

Verve's dialogue between some 20 artists and poets from NSW, Victoria, ACT and Queensland whose artwork distils one of the great themes in our culture, the contest between word and image.

Philosophers and artists alike have struggled to define the different properties of verbal and visual descriptive systems. In the visual arts, the increase effort between language and text has its origins in 1920s avant-garde Cubists, Dada and Constructivist movements. These challenges experiments lay dormant, re-emerging in the artistic and literary ferment of the late 1950s and 1960s in language poetry.

While we are not blessed with Australian exhibition precedents in this area, there are two stand-out Australian historical survey exhibitions: Barrett Reid's *Words on the Walls* (Heldel, 1989), and Nicholas Zandvogl's *Visual Poetics* (for Brisbane's Museum of Contemporary Art, also 1989). Both remain benchmarks. Barrett's survey included prominent contemporary artists who came to notice in the 1970s and 1980s. Yet, only Ian Burns' *Looking at Spring and Reading* (Ivan Dougherty Gallery, 1993) has linked past and present formulations of essentially 'fringe' art and the avant-garde mainstream.

Verve begins with a selection of historical works by Alan Riddell, Rudi Kraussman, Thalia and Richard Topping, major Australian exponents of the international visual or language poetry movement of the 60s, 70s and 80s respectively. Humour and sociopolitical commentary is frequent in their work.

Contemporary artists paying tribute to these pioneers include Christopher Dean (his monophones are a homage to Rudi Kraussman) and Scott Redford (a bold purple and orange concrete poem 'Suffer Paradise' sign is outside the National Trust Centre, facing thousands of cars converging onto the Harbour Bridge).

A few contemporary formulations have appeared: Martin Harrison and Raunk Lewis's primarily performative and aural *Writers in Parallel* ran over an almost ten year period (1980s-early 90s, Art Gallery of NSW). In Melbourne, Mervyn Gates at Monash University Gallery presented *Art with Text* (1990), selected artists using words as signs (pop art), surrealist motifs and narrative (literary, didactic) modes of working, all tropes favoured for analysis and Raunk Lewis's *Palimpsest* touring exhibition drew parallels between international, national and local conceptual language artists.

In between these investigations, visual artists have indicated vivid new takes. Simon Blau, Mikela Dwyer, Jennifer Mills and Destiny Deacon use words and characters in contexts external to their common usage, or as they recur in the everyday. The art of Janet Burchill and Maria Cruz allies visual structure to cultural critique. Formal sequencing devices are used by Sonia Hassan and David Seneqara (Islamic calligraphy) and Tie-Hua Huang and Hou Leong (the tradition of the Chinese scrollmaster), against and western values. Neil Roberts and Andy Davey play with language and museum conventions, while book works by Anne Ooms and Christopher Snee are a bridge back to modernist literary conventions.

Debra Dawes' timely painting, 'Unfinished Business' (the word 'sorry' appearing and disappearing into a program landscape), is a culmination of all these twentieth century perspectives.

WORKS

Verve

STAGE BLAU

1. *Laundry Still Life*, 1994, oil on canvas, 152.7 x 213.5 cm, \$8,100
2. *Still Life (Gold)*, 1994, oil on linen, 153 x 275 cm, \$10,000
3. *Love*, 1993, oil on canvas, 76 x 56 cm, \$1,200
4. *Blind*, 1993, oil on paper, 34 x 24 cm, Courtesy: Tim Game
5. *She*, 1993, oil on board, 31 x 41 cm, \$800
6. *Art*, 1996, oil on canvas, 38 x 28 cm, \$800, Courtesy: Mont Gallery

Artist Statement: *The words in these paintings are relevant to the exercise of exploring the tension between the mundane and the sublime*

JANE BURDELL

1. *Following the Blind Leading the Blind*, 1997, acrylic on wood, 150 x 150 x 30 cm.
2. *Qualities of a Known World 1*, 1997, acrylic on muslinite, 147 x 94 cm.
3. *Qualities of a Known World 2*, 1997, acrylic on muslinite, 147 x 94 cm.
4. *Qualities of a Known World 3*, 1997, MDF and wood, model circa 1956, 180 x 60 x 10 cm.

