

# & ENTERTAINMENT

## Objects cast light on imagination

**M**URRAY WALKER'S work is a bit like one of those Chinese boxes that opens only to reveal another box, for there does not seem to be any end to the challenges it poses.

The first of these challenges is a historical one. Despite the fact that he has been exhibiting for 30 years and has produced a considerable body of work, Walker still awaits discovery as an artist. No one has yet produced an article (as distinct from a review) about his work.

Given that many of Walker's works are genuinely poetic in their effect, it is tempting to explain this oversight by reference to the problems that poems themselves entail. How does the mind come to grips with works of art which, because they live by virtue of their associations, are not what they literally appear to be?

'The River, the Port, the Journey', Walker's current exhibition at the Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, poses this question in a particularly acute way. Eighty-one of the 126 works on display take the form of assemblages made from an assortment of found objects.

It is often said that an assemblagist transforms his materials and endows them with a new meaning. There is some truth in this. But it needs to be understood that whatever transformations an assemblagist induces in his materials must go only so far; an assemblage would cease to be an assemblage if the literal nature of its materials could no longer be discerned.

In all likelihood, the neglect of this admittedly simple point has helped to entrench one pervasive view that has long bedevilled the discussion of assem-

### REVIEW

### Art

GARY CATALANO

Murray Walker, Australian Centre for Contemporary Art (Dallas Brooks Drive, Sth Yarra, until 12 August).  
Roslynd Piggott, Potter (University of Melbourne, until 4 August).

blage. That view holds that any work of art that is made from discarded materials necessarily constitutes a criticism of materialism.

Walker will have no truck with this notion. He loves things, for he finds them pleasurable in themselves and knows that they possess histories that can illuminate a whole network of activities and social relationships.

Because he thinks this way, it is advisable to view every work he creates as an item in an imaginary museum whose contents both echo and extend those of all known museums. Walker wants us to understand that admired works of art like the archaic statuettes he alludes to in his 'Cycladic' and the simplest items of manufacture are part of the same continuum. Both classes of object cast a light on the human imagination.

Fittingly enough, the largest group of objects on show at the Australian Centre for Contemporary Art constitute a homage to the paintings that are now found in the Lifeboat Museum at Queenscliff. Walker says that he saw these paintings as a child and considers them to be among the strongest influences on his work.

His fleet of 26 boats is a reasonably comprehensive one and ranges from great ocean liners to a collier and a

simple yacht. Those of the 26 that use the least number of components are, I think, the most successful: the fewer the materials, the easier it is for us to concentrate on the poetic implications of each piece.

Walker rarely alters his materials before he uses them. Apart from the kinds of modifications necessarily entailed in affixing a fin-shaped piece of charred wood to a stake (such are the materials he uses in 'Coal Freighter'), he tends to keep his intervention to a minimum.

Walker's work turns out to be far more provocative than our original impressions would lead us to believe. For all its levity, its strength rests in the degree to which it expresses a decidedly speculative imagination.

**R**OSLYND PIGGOTT'S installation at the University of Melbourne's Potter Gallery is likely to be of most interest to those viewers who are familiar with her previous work: the tall set of steps with a bowl of perfume hanging above its small platform and the slides and films projected, for the most part on to loosely hanging gauze, all conjure up associations with the paintings she has exhibited over the past four years.

The delicacy of those paintings and their synaesthetic implications indicate that Piggott's work is basically symbolist. Her installation should be seen primarily as an attempt to assert some of those beliefs that must underwrite any kind of symbolist art — especially the conviction that even the simplest thing may have a secret identity.

Having made that point, I'm still at a loss as to how we should judge the installation, which, by the way, is called 'Palace'. On the basis of what criteria do we say that it is either good or bad?