



Exhibition Report

LOCATION

Contemporary photo based work from Australia

Melbourne
Adelaide
Sydney
Tokyo
Manila
Bangkok
Kuala Lumpur
Jakarta
1992-1994

The exhibition was organised by the Australian Centre for Contemporary Art and Asialink, a Centre of the University of Melbourne; tour organised by Asialink.

This project was supported by International Cultural Relations Branch of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, the Visual Arts/Craft Board of the Australia Council, Monash University Asia Centre, STA Travel, Qantas Airways, *Celebrate Australia*, and *Australia Today Indonesia*.

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Exhibition touring Australia and Asia 1992-94

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Supported by

International Cultural Relations Branch, Department of Foreign
Affairs and Trade

The Visual Arts/Craft Board of the Australia Council

Monash University Asia Centre

STA Travel

Qantas Airways

Celebrate Australia, Japan

Australia Today Indonesia

The Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, Melbourne

Asialink, Centre of the University of Melbourne

Curator

Juliana Engberg

Assistant Director, Australian Centre for Contemporary Art.

The Artists

Ed Burton

Rosalind Drummond

John Dunkley-Smith

Graeme Hare

Hewson/Walker

Geoff Kleem

Ewen McDonald

Ian North

Robyn Stacey

David Stephenson

Kevin Todd

Anne Zahalka

Introduction

Location; Contemporary photo based work from Australia opened at the Australian Centre of Contemporary Art in Melbourne in November 1992 and finished its tour at the National Museum of Indonesia, Jakarta in June 1994.

The exhibition included the work of twelve of Australia's leading artists who work with photography, and was based on the notion of 'place'. The artists approached this universal issue in a variety of ways: literally and as well as questioning the 'place' of art in its many manifestations.

The exhibition was conceptually as well as physically challenging, including three-dimensional pieces, pieces using glass 'trays', as well as back-lit advertising presentation boxes. Some work was computer-generated, others were hand-painted. Some work was large, with some being over three metres long. Due to difficulties in adequately presenting the work, John Dunkley-Smith's slide installation was only shown in Melbourne and Adelaide.

Genesis

Jennifer Lindsay, then Cultural Counsellor at the Australian Embassy, Jakarta, held a seminar at Asialink in Melbourne in 1991 for curators and gallery directors, talking about exhibition possibilities of Australian art and craft in Indonesia. She mentioned photography as an area of activity in which Australia excelled and of interest in Indonesia. Juliana Engberg, who attended the seminar, then contacted Asialink with her idea.

Juliana developed her curatorial premise while Assistant Director at the Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, working on an exhibition which would be part of ACCA's program and able to tour in various Asian countries. She received an Exhibition Development Grant from the Visual Arts/Craft Board of the Australia Council which enabled her to travel to many parts of Australia visiting studios and seeing work for potential inclusion in the exhibition.

Asialink prepared a brief noting difficulties of handling and display in many venues particularly in South East Asia, as well as other issues on the difference of audience position in the region compared with Australia.

Exhibition tour

Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, Melbourne

12 November 1992 - 21 February 1993

Opened by Hon Haddon Storey, Minister for the Arts, Victoria.

University of South Australia Museum of Art, Adelaide

4 March - 27 March 1993

Opened by Senator Robert Hill, Shadow Minister of Foreign Affairs

Artspace, Sydney

30 July - 11 September 1993

Tokyo Metropolitan Art Space, Tokyo

22 November - 30 November 1993

Part of *Celebrate Australia*

Opened by Gregson Edwards, Head, *Celebrate Australia*

Talk by Louise Pether.

Metropolitan Museum of Manila, Manila

5 January - 5 February 1994

Opened by John Quinn, Charge d'Affaires, Australian Embassy and Mr Arturo Luz, artist, former Director of the Metropolitan Museum.

6 January: Erica Green lecture/walking tour.

National Gallery of Thailand, Bangkok

4 March - 27 March 1994

Opened by John Richardson, Minister, Australian Embassy, and Ms Saengchan Trikasem, Head, National Gallery.

Presentation by Nick Tsoutas.

National Gallery of Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur

6 May - 29 May 1994

Opened by John Dauth, Australian High Commissioner.

7 May Helen Ennis talk.

National Museum of Indonesia, Jakarta

14 June - 26 June 1994

Part of *Australia Today Indonesia*

Opened as part of ATI by Senator Gareth Evans, Minister for Foreign Affairs.

16 June, Seminar on international exchange, at National Museum, organised by Dinah Dysart, Editor of *Art and AsiaPacific*, in consultation with Asialink; chaired by Dinah Dysart with speakers Jim Supangkat, Astri Wright, Juliana Engberg, Ian North, and Alison Carroll.

Catalogue

A 56 page catalogue was produced, with essays by Juliana Engberg and Helen Ennis. Professor Mal Logan, Vice-Chancellor of Monash University wrote the foreword.

Precised information was translated into Japanese and inserted in the catalogue for use in Japan. Translations, in loose versions to be inserted, were made for the Philippines, Thailand, Malaysia and Indonesia.