Courtesy: Yolk/Crowley

Artist Statement: *I returned to Australia in 1997 after having lived in Berlin for six years ... These works are a collision between ideas, words and influences from Berlin and what I thought to be the context to which I returned, a sensing of the aesthetic qualities of the jamilar. (Each was initially exhibited in its own small room.) Excerpt from full statement in gallery*

MARIA OBUS

1. *Under what conditions would you be prepared to make a great sacrifice? Do you think that sacrifice can be justified on principle?* 1997, oil on canvas, 137.5 x 102 cm, \$1,500
2. *Do you see the mentally ill as a burden on our society?* 1997, oil on canvas, 84 x 51 cm, \$840
3. *Maria*, 1997, oil on canvas, 71 x 66 cm, \$1,000
4. *Do you find it difficult to show your feelings unambiguously to someone close to you?* 1997, oil on canvas, 107 x 61.5 cm, \$1,000
5. *Do you see nuclear energy plants as a threat?* 1997, oil on canvas, 66 x 66 cm, \$800

Courtesy: Sarah Carter Gallery

Artist Statement: *I am interested in letters of the alphabet as shapes, as text with meaning and I am also interested in colour as language. Overlaying on another image in a way seems to create or undo a painting. The composition and conception is totally defined by the unexpected results of textures which then suspend meaning. I find this to be one of the most pleasurable sensations.*

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Verve: An exhibition of visual poetry

© poetic visuals

an S.H. Ervin Gallery exhibition

Bibliography

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1.8. O4 Is the sphallure all our piece? Label in former National Model School, built by Mortimer Lewis, Colonial Architect, 1850.

Courtesy NSW Dept of Public Works and Services

2. **ACCESSION**, 1998, S.H. Ervin Collection
- Labels, string, pins, 70 x 40 cm.
- Statement: *This installation follows on from Darcy's The Future Series (Singapore, 1996, New England Regional Art Museum, Armidale, 1997, and Canada Powerhouse, 1998). It most closely refers to the display in Armidale, where masses in gold banners (arriving directly from collect, former cookies, were juxtaposed with work selected by the artist from the Howard Hinton and Chandler Cassey Collections—creating a dialogue with collecting and porting, power and desire. His selection from the S.H. Ervin collection ran the heat up on homo-erotic motifs even as they are titled by didactic instructions copied from a Pittsburgh museum.*

DEBRA DAWES

Unfinished Business, 1998, acrylic on canvas, 202.5 x 367.5 cm, \$18,000.

Courtesy Sherman Galleries

DESTINY DEACON

Kauri Rocks, Gold Words (Silver Rocks, Swami), Western Victoria, 1991. Colour laser prints from black and white photographs, 9 parts, each 29.7 x 42 cm, \$150 each. The series was part of Deacon's debut exhibition, *Pitcha ni koroi*, 1991 and then shown in *Abstracting Women's Exhibition*, Art Gallery of NSW, curated by Hetti Perkins. With their air of menace, these hanging rocks have become something of a talisman and were part of her installation for Africa, the inaugural Johannesburg Biennale, 1995. Courtesy: Houghton Galleries

Statement: *In her book Moving Pictures, Anne Hollander discusses what she calls "constituted affinities" between moving pictures and a cinematic mode with a long history in painting, printmaking and photography. Among these affinities she identifies a "combination of casual phenomena with charged encounter and the condition of "continuous suggestion"—"the difference between letting us see something and carefully describing it."*

My homecoming work came back exhibition catalogue, GNS, Adelaide, 1994.

