in the group who are concerned with issues of artistry, beauty and aesthetics in the context of contemporary society.

It's clearly a case of "different issues, different people". That's how diverse this group of non-English speaking background artists is. These differences create a dynamic process and exhibition that is, at the very least, eclectic. It is about making a difference through the art; not only with the ideas, but through the means of producing it.

From the perspective of non-English speaking background artists, it makes an important statement. We will not be forced to experience ourselves generically. If we are, then we can transform that position into a panoramic display of difference; a positive collective experience which depicts the multiplicity of culture. This is one option for artists from non English speaking backgrounds as they continue to work experimentally and collaboratively, and as they continue to actively intervene on what is understood as Australian culture.

(This article is based on an interview conducted with the project's artists.)

CROSSINGS

Nicholas Tsoutas

The subject of Cultural Diversity and the relationship between the cultural centres and margins in Australia, today, now, is unavoidable, regardless of, veiled as it is by the empty rhetoric of liberal democracy, and an uncommitted Arts bureaucracy which only pays token lip service whilst strategically maintaining the status quo. Art in this country still belongs to and is controlled and dominated by establishment, mainstream cultural interests - condescendingly and gratuitously throwing crumbs only when challenged. Within the art-world, few cases of overt censorship due to racial discrimination are recorded because personal taste, establishment values and individual curatorial selection rule and for the most part remain unchallenged - within a structure which is affectively white, Anglo, middle-class and, particularly in the upper echelons, male. Ethnocentrism in the Arts is calculatedly determined on the vague notion of Excellence that not only transcends boundaries but is identifiable only by those in power. In these democratic institutions Excellence is above and beyond cultural and racially determined difference, for racism has nothing to do, we are told, with art. True art is always Universal it seems and Excellence as the mediating factor will always prevail. Excellence has always been the most effective tool of discrimination, exclusion and manipulation on the side of homogeneity in both the modernist and postmodernist structures, despite the fact that nobody can actualise a working definition for it. The convention of good taste, that culturally stylized standard which we were all raised on and educated by, was and still is based on an illusion of social order that is no longer possible, sustainable or desirable. We are now looking at art within the context of disorder, a far more difficult task than following institutionalised regulation - regardless of the fact that artists from a different cultural position have critically challenged these notions of Excellence in favour of a more open, equitable and just process of access and distribution and have been fended off from the mainstream bastions. Such mindless fidelity to outdated and clearly culturally bankrupted criteria for what constitutes and differentiates good art from bad, and such ignorant resistance to the fact that criteria can differ radically across cultures, class and gender still remain firmly embedded in educational and artistic structures - maintaining systems which are liberal, conservative and culturally indifferent - making sure that those of a different cultural position are permanently excluded into a state of invisibility. Cultural racism is damaging and virulently hitting its victim in particularly private places that denigrate and self-efface in a fashion that is reductive and only leads to silence. That is not to say, however, that art is not being made and enjoyed by the Other, the culturally dispositioned. It is, but it cannot penetrate the authorising validation processes determined by

Excellence. When cultural continuity and identity are suppressed through constant and arbitrary colonisation and cultural imperialism, the artists, these communities lose more than their immediate superficial vocabulary, and ultimately the whole community is subsequently deprived. Australia itself is the real loser for failing to comprehend the value of other people's cultural contributions to the eventual fabric of what constitutes a meaningful Australian culture. The Arts are often pleasurable, entertaining, redemptive, restorative, critical and empowering. If we are not moved we stand still. In fact we go backwards in time and are left with an inadequate status quo to contemplate as a reward. We must embrace the different cultural insights and contributions with earnest enthusiasm and avoid thinking of other cultures as existing passively in the past - over there, not here, while the present is the property of an active civilized Western cultural mainstream. Culture is neither static nor the privileged domain of the few, but a contestable dynamic constantly de-centred site. Overemphasis on the static and authenticating notions of vapid Excellence can only lead to subjective stereotype and false representations that freeze non-Anglo cultures into an anthropological present or an archaeological past that denies them a modern identity or political reality on an equal basis with the rest of the Australian community. So why is it exactly at the moment when so many of us who have been silenced begin to demand the right to name ourselves, to scrutinize the false barriers that divide us, to act as subjects rather than objects of history, that just then, the very concept of subjecthood becomes problematic. Demographics alone demand that society change as its cultural composition changes. Enlightened governments should not stand in its way, but should actively facilitate and encourage the positive nature and benefits of such change. To do so is not only to acknowledge difference, but to engage it into our cultural formulations, and so acknowledge the images that have operated in the gaps and expose these barriers that have served to exclude them. In avoiding dependence on the false histories, the master narrative and learned cultural myths (which some of us have learned to resist) - we can demonstrate the tremendous range of possibilities that exist in intercultural art. The disappearance or meltdown of culturally limiting boundaries can be simultaneously both exhilarating and terrifying, but the model is eventually more satisfying politically, fresher and socially healthier, demanding a vigilant repudiation of unquestioned socially recurring criteria about art and its multiple meanings. The intercultural, collaborative art of Crossings demonstrates the conciliatory possibilities in the ways in which cultures see themselves. More specifically, Crossings suggests the necessity to rethink the assumptions, to renegotiate the value systems, to deny the stereotypes, to resist and break the patterns that exclude and disenfranchise. In this context, the visual arts of Crossings demands a healing process to begin.