Extended labels, which were translated in situ, were made for all Asian venues.

Curatorial visits

Curators were sent to each venue to help install the work, to speak at the opening if need be, and to give a lecture or talk on the work if appropriate, and to represent the exhibition to the press. The curators also inspected the condition of the work and reported any damage. Curators were ask to do this work, based on their familiarity with the exhibition, and previous interest in links with Asian countries. The following people accompanied the exhibition:

Japan:

Louise Pether
Director, Artspace Sydney.

Deborah Ely
Director, the Australian Centre for Photography, Sydney

Manila

Erica Green
Director, the University of South Australian Museum of Art

Thailand

Nick Tsoutas
Director, the Institute of Modern Art, Brisbane

Malaysia

Helen Ennis,
Freelance curator; catalogue essay writer.

Indonesia

Juliana Engberg
Curator, Museum of Modern Art at Heide

Ian North
artist

Liz Oley,
Curator, Balikpapan, Kalimantan
Liz came to Jakarta to pack the exhibition prior to its return to Melbourne.

Asialink had initially hoped that a number of artists could also accompany the exhibition, but increased budget issues precluded this. Ian North travelled to Indonesia with his airfare paid by the University of South Australia and he undertook University business while there.

Comments on the exhibition:

Deborah Ely, curator in Japan: "People were impressed".

Louise Pether, curator in Japan: the Curator of the Setagaya Art Museum "commented with surprise at the quality of the exhibition as he had thought it would be photo panels of landscapes".

Louise Pether noted: "how carefully the presentation of Australian events in Asia must be handled - with the greatest care, dexterity, diplomacy and at the finest possible level".

Deborah Ely: "The Japanese professionals were so willing to spend time with us. I felt proud to be presenting *Location*; the physical and intellectual scope of the exhibition were important pluses."

Erica Green, curator in Manila: "*Location* was a challenging exhibition, and the theoretical underpinnings of the exhibition were 'remote' to most people attending. However, there was a curiosity and interest in the works presented and on this basis, I endorse the strategy of presenting *Location* at the Metropolitan Museum of Manila."

Ms Saengchan Trikasem, Head of the National Gallery of Thailand: the exhibition was "well received by the local community ... a major group of the audience is art students".

Nick Tsoutas, curator in Bangkok, after more space was allowed for the exhibition: "I think the exhibition benefited enormously as a result allowing the large works to breathe freely.... I feel the exhibition looked fantastic as a result of the extra space."

Helen Ennis, curator in Kuala Lumpur: "It was hard - and hot -work but it was a very positive experience. I was happy with the way the show looked and enjoyed talking with people."

Helen Ennis: "The Gallery spaces were quite suited to the show as the works could be contained by the bays and mini-galleries. The staff were very co-operative and enterprising".

Ian North, artist in Jakarta: "Lively interest on the part of the media, plus conversations with various Indonesians (in particular Jim Supangkat and Amir Sidharta) and the attentive audience at the symposium generally, all indicate that the exhibition is having some impact and that it will continue to do so, in unpredictable ways and quarters."

Issues in Asia:

All curators had problems hanging the exhibition, though most noted the willingness of their local assistants to work long hours. The problems varied throughout the tour in Asia: from confusion in Japan due in most part to the show being part of the huge *Celebrate Australia* event, to lack of time in Jakarta given to get the show up, again due in most part to it being part of the *Australia Today Indonesia* with its many demands. Endemic problems in South East Asia were evident: poor physical conditions, with

variously lack of air conditioning, bad pollution, poor facilities generally and few experienced curatorial staff.

The exhibition proved difficult conceptually for much of the audience. While the catalogue was provided and extended labels (which were translated) - as well as the curator being there - perhaps more attention could have been paid to interpretation of such an exhibition, for example, with an education pack or a video.

An important issue for Asialink in such exhibitions is enabling Australian curators to 'work' in Asian galleries, increasing understanding of the physical and conceptual realities of touring Australian art and craft in the region. We are grateful to them for their willingness to undertake this - for no payment - working hard and in often very difficult circumstances.

Australian Posts in Asia:

The exhibition could not have occurred without the help of the Australian Embassies and High Commissions and their staff. They were crucial in early negotiations, in helping the exhibition through customs and freight problems, and in organising openings and publicity. They often contributed from their own budgets to ensure the events went well. In some cases the Posts also arranged translations of the catalogue and labels; as well as introducing the visiting curator to much of the local art community.

Freight

Freight and customs are major parts of international touring, financially and logistically. Qantas provided freight (as well as two airfares) from Australia to Japan, which was a major support of the exhibition. Asialink has been delighted to work with both the Posts and with Neil Wilson of International Art Services in touring *Location*, which is a very large exhibition, with 10 crates, (2,000 kilos, 12 cubic metres). Due to Qantas, the Posts and IAS, the freight was only \$30,000. We are all learning about touring art in the region and gradually all our expertise is improving, ultimately meaning cheaper and safer exhibitions.