CHRISTOPHER DEAN

1. *The Lady Country*, 1995, enamel and cardboard on canvas, 45 x 35 cm.
2. *Harpywing*, 1973 Rudi Kraussman/Monochrome, 1996, enamel and cardboard on canvas, 120 x 120 cm.
3. *Spirit (Parang Free)*, 1996, (after Rudi Kraussman, 'Society', in Powers of Empower, 1982), enamel and cardboard on canvas, 45 x 45 cm. Courtesy: Angela Marcon
4. *Spirit (Parang Blue)*, 1996, (after Rudi Kraussman, 'Society', in Powers of Empower, 1982), enamel and cardboard on canvas, 45 x 45 cm. Courtesy: Angela Marcon

Artist Statement: *Three of these paintings refer to the work of Rudi Kraussman while the fourth quotes the front cover of a 1965 edition of Donald Horne's 'The Lucky Country' ... As with most of my work these four paintings were originally produced as experiments and on the line of their manufacture I had no immediate plans to exhibit them. The only painting from this group that has been previously exhibited in the green painting called Harpywing, 1973. Rudi Kraussman/Monochrome. The small rose and the painting contain references from an installation called Concrete Poetry which was held at Side-On Studios Sydney in 1996. This was a collaboration involving both Rudi Kraussman and myself. The installation consisted of a 3 x 3 x 3 m wire version of a concrete poem by Kraussman called Spirit which was sheltered onto the painted grey concrete floor of the gallery using yellow glass enamel. Excerpt from full statement in gallery*

TIKELA DWEE

April Love, 1998, modelling clay, magnetic tape and compact discs, dimensions variable, \$4,000

Courtesy Sarah Carter Gallery

SONJA FASBAE

1.5 Entitled, 1996-1998, oil pastel, watercolour, collage and etching on paper, unit 38 x 28.5 cm, Framed each \$500

Artist Statement: *Three work stems from my recollections of formal associations with Islam where Koinon for card meaning was learnt by the copying and drawing of Syzra (verses). My work thus represents symbolic rather than literal transformations of the language of prayer such as 'Milk' and 'Yismalil'. I have reconstituted sacred text as a visual code of words and packaging to reveal the inherent beauty and power of Arabic script.*

THE BIA SUKES

1. Paving Fudge, 1998, ink on rice paper, 122 x 92 cm, \$5,000

2. Merguare Pass over Wollongong, NSW, 1998, ink on rice paper, 122 x 92 cm, \$5,000

3. Black Penny, 1996, ink on rice paper, 85 x 45 cm, \$2,000

4. Weaving Temple near Wollongong, NSW, 1997, ink on rice paper, 122 x 92 cm, \$5,000

Courtesy the artist and Quadrivium Gallery

Statement: *From the age of ten to twenty-five, 'The Hua Huang was one of a few selected students of Master Zhu Qi-shan, latter after study at the Shanghai Fine Art Institute, the former Senior Lecturer in Fine Arts at Shanghai University and served as a consultant to the Shanghai Museum and Art Gallery'. The Hua left for Australia in 1987 to study western art. In 1990 he was artist-in-residence at the University of Wollongong where he completed a Doctorate of Creative Arts. The artist says: "My intention over this last decade has been to rise the literary tradition as a scaffold to allow me to move into a direction combining both the traditional Oriental style with those from the West."*

ELA JOHNSON

EX 13 THE

Abstract Form, 1996, acrylic on canvas, 180 x 150 cm. Courtesy: the artist and Mont Gallery.

Statement: *Reading the Chinese calligraphy from top right down to bottom right and so on, the poem is based on a Buddhist parable. In essence as a former plants a rice field he/she must bend down to see the seedlings and, as you bend towards the earth and water you see the reflection of the sky. Keeping the mind and heart calm is done in the same manner that walking backwards could be seen as walking forwards. Since 1994 artists Tim Johnson and My Le Thi have worked on a number of collaborative exhibitions including: 'Innocence', Kassa, Germany 1997 and 'Crossing Boundaries', Drift Hall Gallery, Canberra.*

BUDI KRASUMATI

Concrete Poems, 1978. Set of 10 silk screen prints by the artist at the Tim Shea's Art Workshop, Sydney University. Here, artist's proof, *Flame*, artist's proof, *Final Victory*, edition 1/15, *Darkness Impressions*, edition 4/12, *Hand Hammer Jack Hammer*, 8/16, *Critic*, edition 2/17, *Build*, edition 7/12, *Competition*, edition 7/14, *Christmas 74*, artist's proof *Corruption*, 75, artist's proof. All works average size 34 x 51 cm. Courtesy Raunk Lewis

