



Despite TV *Out of Line*, 1992 (still), UK, 39 mins

rebirth, *The Passing*, and in a much lighter vein, Maria Betty and Annie Sprinkle's huge crowd pleaser, *The Shuts and Goddesses Video Workshop*.

Another significant feature of the Festival is its annual emphasis on inviting overseas artists, curators and writers to Australia: this time, guests from Holland (Jaape de Jong), Britain (Michael Maziere), and the former Yugoslavia (Breda Beban and Hrvoje Horvatic). Jonge's subtle and ingenious installation *Horizon*, with its kinetic minimalist features, echoes video's legacy to Conceptual art and Minimalism in the 1960s and 1970s. Breban and Horvatic, influenced by Marxist filmmakers Jean-Marie Straub and Danielle Huillet, and by Viola, have constructed an engaging installation called *The Shape of Pain*, which delineates the artists' concern with strong human emotions, light, ritual and presence. Of their four tapes on show, all consummately crafted, the four-minute miniature piece, *For Tara*, is notable for its highly metaphysical abstractions.

There were many noteworthy tapes, including, amongst others,

John Sandborn's refreshingly witty neo-Dadaist self-portrait, *Quirky*; Sandra Kogut's bouncy postmodern look at transcultural communication, *Parabolic People*; Michael O'Reilly's low-tech ironic monologue on the politics of contemporary health care, *Glass Jaw*; and Bettina Rave's chiaroscuro poem about a thunder storm, *Cheimon*.

Australian artists represented this time included Suzi Alesandra (*Sometimes*); Peter Callas (*Ambient Alphabet*); Belinda Chayko (*Anatomies*); Greg Ferris (*Kinder und Hausmarchen*); John Gillies and the Sydney Front (*Test*); Leigh Hobba (*T'As Vu—A History of Sound, 3000 BC—12th August 1992*); Jan Parks (*Driving and Dreaming*); Michael Strum (*I Paint I Am*); Lawrence Wallen (*Half Cube with Projection*); and Julie Vulcan (*Bum*).

This year's Festival appears to have been a curatorial and popular success. Anyone who attended, from the lay person to the specialist in electronic arts, would have found it informative and stimulating.

JOHN CONOMOS

THE CABOOSE

Ars Multiplicata, Sydney
September 16 - October 17, 1992

The *Caboose* is a portfolio of prints published by the eight contributing artists whose common ground in this initiative is their association with the Store 5 gallery in Melbourne. The portfolio, like the venue, is coordinated by Gary Wilson. As such it acknowledges the central focus of an emergent generation of artists connected by their independent yet respectful affinities as co-exhibitors at Store 5, as well as connected to the broader arena of the commercial and public gallery exhibition circuit. The works reflect relatively central concerns of each artist's practice, translated and transformed to different degrees by the specifics of an image, and the exigencies of printmaking as a break from their usual media. The pristine formality



Bronwyn Clark-Coolie untitled, 1992, screenprint on paper.

of the limited edition print lends a certain artificial homogeneity to the occasion, tempting further definition of an underlying accord.

Abstraction is a central issue in which the supportive influence of John Nixon and writer Carolyn Barnes is significant in the promotion of aims, configuring a relationship with the early twentieth century avant-garde. In the catalogue introduction to "Abstraction" at Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery in early 1992, an exhibition in which all of the artists participating in this portfolio (excepting Diena Georgetti) were represented, Nixon provides the premise that "Abstract art is culled from the real (contemporary) possibilities open to artists at the present time." He concludes his introduction with the radically romantic notion that, "Theirs is a transgressive but idealistic art and the world is a better place because of their endeavors." Thus stated, these artists are self-consciously and affirmatively placed in a crucial relationship to modernism that

embraces something of its faith and a distance from this. The awareness is not cynically self-effacing, but more humble in its humorous humanity and aspiration.

The prevailing condition is suggested by the compulsive extension of practice in tandem with that of the metaphor of the portfolio's title—"the little red caboose behind the train ..." of *Modernism*. The altered circumstance and fervor is underscored by the modest size of its pages (approx. A3) and the cheery childlike fire-engine red color of the containing box. The camaraderie of the occupants of the caboose—the guard's van—sustaining, with both something of a generous solicitude and subversive intention, the spent force of the vanguard at the head. The reflection of hindsight is a different experience to that of its more heroic and fanatical leaders. It is not entirely one of severance or of negation but, tempered by a fainter pulse, a more democratic and pluralist shifting of emphasis and goals.

The condition of abstraction, the "local problem" as Gary Wilson calls it, is thrown up in all its contradictory enigma of silence and concordance of reference in his untitled screenprint featuring the emblematic essentials of the cross and the circle. The prints by Melinda Harper, Kerrie Poliness and Bronwyn Clark-Coolie collectively broach the unbending rigor of geometric abstraction and the ordering of "the grid" as the essential condition of "non-objective" composition.

Harper's image of gay, randomly constituted vertical stripes of color is invaded by a white square, not opaque enough to conceal the background or prevent a slicing incursion into the purity of its geometry. Poliness's trademark diamond pattern—the decorative grid—confounds definition in its unresolved layering of lines, shape and color, and continuous composition unevenly disappearing off the edge of the paper. Similarly, Clark-Coolie's characteristic circled star forms spill into the picture plane defying the logic of placement in an irreverent domestic jumble.

A more literally human "animation" of the transcendent geometry is evidenced by the work of Stephen Bram and Rose Nolan in the portfolio. Bram's exercise in perspectival perception proffers a possible yet ambiguous illusionistic and habitable space beyond the abstract shapes of the two-dimensional surface.

Rose Nolan harnesses the domestic faith and approachability of the humble linocut and the figurative image, reconfiguring a more human face to the icon with her anthropomorphized cross standing tall against the landscape with a triumphant gesture and physically human shadow.

A similar appeal to the historical faith and face of modernism, in all its pompous humility, qualifies Eugene Carchesio's untitled black square, crooked and imperfectly printed on the page and punctuated by the vulnerable formality of the word "museum."

The most singular work in the portfolio is Diena Georgetti's enigmatic monogram-like image, *A very common Model*, a blend of nature and artifice embracing an aesthetic of the organic and the

elegant. It is an image that evades precise understanding of its constitution or reference.

As a box set *The Caboose* presents a range of prints that are satisfying as a tribute to the broader practice of each artist and the more elusive sensibility of the "collective." The group dynamics promote a knowing regard for the present logistics of creative invention and intervention. The drawcard offered, the continued currency of practice, is a seemingly deliberate nostalgia—a retracing and updating of well-worn steps. The saving grace is a qualitatively and intentionally humble one. Theirs is not a radical statement, but rather a quietly subversive conservatism.

EVE SULLIVAN

ROBERT HUNTER

Annandale Galleries, Sydney
September 9 - October 10, 1992

In his famous and now much discussed article, "Art and Objecthood" (1967), critic Michael Fried makes a distinction between two modes of apprehending art. The first is that appropriate to "literal" objects, say, the minimalism of Donald Judd or Robert Morris. One feels one never comes to the end of it; their work is always of further interest. But it is always of further interest "not because of any fullness—that is the inexhaustibility of art—but because there is nothing to exhaust." On the other hand, with great art, say, the sculpture of Anthony Caro, our experience of it appears to have no duration; one has the impression that "if only one were infinitely more acute, a single infinitely brief instant would be long enough to see everything, to experience the work in all its depth and fullness, to be forever convinced by it."

It is a brilliant inversion: one might imagine that it is because there is something to see that we have to look, but Fried is quite right