

Neurotic vision fits the bill

Art

By RONALD MILLAR

IF you live in America, you cannot go far wrong in listing the 10 best Australian sprinters over 100 metres.

Choosing the eight "best" young artists to represent Australia at New York's Guggenheim Museum is more a question of weighing the conflicting advice and looking around a bit.

Whatever advice was offered to Diane Waldman, deputy director of the Guggenheim, she seems to have made her selection from those artists who were in vogue at the time. The result: Australian Visions, back from its American exposure, a show so big that some is housed at Monash University Gallery and some at the Centre for Contemporary Art.

WALDMAN herself, it appears, has a vision of Australia and its young art: she says it is raw, awkward (but vital, of course), ungainly and melodramatic; and she has picked artists who confirm her impression.

Older readers may recall the same clichés about Australia



were trotted out by English critics who were faced with Boyd and Nolan.

Not surprisingly, Waldman's revelation that we Australians suffer from a collective neurosis based on our isolation and on our love, fear and dread of the land is easy enough to support: there's a lot of neurosis about.

For example, Peter Booth's Goya-esque and bloated mutants, gorging on blood and entrails and inhabiting the most ghastly wastelands, fit this bill better than Diane Waldman really deserves.

Jan Murray's work (snapped columns, Beckmann-ish sacrificial fish, twin red hearts beating as one) also has enough rugged vitality to qualify for inclusion; and Dale

Frank's gluggy rivers of paint, dead seas and psychotic-looking enlarged heads must be neurotic enough for anybody.

A couple of Mandy Martin's jagged and stridently-colored industrial landscapes look better than the ones she showed at Heide recently, but she is an inconsistent painter.

SUSAN Norrie, whose small works once conveyed an intimate mystery, overstretch-es here and the surfaces appear labored.

Vivienne Shark LeWitt's sentimental little schoolgirl fantasies do not appeal either as idea or as painting; and John Nixon's weary conceptual games do not seem worth sending all that way to America.

Bill Henson's photographs of the Melbourne rush-hour are fine studies, but New Yorkers looking at them must have thought us a glum and pre-occupied lot.

In short, Booth and Murray are the only two artists here who would get a game in any decent team of young (Booth is actually about 45) Australian artists chosen on a different basis: that of quality.

To judge from his excellent Powell St. exhibition, Peter Ellis would have to be included in such a group. He is certainly more talented, interesting and original than any of the Gug-

genheim selections except Booth.