Statement: *Kraussman edited the quarterly art and literary journal Aspect, from 1975-87. In 1980 he commissioned two special issues of Aspect on visual poetry (Vol 4/4 and 4/5 edited by Richard Topping). His publications include from another Shore (Issue), 1975, illustrated by Brett Walker; 'The Water Lily and other poems, 1977; Paradox, poems, 1981, illustrated by Lorraine Kraussman; Flowers of Empitness, poems, 1982 and Three Plays: A Trilogy, Everyman, The Perfection, The Word, 1989. He edited Multicultural Theatre in Australia and Multicultural Literature in Australia.*

POU LEBORG

1. *Five Blue Poets*, 1998, ink on canvas, 175 x 110 cm.
2. *Seven Blue Poets*, 1998, ink on canvas, 175 x 110 cm.
3. *Mountain and Water (1)*, 1998, ink on canvas, 175 x 110 cm.
4. *Mountain and Water (2)*, 1998, ink on canvas, 175 x 110 cm.

Courtesy Rex Irwin Art Dealer

Statement: *"While paying homage to de Kooning and other western heroes, whose works are hanging in the National Gallery of Australia, Canberra this current show, Leborg is also commenting on the career of the commentators on western culture who describe these paintings more for their 'radical' messages than for their artistic merit." Michael Wardell, Moeet*

RAUNK LEWIS

1. *Every Possible Place*, 128, Raunk Lewis (with Paul Carter), Impressionism at Hessestone Bend, 14 July 1994, T.G.H. Strahlow, 'Rain Prayers' from Journals X4, South Australia Museum, 1998. Photocopy on tracing paper, each 42 x 29.5 cm. Installed in three North bay windows, S.H. Ervin Gallery.
2. *Anthology*, 1989
- 2.1. *At Least a Letter Should be Finished Now and Sent off* - Kosmanudhe Doesecher (no 4), 1989.
- 2.2. *The Train* - Anna Conant (no 6), 1989.
- 2.3. *Phase send me a post card hanging in an end your enigma* - Conal Fitzpatrick (no 8), 1989.
- 2.4. *Goose Song - Paul Carter* (a performance piece for 2 voices and tape) (no 2), 1989.
- 2.5. *Second letter to Betty* - performance for three voices and tape (no 1).
- 2.6. *A Guff Trip* - Andrew McLennan (a radio tape composition) (no 7).
- 2.7. *Frequent Kinkyer Downing* - Joan Brussal (no 3).
- 2.8. *Herding* - Martin Harrison (no 5).

All works pencil, pen and ink on paper, image size c. 22 x 18 cm

3. *Transcription Drawing from Die Arnold - Lind Lortjig - Sismar in Zeetra Australia*, Blue Water Drawing, Transcription from Die Kegu - Moeurer (ud Dir Regon Bogon, Carl Strahlow, 1997, 1997.
- Oil stick on canvas, 56 x 414 cm
4. *Transcription Drawing from Song of Central Australia*, Red Water Drawing - Transcription from Western Strata Reza Song of Kapoolia, T.G.H. Strahlow, 1978, 1996. Oil stick on canvas, 56 x 414 cm
5. *Anthology: Australian Contemporary Writers, transcription drawing from Cheri Mann's Changing the Subject*, 1992, 1992, lithograph, edition 10/12, 38 x 57 cm, Unframed \$350.

BRETTER WILLS

1. *Some Letters*, 1997, oil on linen, 144 x 109 cm, \$1,200
2. *Some Blue*, 1996, oil/linen, 111.5 x 60.5 cm, \$800

Exhibited under the title *Photographs*, 1997. Courtesy Darren Knight Gallery

ADHE OOMS

The Position, 1998, 3 artist books: *The Gravel, Learn, The Book of Skein*, all 1998. Installation in South bay of S.H. Ervin Gallery, 3 armchairs, 3 lamps and 3 side tables, dimensions variable.

Please sit and read the books!

The artist wishes to thank the Visual Arts/Craft Fund of the Australia Council and, for the furnishings, De and Dario Chitico of Pad, Darlinghurst Road, and Tri Fians.