MARIANGELA VECCHI

Italian born, Mariangela studied Mediaeval art and textile design in Italy before coming to Australia ten years ago. A Tibetan Buddhist and fibre artist, she works from stream of consciousness with colour and form to express symbolic reality.

DONNA TOUSSAINT

Donna was born in Australia from a Ceylonese father. As a freelance visual community artist, she has worked extensively in north Queensland on various visual and performance projects.

SEBASTIAN DI MAURO

Sebastian was born in Innisfail north Queensland of Italian parentage. He has exhibited extensively in Queensland as well as NSW and Victoria. Sebastian is currently undertaking a Masters of Visual Arts degree at Monash University.

EXCLUSION/BEHIND THE OUTER VIEW, PICTURE OF A MIGRANT WITH AN ACCENT IS THE INNER VIEW, THE IDENTITY OF THE WARRIOR

Medium: mixed media

SEBASTIAN DI MAURO, MARIANGELA VECCHI & DONNA TOUSSAINT

"The collaboration between us is based on the notion of identity, labels and stereotyped images of 'migrants with an accent'. How do people from non-English speaking backgrounds relate, interact and exist within a different culture. This pre-conceived idea will be challenged by your senses without own images and memories."

LAURINDO DE ABREU SOTO
Born in Caracas, Venezuela, in 1957. Laurindo has studied cabinet making, design and calligraphy. He is a self taught sculptor and Zen Buddhist.

MARCEL DESBIENS
Born in Quebec, Canada in 1954 where he has exhibited widely since 1975. Marcel works in oil following the traditional method of the 15th and 16th centuries. He has been artist-in-residence at Ipswich Boys Grammar School.

ED DZIDUCH
Born in Australia to a Russian mother and Polish speaking father. Ed grew up in Brisbane, and has worked in various mediums for about 18 years. These include music, graphic design, clothing, small sculpture, jewellery and metalwork.

CHOOSING REALITY, REALIDAD ESCOGIDA, CHOISIR LA REALITE

Medium: painting and sculpture
MARCEL DESBIENS & LAURINDO DE ABREU SOTO
"The work presented in this exhibition is the fusion of two different approaches to beauty and aesthetic, one classical, another contemporary."

SARDONICUS

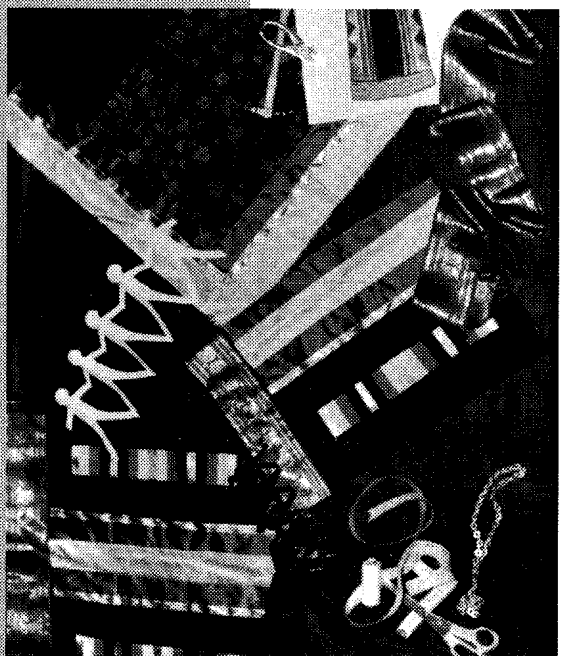
Medium: brass
DONNA TOUSSAINT & ED DZIDUCH
This piece will be used as adornment in Donna's interpretation of the myth of Sardonicus.

ULTIMA THULE

Medium: brass
ED DZIDUCH & LAURINDO DE ABREU SOTO
"Our work explores with a contemporary language our interest in ancient cultures (mythology and mysticism). We both share the same fascination for the Celtic civilization which is part of our background".

INGRID STAHN

After 25 years in Germany, adventure drew Ingrid to Australia. Her love for jewellery led to tertiary studies in art, design, gold and silver work. Since graduation she has been part of exhibitions locally, interstate and overseas.



