

## EG ARTS &amp; CULTURE

## Take a look at yourself

Artist Nick Devlin tells **Fiona Scott Norman** that it's all about the gaze.

**W**ITH hindsight you can always see where something began. The drummer used to clang saucepans as a child, the girl who became a vet nursed an injured wallaby back to health, and the kid who ended up a politician used to steal other children's lollies and laugh while they cried.

Artist Nick Devlin, known for his peephole dioramas and video art installations that turn the viewer into a voyeur, says that even when he was first studying painting it was all about the gaze.

"I always seemed to end up painting hard-edged, minimal abstracts. They were invariably op-art pieces that would basically just f--- with your eyesight. It was impossible to find a place from which to view the work. I think I've always made art from the viewer's perspective, wanted to explore how the viewer was looking."

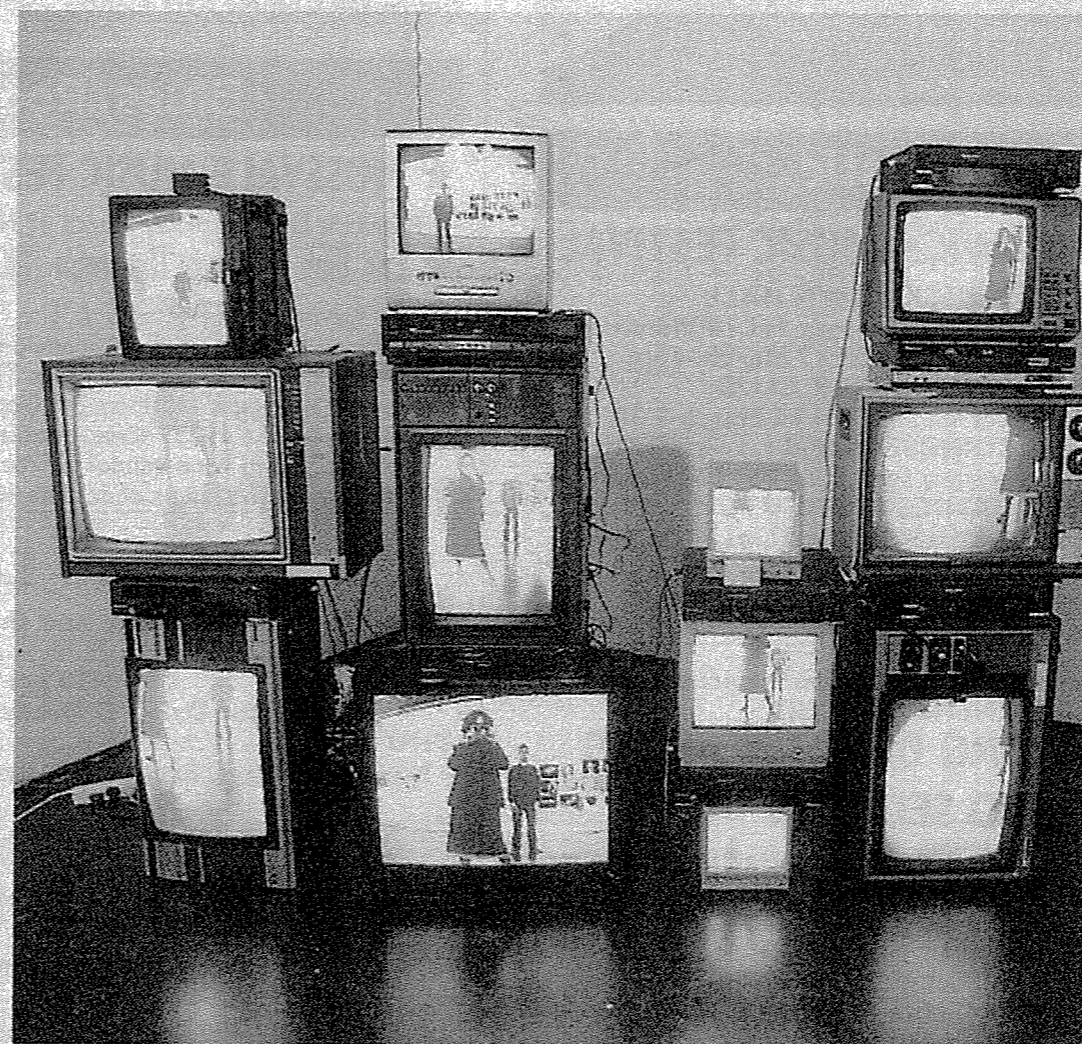
Devlin progressed to building walls within a gallery and creating

dioramas inside those walls that could only be viewed through an aperture. This desire to keep the viewer active and segregated then led him to working in video, and a place in *NEW07*, the prestigious annual exhibition for groundbreaking artists commissioned by Juliana Engberg, the artistic director of the Australian Centre for Contemporary Art.

One of the works Engberg took was a four-by-three stack of old television sets Devlin has called *Within You Without You*. Hidden video cameras shoot the watcher, and display fractured body parts on the screens.

"When you stand in front of any of them your body parts are reflected back. I suspect it's a comment on many things: on surveillance, on how we live a fractured existence, on how magazines pare the body down to its parts and objectify them.

"I suppose what I'm trying to do is make you look. We see our images every day in mirrors, but



Fractured existence: viewers of Nick Devlin's televisions see parts of themselves reflected.

mostly it's an unconscious glance; when something is recontextualised you look at it differently."

The second of Devlin's artworks in the *NEW07* exhibition flips the perspective 180 degrees, presenting a voyeuristic experience. Called *Apartment*, it's a nine-high stack of televisions, representing a brownstone apartment block. Inspired by *Rear Window*, Devlin shot the footage of the apartment block opposite his while in New York last year, and

lives, which, of course, meant them not knowing they were being filmed."

Devlin is acutely aware of the invasion of privacy and has gone to some lengths to defuse that issue. He made sure not to shoot anything explicit, and the footage is from a distance and grainy. He has also included an audio track, simultaneously recorded in his family's holiday apartment.

"I had no intention of using it at first, recording it was inadvertent. But it puts me on the same level, it's nice that we're willing participants as well. You can hear us talking, watching *American Big Brother*, our son crying. When I asked my partner if she minded me using the audio, and she said, 'What's on it?' I had to say I didn't know."

Nothing is wasted in Devlin's work, everything has a point. It is important, for example, that the televisions he uses are old, not spanking-new plasma gizmos.

"I'm trying to imbue the piece with some life and soul, and that's difficult to do with plasma screens. And it's a 'one-man's rubbish' scenario. I like old technology. I have a record player and still play my records. These televisions are 30, 40 years old and they're still working.

"That's a comment in itself, on what a wasteful existence we're living materially."

*NEW07* opens tomorrow at ACCA, 111 Sturt Street, Southbank. Open 10am-6pm, Tuesday to Sunday, 9697 9999.