

ARIENNALE

An exhibition focussing on Sydney's artist run galleries.

EMR GALLERY, REDFERN JUNE-JULY, 1988

An exhibition is a machine for various kinds of work: it is itself an art work. Once it is installed, the viewer — that unreliable bag of precept, prejudice and preference — is its operator, but one who may not know which levers to pull. The operator is liable to an initial dislocation, when the logic of the machine is not evident in its visible components (the catalogue often functions as a manual). It happened at the Biennale, there's no reason it shouldn't have happened at the Ariennale (if for quite different reasons). At the Biennale as seen at the NSW Art Gallery there was supposed to be a unifying principle or focussing device evident on the walls. A clue was provided by series of mind-numbingly coarse and/or arbitrary juxtapositions, but the hapless viewer, exposed to these series of cogs that never quite meshed, was left floundering for some visual spanner. The operator, subject to the machine's dysfunction, was left to wander among its bits and wait for the presence of Great Art to spark something off. And of course Great Art's iconic status allows it to work — with and against the weight of history and expectation it carries — despite its immediate context.

A similar dislocation or functional suspension struck the would-be operator of the Ariennale. Again, a unifying principle was not immediately evident in its components. There was the instruction manual, though, so one knew that the exhibition provided a political and historical housing for its working parts: these were all provided by Artist Run Initiatives (ARIs), alternatively-funded, independent, non-profit galleries and studios. The first level of the exhibition's operation was to provide a broad sample of the works of artists who wish to and/or must work in the margins of commercial and government systems. This was a valuable operation but it didn't, necessarily, provide an aesthetic context or principle beyond attention to the conditions of production. Some of the participating ARIs, Kelly Street Kollektiv for instance, specify as selection criteria only participation, in turn, in their own internal democratic processes. So while there might have been some great art, there was no Great Art: the Ariennale was loaded with different history, but only the combination of works displayed could (re)locate the viewer in relation to it.

Entering the exhibition meant passing between two machines, two techno-installations (art and information technology as each other: junk culture). Then the viewer turned along a wall of surprisingly different references, attuned to better-known conventions, which raised more familiar names — say, Lindy Lee, Vivienne Shark Le Witt, Imants Tillers, Terry Burrows — than the artists' own. Not that those artists need have been unhappy to appear in this company, but their names were levers for this viewer to pull. So, disparate components, and among them a dislocated familiarity (where have I seen . . .?). Centrally positioned, in a glass case which might have sat in a museum, were 'Surviving Works and Images From The Yellow House' — relics, but of a machine that did a particular kind of work, an early ARI reinvigorated among its descendants. Still, the works from The Yellow House had a poppy, zany bohemianism which sounded the notes of an aesthetic gear crunching with its neighbours. A clue this, a distinction constructing an aesthetic framework, another logic for the machine, and a

point at which conditions of production and aesthetics met (or, shall we say, history and desire). Of course, there are historically-determined changes of style in the margins as much as anywhere. The Yellow House operated from 1969 to 1973: the surviving works were theatrical, bright and expansive. *Magritte Boots* might have tramped anywhere. Against this background many of the other, recent works in the Ariennale appeared more guarded, more ironic, more conscious of threat (take the shadowy qualities and classical references of work from the 338 Gallery for example, or the intriguing containment of work from First Draft). It's not that the contemporary work was more serious, but much of it seemed to say: let me work where and as I want, with whatever history I find — or this may yet be the Greiner age.

Only so many artists, working with limited ranges of history, can be supported by commercial galleries, even less by government institutions. The others fall into the abyss of market forces, to survive as best they can. This is one of the things addressed by a work which stands as an analogue for the whole Ariennale, Jacqueline Evers' wall-installation *And Desire Filled the Void*. Elaborate frames contain continuations of a dark background, metaphor for all kinds of threat, studded with fragments of mirror. Artist and viewer alike are constructed in fragmented, partial relations to aesthetics and history fostered by various institutional and economic interests. Like Evers' work, the Ariennale was a machine for thinking about the desires which are excluded by and/or escape from those constructions.

FRAZER WARD

The aim of this supplement is to fill in some of the gaps left by other art publications while remaining accessible to a broad spectrum of the gallery going public. Rather than soliciting material appropriate to identifiable editorial interests we wish to make this publishing space available to a wide range of writers referring to diverse art practices. Unfixed and variable, the supplement aims to flesh out rather than intrude upon, the detached role of the ART ALMANAC.

Contributions are welcome and contributors should note the following guidelines: all contributions must be original, unpublished material and should be typed, double-spaced, with material intended for italics underlined. Any editing will occur, whenever possible, in consultation with the author who should retain a copy of the manuscript as the ART ALMANAC accepts no responsibility for loss or return. Contributors are requested to contact the coordinators prior to submitting work. Published contributions are paid at the rate of \$50 per thousand words. Accompanying images should be photographs, preferably black and white, with caption details written on the back. Contributors' opinions are not necessarily those of ART ALMANAC.

The deadline for the September supplement will be August 12.

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