SUSIE RAZ

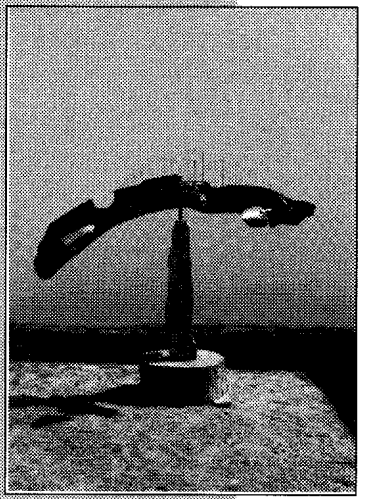
Born in Australia and grew up in Israel. Since childhood Susie has played and worked with fabrics. At 20, after two years military service, starved for a creative outlet, she taught herself patchwork and quilting. She hasn't stopped since.

A DRESS FOR ALL NATIONS

Medium: fabric, wood and metal
INGRID STAHN & SUSIE RAZ

"Through combining fabrics from different cultures such as Bedouin embroidery, Indian brocades, Oriental silks, Aboriginal and African colours, the kaftan expresses the enrichment created by cross-cultural relationship. The belt further emphasises the equality between the different races through its paper cut-out design of people linked together."

Photograph: GOTTFRIED STAHN

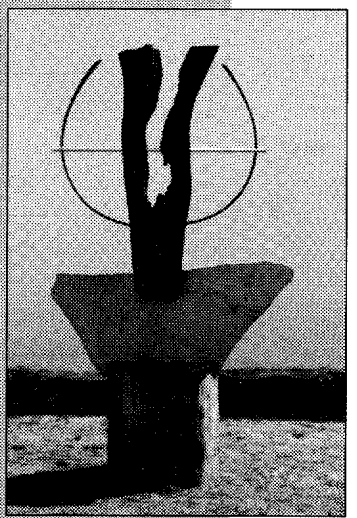


TAMNIAB CHUAWIWAT
Tamniab was Born in Thailand and studied architecture and art in Brisbane and Sydney. He has won awards and has exhibited in Queensland.

BERND ULLRICH
Bernd was born in Germany in 1949 and migrated to Australia in 1969. He studied painting and drama at the Darling Downs Institute of Advanced Education and graduated in 1975, then opened the Exhibition Room of Modern Art in Toowoomba.

THE DEAD EEL IN THE WELL

Medium: wood, stone, bronze, copper and brass
BERND ULLRICH & TAMNIAB CHUAWIWAT



TIME IN THE FOREST

Medium: stone, wood, brass, steel
BERND ULLRICH & TAMNIAB CHUAWIWAT

"The challenges of different cultural backgrounds and artistic experiences were nearly instantly overcome by the strength of the surrounding forest from which we collected most of our materials. We find our sculptures a pleasing extraction from our happening".

Photographs: TAMNIAB CHUAWIWAT

ANA FONOLLOSA - GONZALES

Born in Spain, Ana holds a Certificate in Art and Design, QLD College of Art; Bachelor of Fine Art, Qld College of Art; Graduate Diploma, Secondary Teaching, QUT. She has practiced and exhibited since 1988, and works as an Art Teacher.

RAQUEL REDMOND

Born in Chile, Raquel holds a Diploma and Bachelor of Fine Art from Queensland College of Art. She has been practising and exhibiting since 1988. Raquel worked on projects including Out of the Box Festival and runs a Children's School of Art.

COLLABORATION EVE THE JOYFUL SOUL. THE PROBLEM OF EVE

Medium: lino cuts

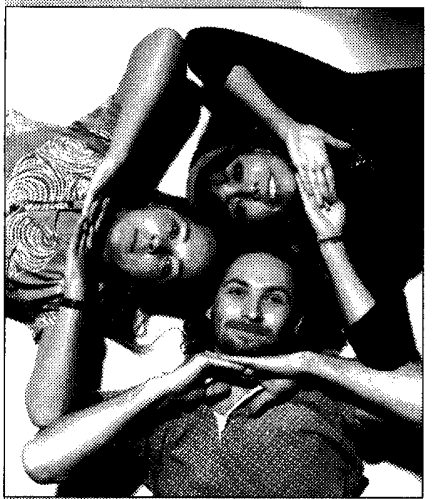
ANA FONOLLOSA & RAQUEL REDMOND

Ana: "EVE THE JOYFUL SOUL: I celebrate Eve, the mother of all women. She takes the venial sin with humour. She copes with it, in a playful and feminine way. The images tell about the numerous roles in a woman's life with wit and irony".

