

Arts & C

Touching emotions, touching the mind

Love of nature, the country and the work of Charles Darwin come together in the art of Lyndal Jones, writes **Megan Backhouse**.

SEXUAL attraction, climate change, the resilience of the immigrant — Lyndal Jones can expound on it all before the opening of her biggest survey show at the Australian Centre for Contemporary Art.

The show, which opens to the public today, is her first exhibition in Melbourne in five years, although last year she did show the house and grounds in Avoca that she is currently turning into a massive live-in artwork about place and climate change.

She bought the Avoca property a few years after representing Australia at the 2001 Venice Biennale with a video and sound installation full of lapping water and tales of sexual intimacy, and voices in Italian and English.

Jones says the advice given to her after she showed her stuff at this most coveted of artfests was “to go straight to Berlin” because her videos had prompted interest from collectors there. But in the end Avoca beckoned more strongly than Germany. As a child she used to

go camping in Avoca, but she grew up around the Riverina. She has found that her latter-day “country town thing” has a “lovely familiarity to it”.

Her earlier country town thing, however, meant she grew up not considering that she could become an artist. She never went to art school but studied anthropology “and a bit of zoology and English and drama”.

She says much of this stemmed from when she was a teenager and a visiting cousin brought a copy of Margaret Mead’s *Coming of Age in Samoa*, the pioneering and controversial book about how young people (particularly women) outside the West pass through adolescence.

More than 20 years on, you could still see something of the Mead influence in her works, particularly perhaps in *The Darwin Translations*, which came about after Jones received a \$260,000 Keating Fellowship in 1993. She took off to Cambridge, where she read Charles Darwin’s notebooks, and the Galapagos Islands where Darwin developed his ideas about



Lyndal Jones has brought together a selection of 25 years’ work into a “whole installation”.

PICTURE: SIMON SCHLUTER

natural selection and evolution.

The resulting videos of giant Galapagos tortoises, teenage mating rituals in Scotland, references to Freud’s consulting room and more are being brought together in the ACCA survey for the first time to commemorate next year’s bicentenary of Darwin’s birth.

But Jones says she is “opening” that work out again, by combining it with her *Tears for What Was Done* series, which

was more concerned with the emotional aspect of Darwin’s work than her earlier series and which she abandoned half-way through when she became struck by the urgency of climate change.

That was when she bought the dilapidated Avoca weatherboard, a prefabricated gold rush residence. It now forms the basis of her *Avoca Project*, which she describes as a “model of resilience” and for

which she has big plans. All the “music” in the house is to come from the hydrophones embedded in the underground water tank, providing an aural record of water use. The electricity is to be generated by solar panels that will be installed as sculptural pieces throughout the grounds and will turn to follow the sun.

Jones herself has “the most beautiful studio” there. A couple of years ago she took a

recording of the cacophonous early morning bird song with her on a visit to South Korea. It was made as a video but given Jones’ view that “most video is actually sound with images attached”, she only took the sound element.

Her Korean trip was at the invitation of an American-Korean curator who took her into the demilitarised zone. Her sound recordings of the place will be juxtaposed with her photographs of Avoca in her coming exhibition at Anna Schwartz Gallery, where she has been showing for about 15 years.

“That exhibition is looking at how easy it is to translate events onto other cultural sights,” she says.

Except for an installation over the ACCA exterior comprising neon text (spelling out “tears for what has been done”) and 150 44-gallon drums of

water (to be recycled), the survey is predominantly made up of video, and Jones says this will be the last time she does that on such a grand scale.

“It has to be really. The ACCA show is a hugely resource-rich show. It uses projectors and flat screens and high technology and really points out the dilemmas being faced by artists.”

But she does not feel uncomfortable about it this time around, with the exhibition to include some form of marker to publicly display the electricity that’s ticking over to power it.

And, of course, when it comes to power, this show could be using up much, much more because ACCA, she says, is “frankly not big enough” to hold even a third of her work. So she has taken a selection of what she has made over the

past 25-odd years and made one “whole installation”.

There is one instalment of her *Prediction Pieces*, the 10-year series she began in 1981 looking at the nature of prediction, projected onto the ceiling in the foyer; the Darwin works; some of the *Tears for What Was Done* series; and the *Deep Water/Aqua Profunda* installation she took to Venice, as well as the new piece over the ACCA exterior.

She says her work is a continuum and that she has tried to give over “10-year periods to particular content”.

“I think a lot of work suffers from trying to address too many things, so I really appreciate being able to dig in on something over a long period of time,” she says.

But she also found time to qualify as a Feldenkrais practitioner in 1990, which led to her working with

elite athletes, performers and others to improve their movement, and she currently has a full-time job running the research program at RMIT’s school of creative media. With that post she gets one day a week for research, which gives her three days a week to spend at Avoca.

“Everything I do I realise is very kinesthetic, it’s all based in touch, trying to touch, trying to be touched — on the emotional level as well as the physiological.”

Lyndal Jones: *Darwin with Tears*, from today until July 20 at the Australian Centre for Contemporary Art. Her show *The Bridge of No Return* is at Anna Schwartz Gallery from June 6 to July 5.

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► Lyndal Jones in My Space



Stills from Lyndal Jones’ videos *Room with Finches* (above) and *Spitfire*.