Statement: *... One set in a chair, the text by Anne Ooms comfortably resting on your face, or perhaps held in one hand so that the other is free to scribble over the pages, and your body angled so that the light is just right to see the black marks on the page; the reading room around you slowly disappears, and you find yourself in another room or place, but nobody but you, can quite know where.*

Excerpts from Richard Grayson, 'Reading Rooms', Anne Ooms: The Ladies of Saint, exhibition catalogue, EAF Adelaide, 1997.

SGOPE RASPOZAI

Untitled (Writers Paradise), 1997-98, vinyl lettering on acrylic, 57.1 x 207.5 cm.

Courtesy: Belias Gallery and Sutton Gallery

Artist Statement: *Writing is a practice originated in the Pacific culture, especially Hawaii where, prior to European contact, there was a genuine oral culture. Texts were dedicated to writing, villages stood empty when a war was coming and writing festivals were staged annually. Yet, it had almost died out after only one hundred years of European contact. How an Australian tourist town built on a sensory (visual) culture, and a place often recalled for its dullness and lack of culture, should come to be called Sufferers Paradise (no 5) must not as a poetic art (poetry being the imaginative or creative use of language), especially as the former, none knew Hindi. Even well into the 1960s the town's citizens had to depend on a writer who served as an understudies. But to teach it was "... the most beautiful name for a place in the world". One could just be Writing Less than the Establishment of Sufferers Paradise on Earth—1066 AD.*

ALAN RIDDLE

Olympic Cycle, 1969, screen print, edition 18/20, produced in the studios of Original Graphics, Sydney in 1969, 50.6 x 80 cm. Exhibited in 'Verbal and Visual' an exhibition of concrete poem prints by Alan Riddell at Gallery A, Sydney, 1969 (cat no 6) and 'Alan Riddell, Visual Poem Prints, New 57 Gallery', Edinburgh, 1971. Courtesy Ann Lewis

Statement: *Alan Riddell (1927-1977) was born in Newcastle, Queensland and emigrated to Scotland at the age of eleven to live with four parents. He studied arts at Kilmahigh University. After being in Paris in the early 1950s, he founded the literary review L'Espece in 1952. He worked as a journalist in London, Edinburgh, Sydney, Melbourne and Athens. As well as concrete poetry, he published collections of linear verse, notably 'The Stopped Landscape' (1968, Hutchinson) and 'Belongs' (1972, Calder and Boyars), a collection of his visual poetry. His group exhibitions include Concrete to Apollinaire, ICA, London (1968). In 1973 he created the 'definition' (and first of its kind) international exhibition 'Typewriter Arts: Half a Century of Experiment' (New 57 Gallery, Edinburgh). Riddell's concrete poems are distinguished by their elegant, visually powerful and often circular systems of arrangement (such as Olympe Cycle), and at other times become more literary and more.*

BEIL ROBERTS

Tracking Blocks, 1992, 21 objects, mixed media, dimensions variable.

Courtesy Grace Weisse Gallery

Artist Statement: *Looking temporarily in the Philippines for my tracking blocks, I chose a range of objects which paradoxically evoked my experience. Later (on AXS, Perth, 1992), I took this of discarded packaging I would pass each day in the Asian neighbourhood of Perth. I was staying in each, with no knowledge of their meaning, daily 'scratched' a piece of cardboard with Chinese characters on it to each object. From the storefront of the gallery I was exhibiting, I took a series of old museum picture labels like 'Death of Captain Cook, Pro Hart, Bremner Bequest 1972' and had these over-exposed with words like 'he was hurt, faint', 'over-worked with words like Asian resources for me but in a very private way. So the resolution had many permutations of possible connotations and of course, personal collusions or total messes ... I took a chance to free associated within a given framework of ideas or intentions."*

DAVID SQUERIA

1. *Creating with Space and Construction*, 1998, 21 x 18.5 cm, \$300
2. *Let's Find Out*, 1998, 23 x 17.5 cm, \$200
3. *The Record of Faith*, 1997, 19 x 13 cm, \$180
4. *What Makes a Light Go Out?* 1997, 21.7 x 17.4 cm, \$240
5. *Label in Pictures*, 1997, 26 x 16.8 cm, Courtesy: Fiona Macdonald
6. *Paratext Geography*, 1997, 22 x 16.5 cm, Courtesy: Fiona Macdonald
7. *Recounting Fairy Tales*, 1998, 28.5 x 22 cm, \$240
8. *The Oxford Fairy's Reference Library* Vol 4 India, 1997, 28 x 22 cm, \$240.