Raquel: "THE PROBLEM OF EVE. THE PROBLEM OF ALL WOMEN: In reversing the role of women on the stories of the Bible, I question: what would have happened if Adam would have given the apple to Eve to eat. Would he have been responsible for the fall of woman?"

ANN BERMINGHAM - MUSICIAN

Ann was born in Australia, she has worked as a community based musician since 1989. She is currently the musical director of the Combined Union Chior and has a strong interest in multicultural music. Ann has worked with the artists in exploring sound for the exhibition performances.



SANDRA MALDONADO

Sandra was born in Chile where she studied graphic arts and photography. She studies photography at the Brisbane Institute of Art, and is a free-lance photographer and correspondent for American News Service.

SONJA DE STERKE

Sonja was born in Netherlands and arrived in Australia in 1992. She worked in advertising for a few years, then started a course in creative photography. She currently studies photography at the Queensland College of Art.

KRZYSZTOF BIALOSKORSKI

Krzystof was born in Poland. He holds a bachelor of visual arts with a major in photography from Griffith University, and is now completing his honours year. He has won awards and exhibited in Queensland.

THE WHEEL OF FORTUNE

Medium: installation of photographs

SANDRA MALDONADO, KRYSZTOF BIALOSKORSKI & SONJA DE STERKE

"Irony has a kind of gyroscopic function of keeping life liveable: it can be used both to destabilise the excessively stable and established, and to stabilise the unstable, the arbitrary and the chaotic". D.C. Muecke

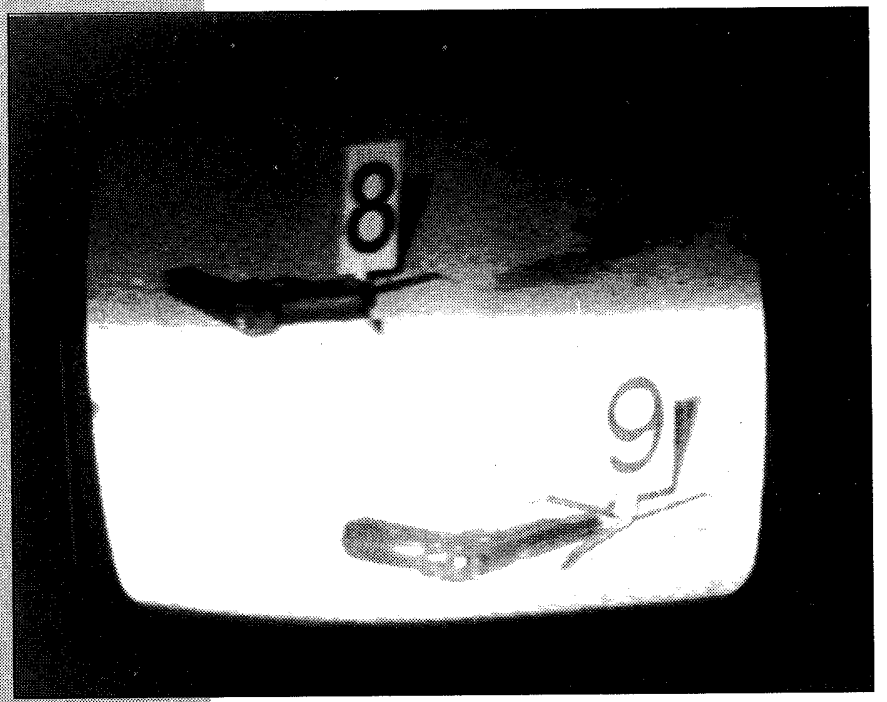
CRAEMZIINGRENS

Medium: photography black and white

SANDRA MALDONADO & SONJA DE STERKE

"Darkness travels to the light. But blindness leads to death". R. Tagore.

Photography by the artists.



MULTICULTURALISM CONSUME MULTICULTURAL CHOCOLATE AND A CHOCOLATE MUSEUM FOR EVERYONE. DEPARTMENT: SOCIAL/POLITICAL DESIRE.

Medium: Chocolate

FRANZ EHMANN

Photograph: Franz Ehmann

Brisbane Ethnic Music and Arts Centre Inc.and the Institute of Modern Art acknowledge the financial assistance of the Queensland Government through the Minister for the Arts, and the Australia Council, the Federal Government's arts funding and advisory body.

BEMAC "Yungaba"
120 Main St Kangaroo Point Q
PO Box 7299 East Brisbane 4169
Ph 391 4433 Fax 391 2802

IMA
608 Ann St (cnr Gipps St)
Fortitude Valley
GPO 1897 Brisbane 4001
Ph 252 5750 Fax 252 5072

Cover photograph: Krzysztof Bialoskorski
Catalogue design: Robyn McDonald Inkahoots

crossings

BEMAC IMA