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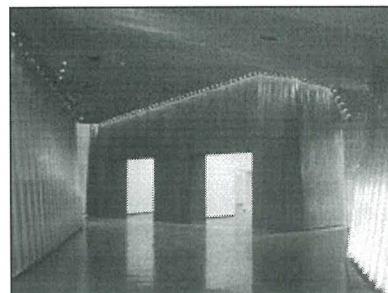
ACCA's new home sees 'history in the making'

by Rita Dimasi

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Melbourne's Australian Centre for Contemporary Art (ACCA) is finally set to open its new home on October 16 this year, heralded as an exciting and innovative development. Artistic Director Juliana Engberg underlines its importance: 'Contemporary art is history in the making. It is the frontier line of artistic activity.'

With this in mind, it is perhaps fitting that the gallery will open with two new contemporary shows that are part of the 2002 Melbourne Festival. One is Susan Norrie's *Undertow*, which will be officially the first exhibition to show in the ACCA Commission Hall. Described as that 'subterranean pull of the unconscious – ominous with premonition,' the show looks to 'explore the hidden terrors and delights of a world in environmental turmoil', and will be a mix of moving image, media, sound, and sculptural installations. A graduate of the National Art School in Sydney and Melbourne's Victorian College of Arts, Norrie has had work exhibited at the Guggenheim Museum in New York, the Museum of Contemporary Art in Sydney and the National Gallery of Victoria.



The new home of the Australian Centre for Contemporary Art (ACCA) is set to be opened during the Melbourne Festival in October.

The other opening exhibition is *A History of Happiness*, a group exhibition curated by Juliana Engberg. Including the works of Nan Goldin, Felix Gonzales-Torres, Jenny Holzer, Barbara Kruger, Peter Land, Robert Mapplethorpe, Yoko Ono, Robert Owen and Yoshihiro Suda, the exhibition explores the basic notions of happiness. Engberg explains the show's curatorial layout as melding perfectly with notions of self-delusion, optimism and uplifting spiritual enlightenment. The collection of work flows according to these concepts, she adds.

Curator of more than 300 exhibitions, and described as the nation's 'most maverick and ambitious curator of contemporary art' by *ArtForum* magazine, Engberg will be working at ACCA with Kay Campbell, who has taken on the role of Executive Director. The two previously worked together in the UK, where Campbell was Director of Spike Island, Bristol's national centre for art production and presentation. Engberg visited Bristol in 2001, where she took up the position of Curatorial Resident.

Returned from England after eight years, specifically to fulfil the new role at ACCA, Campbell was born and educated in Melbourne, and worked at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Sydney for seven years before leaving for overseas. Her roles in Britain included Exhibitions Director for the Centre of Visual Arts in Cardiff, before taking on the role in Bristol.

Together, Engberg and Campbell are looking to provide Melbourne with an aspect of both the local and global contemporary art scene, and the list of artists booked to exhibit at ACCA is impressive. From the local talent of David Rozetsky, Louise Weaver, and Daniel von Sturmer, to overseas artists such as Canada's Rodney

Graham and Scotland's Douglas Gordon, the gallery has clearly placed itself within contemporary culture.

ACCA has pledged to offer six commissions for emerging artists, for works to be shown at the new premises. Commencing in May 2003, this project will exhibit in conjunction with survey shows from more established artists.

For instance, soon to be shown at ACCA is Melbourne's own Patricia Piccinini, a digital artist who has recently been selected by the Australia Council to represent Australia at the 2003 Venice Biennale. Selected from more than 100 applicants, Piccinini, 36, is renowned internationally as one of Australia's most exciting emerging artists, creating works that examine the relationship between genetic engineering and human life. As reported in the *Age* newspaper recently, Juliana Engberg, who is organising ACCA's first major survey of Piccinini's work for late December, has called the choice of Piccinini for the Venice Biennale 'simply wonderful'.

The new premises for ACCA were designed by Wood Marsh Architects, who also designed the award-winning Bourke Street Bridge and Gateway design for the Docklands Trunk Infrastructure. Located at 111 Sturt Street Southbank (next door to the CUB Malthouse), ACCA is sharing their architecturally impressive space with Melbourne dance company Chunky Move.

The increase in space and facilities will also allow the gallery to expand the number of public lectures, tours, and holiday activities it can offer. Engberg calls the new residence 'a fabulous purpose-built building' and a 'dynamic form that blends the vernacular with the international.'

For Engberg and the team at ACCA, the completion of the space will be a welcome relief. Under construction since 2000, the new residence, which already enjoys a steady stream of adjectival descriptions – including 'that stunning rust-red monolith' – will allow ACCA to have, as Engberg puts it: 'A place in Melbourne where contemporary art can stretch itself and where ideas and art can intersect.'

Engberg sees great parallels between the architecture and the art. She says: 'Like the building itself, which combines a local sensibility with a global ethos, my program for ACCA will be a mixture of international and Australian art, a combination of artistic adventurism, emotion and intellectualism.'

The new ACCA galleries open on October 16, as part of the 2002 Melbourne Festival program.

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