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## Visual arts

# Engberg set for Biennial 2001

By RAYMOND GILL

**T**HE contracts are yet to be signed and sealed, but artistic director of the inaugural Melbourne International Biennial, Juliana Engberg (right), will continue as artistic director for the 2001 Biennial.

The City of Melbourne, which funded the contemporary art event to the tune of \$760,000, is already sending out literature with Engberg's name attached to the next Biennial.

"When I was contracted to do this Biennial in April last year, I was appointed until 2000, but they have indicated they want me to do the next and the third event (in 2003) — they are extremely delighted with the artistic vision," says Engberg.

As well as the City of Melbourne and the Biennial's other main funder, Arts Victoria (which granted \$150,000), should be. The event was first tendered out in 1997 when it was timidly titled Melbourne Arts International — in case it didn't prove viable as a regular event. After the University of Melbourne won the tender with Frances Lindsay as the Biennial's director and Engberg as artistic director, they managed to drum up more than \$1 million of in-kind sponsorship, whittle down entries to 60 artists from around the world, bring 47 of the artists to Melbourne for the six-week event (since extended to eight weeks), and then watch as 21,000 people wandered through eight floors of the old 1948 Telstra Building on the corner of Little Collins and Russell streets to view contemporary art that is comic, bizarre, desperate, hopeful, sometimes ugly and often strangely beautiful.

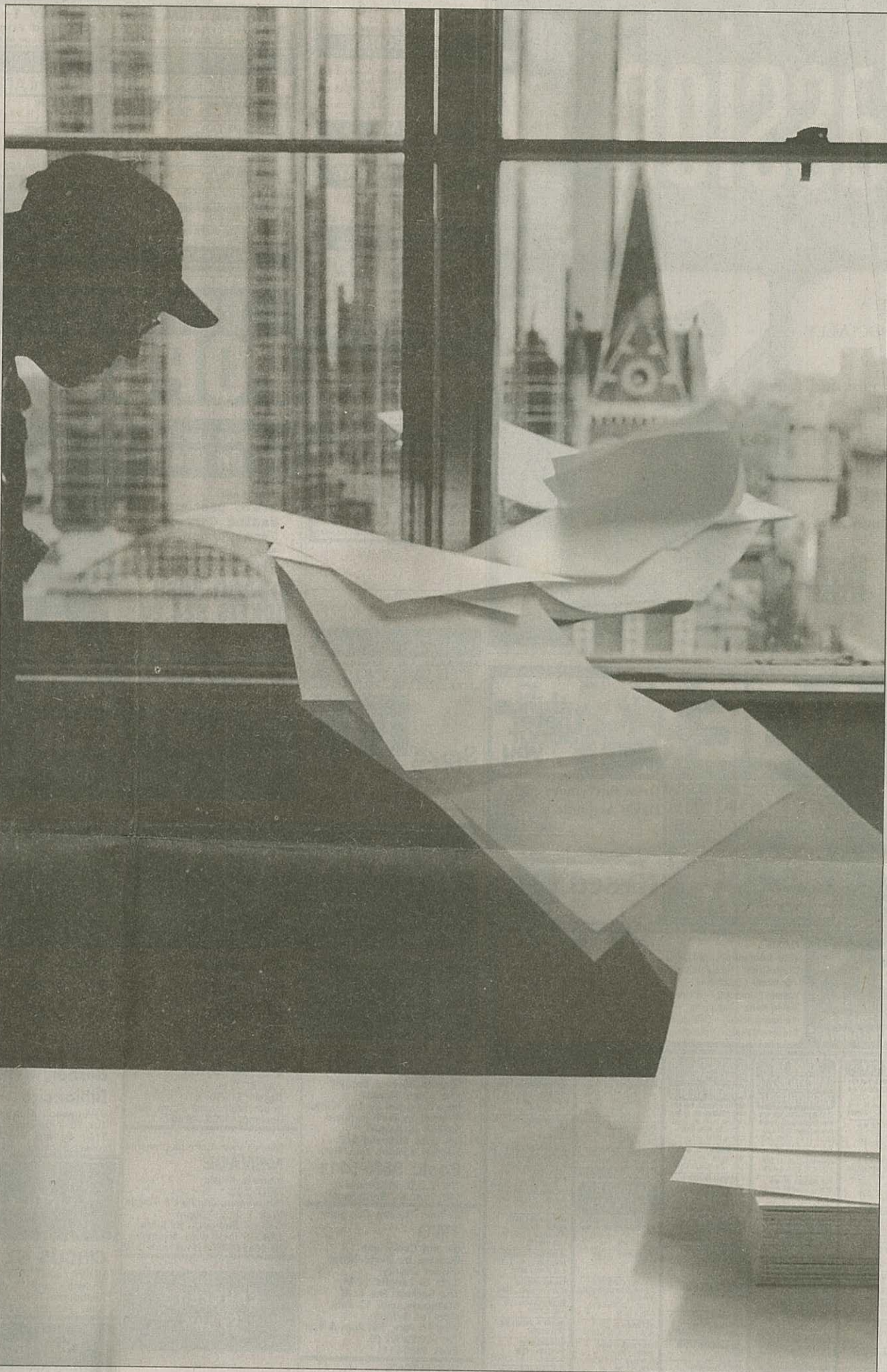
"The best thing about the whole experience is that a general audience have become very captivated with contemporary art," says Engberg. "It has shown that contemporary art can be accessible and enjoyable and we have had so many repeat visits by people wanting to commit time to it."

Most of the in-kind sponsorship was provided in the use of the old Telstra building now owned by architects Nation Fender Katsalidis, who will redevelop the building as up-market apartments after the Biennial.

Part of the magic of this Biennial has been wandering through the zig-zagging corridors and stained and tiled fire escapes looking for the next artistic surprise — so where to in 2001?

"I've got my wish list for some city buildings, but it would be a challenge to find a building that is still in progress of being built so that I could commission works that could remain *in situ* after the event is over," Engberg says.

● The Melbourne International Biennial is open daily until Sunday 11 July at the old Telstra building, corner Little Collins and Russell streets.



Full of surprises: Top, "Unrecallable Now" by Mariele Neudecker (German/UK); main picture, "Powerless Structures No. 69" by Michael Elmgreen and Ingar Dragset (Denmark); above, "The Abandoned Dwarfs" by Meta Isaacs-Berlin (Sweden). Pictures: PENNY STEPHENS