All works poster-size string and found book.

Courtesy: Richard Whittell Gallery

Statement: *In between the sensory and the intuitive Squeria has worked with language, geometry, colour, light and image ... "Each book has been seen that with a geometric design and so to gain a sense of the information and ideas, the string must be cut, the pattern unravelled and the book opened. In so doing, of course, the work is undone. He collects the books according to the size, colour and title, allowing the interplay of central reference to enter the work. Squeria has an on-going interest in the place of the found object within contemporary art practice, testing the limits of convention and meaning. Excerpts from Mervyn Gates, 'Palimpsest' exhibition catalogue, Asialink Centre, University of Melbourne, 1997.*

CHRISTOPHER SNEE

Prizes All At Once by JAI, 1992-1998, adhesive vinyl lettering on wall and oil on board, dimensions variable.

Courtesy: Grace Weisse Gallery.

Artist Statement: *An important junction of this concept we call art is to look at the institutional conditions of art production now ... and expand our understanding of language in that process.*

ELIZIA

Concrete Poems 1-10, 1987

1. *Literature*, 2. *Acquaring 3*, *Mization*, 4. *Mocmans*, 5. *Shelter From 6*, *Waka*, 7. *Jeagers*, 8. *Radical Actions*, 9. *Flashed Silvered*, 10. *Army*. All laser print copies, edition 31/50, each 29.7 x 21 cm. Each \$100 or set \$1,000.

Statement: *Elizia has been writing and performing her works since the early 1970s. She was born in Katerina, Greece, and with her family she migrated to Melbourne in 1964. Much of her work reflects the migrant experience in Australia. In the mid-1970s she allied aural to women and co-edited the workers' literary magazine 9.2.5. Her first book of prose poems was Night Flowers (Collaborative Effort Press, Melbourne, 1985). Elizia is published in many poetry anthologies and journals and is one of the founding members of the Poets' Union. Elizia has exhibited her iron poems using short-hand symbols. In concrete poetry strategies around the world, to Karl Young, 'Taking short-hand division is the job of servants (making words as one). The dictations themselves are usually from work in positions of power—that is, the words of the dictators," which thus creates a new language based on short-hand which has primarily been a woman's language.*

STEPHAD TIPPING

From silkscreen folio, Adelaide, complete edition no 1-11 then incomplete numbers.

1. *Mr Heron*, 1979
2. *Summer Breakwater Bay*, 1967
3. *Swains Frequent Evening*, 1968
4. *The Blood of the Poet*, 1979, silkscreen, hand screen-rolling and watercolour.
5. *The Natural*, 1979-1992, Framed assemblage of press texts, photographs, screen print.

Artist Statement: *Poet: Thee (1979) was three plaques, made as a prototype for an intended edition in brass. I also made a stencil-cut version for spray painting, and did that mark various impromptu or noisy press during one Adelaide Festival. The tree bleed (or hand-rolled) with the plaque is "poet's tree" on one reading, or is leafy the poet. The word 'poetry' has split might remind you of falling and falling, rising and falling through trees; the rising and falling of your, trunk, branch and crown, or 'nocturnal hawk', while the reluctant grinding of paper mills creates press into mountains of penmanship. Poet Thee was meant as an action, to be material into the large room and acted upon. It appears as part of a long screenplay 'The Blood of the Poet in my first folio of prints. Airport: Word Works, 1979, as verified into a magnificent swathe which is paraded being damaged in an echelonism for 'SIC on Australian Campaign 9/11'. Aspects of Poet Thee are transmitted as a performance document and titled 'The Natural' Trust*