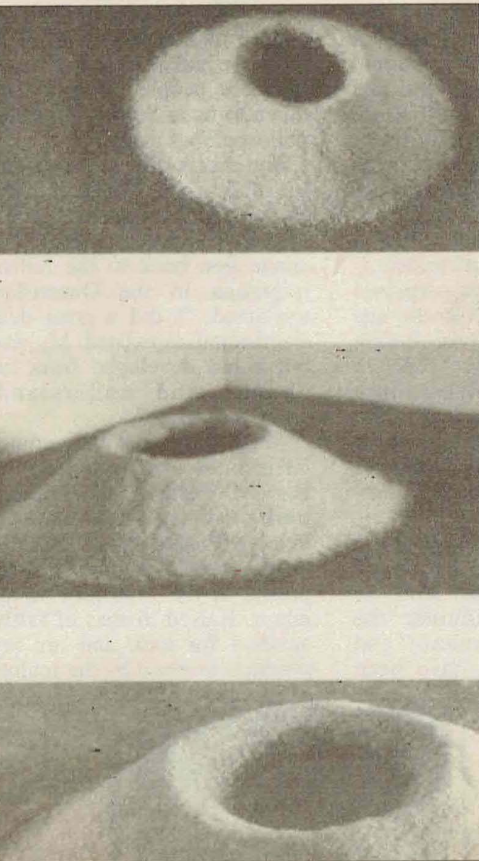


## PANE E ZUCCHERO

By Sam Di Mauro  
Cairns Regional Gallery  
Closes November 1

Reviewed by Marina Muecke



STRANGE landscape out of raw sugar.

# Sugarcoated narrative

BECAUSE it's an unfamiliar artform, temporarily constructed, financed by government grants and businesses — but not for sale — some people say that installation art is a waste of time, effort and money.

These are people who will not go to a gallery to liberate their primal senses and experience the visual poetry of Pane E Zucchero by Sam Di Mauro.

But those who are willing to give time and credit to this installation have discovered its subtle impact and beauty cannot be easily discarded.

Sam Di Mauro is so selective that he has clearly developed installation art from the Minimalist tradition, which developed in Australia during the 1960s.

Minimal art was then called contemplative because it locked attention on what initially seemed blank but had presence.

It emphasised art as objects in space, rather than gestures or expressions, so the viewer had to consider the meaning of an artwork because of its site-specific location.

The title of this installation means bread and sugar.

It refers to staple features of Sam's childhood in South Johnstone with Sicilian relatives, sugar cane and his father's bakery. But don't expect to see bread.

Instead, small mounds of raw sugar are carefully composed on carpet underlay like a relief sculpture, which lures you to physically interact and sense the installation like a strange landscape.

(More familiar associations for locals may be triggered by their own childhood memories of the overwhelming smell and mass of raw sugar piled over 15m high in Far Northern mills.)

The sugar has been scooped from the top of each small mound to provide wells for olive oil, which gradually seeps through the sides and on to the surrounding fibre.

Being made from jute, the carpet underlay is completely natural, warm and soft.

It has a familiar aroma and changes the cool, conceptual formality of the gallery environment, so more personal responses are possible.

Even a few lines of handwriting in charcoal across each whitewashed wall encourage familiarity.

Although the language is Sicilian, words with Latin origins or cross-cultural applications are clearly discernible.

An entire wall is neatly covered with the same handwriting in an adjacent room, where a nostalgic atmosphere accumulates with a continuous recording of Sicilian voices and home movies.

After attending to this sculptural installation and sensing the purity of raw materials and artistic refinement, the symbolism of these objects and their

interaction becomes clearer. Sugar is energy and refers to populated centres across the natural landscape.

Olive oil is associated with Italian culture and during this exhibition, we witness it pass through the

symbols of population centres and permeate the surrounding landscape.

The process of transformation is subtle but straightforward and part of a personal narrative which is obviously attractive, intriguing and intelligent.