

***New New*—various artists and various venues, Adelaide November/December 2010.**

by Ken Bolton

New New provided a great and tonic buzz when it opened at the Galleria on North Terrace. Some satellite exhibitions were up already and a few more chimed in soon after. The North Terrace venue was the main thrust, the tsunami. The building had been closed for so long most were not aware of its presence. The exhibition was so big, the space itself such a pleasant surprise to find and then explore, it was possible to feel like a child searching for lollies or marvels within the cavernous space. Opening night resulted in a big crowd and a queue stretching down the street. Art rarely gets to look as 'in demand' as a night-club. Many never got in to see it that night: attendance was so good.

New New was a shot in the arm for the contemporary art crowd in Adelaide—a bit like SALA Week, but more a South Australian *Really* Living Artists' Week. These were the names, notionally, who have been making the running locally, who constituted the genuinely up-to-the-minute contemporary. So the scene itself felt celebrated, or vindicated. For the new names that the programme effectively added to the lists this would have been a real fillip.

I was much enthused on opening night. Less so on my return. Still, it was a good thing to have done, good for art's standing in the community, good to see the shape of things in this class-photo or group snapshot for 2010.

In fact it wasn't a 'class photo': many of the names were very old, the usual if deserving suspects for the last couple of decades in many cases. The best work in my view was Andy Petrushevics'—and Petrushevics was in the first *New New* back in the mid 1980s, had even coined the name for the exhibition's instigator, Bob Steele. Those two exhibitions—*New New* and *New New II*—had been much more of a class photo. They had announced the arrival of a large batch of what purported to be new talent recently out of art school. (Out of 'the' art school. Nearly all were from the SA School of Art. The current *New New* draws on UniSA (that same art school) but also on Central School—and maybe on TAFE alumni as well.) Those early *New News* were heavy on painting: the current one, appropriately, was not.

Aldo Iacobelli, Craige Andrae, Petrushevics, and Anton Hart were in those early exhibitions—and are here again. Was Andrae there? He is of that generation. Others who, like these, are definitely not newly announced include Ian North, Hossein and Angela Valamanesh, Linda Marie Walker, Jonathan Dady, Marg Dodd, Louise Haselton, Paul Hoban, Mark Kimber, Warren Vance, George Popperwell. So, how new? *Mere novelty is not the point*—was *never* the point—

hear you shout. Another 'observation' is that *only* the newly-announced could look very new to anyone, because the artists mostly showed a sample of their *usual wares*. Few made a new move expressly for the show. These were trade-fair samples, each artist manning his or her own booth, showing their signature style.

(On the other hand, this was a 'survey'—of the *decade*—it wasn't aiming to be all new. Or was it aiming to get a *general* public's attention, people who had *not been looking* for ten years, and allow *them* in on the secret? New to them, maybe?) *New New* has always been a good name. It will be again.

A few major efforts—work in keeping with the artists' practice but substantial work nevertheless—were memorable: Petrushevics', as I've said, and, say, work from Ian North, Warren Vance, Yoko Kajio. There were a few behemoth efforts, from mid-career artists, that landed with a dull thud, I thought. But I won't name them: no one whose work I usually like—though a few who are sometimes good when in form also produced duds. Which is par for the course.

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Julia Robinson's work looked good, I thought, if a little dependent on Bruce Nauman for the idea. Her work was new to me. It was very well made: sculptures of animals whose parts were truncated or recombined, wrongly, with limbs in the wrong place etc. I take it to be about Man and Nature, bio-engineering and so on.

Christine Collins, whose work I've seen a only a few times over the last few years and found interesting, was interesting again. I think the work fails. But it fails intelligently—not visually interesting enough, curiously (and interestingly) caught between its own rather dematerialised presence and a referent that is 'notional', an *imagined movie* based on *elements* of a *real* movie. Unless, that is, the 'referent' is taken to be the style of ... that *imagined* movie (story-boarded for us in the exhibition)—or the style of the source movie and of its era and genre.

Like a lot of goodish Adelaide art Collins' work deals with a (sub) popular-culture world, or theme. (Think of Andrew Best, Paul Sloan.) In this case I think it is a species of stylised teen-Goth movie, and maybe the artist is drawn to a particular era (late 80s/early 90s) and is thinking about what drives it, how it deals with its material etc. Collins has here nailed a particular graphic style accurately and located its fascination. Past work has, I think, dealt with similarly sourced soundtracks. (In fact, as the *New New* catalogue explains, the source movie in this instance was *Dawn Of The Dead*, from 1978). I think I find the work rather disembodied, thin. But Collins was for me the only surprise of the exhibition.

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Andrew Petrushevics presented a dark room—with an aperture cut out to frame the elements inside. The frame offered those elements as a bright, Pop-ish ‘painting’. Or a Punch-and-Judy show ‘set’. The elements within the space were various disks and target-shaped ovals and circles, onto which were beamed moving images. These were drawn from the vast archive of Petrushevics imagery: cheery depictions of The Modern, the American Way, The Great Society and of Cold War era tv and advertising and style (cars, hair-dos, kitchenware—and colours). His Weimar Cubo-Futurism gets a run, too. The equivalence his work enforces is shocking and breezily cynical and our readiness for, and ability to read, the sequences as they come are sort of incriminating. The work benefits by standing stranded between film and painting—with a kind of shaggy-dog, ingratiating charm. Petrushevics deals with ideology and media knowingness, and induces an alertness to signs, a kind of semiosis.

The work was not a surprise, because the piece operated in one of Petrushevics’ usual areas, but terrific because it was pitched so perfectly, had such visual éclat. Petrushevics’ more political work is often very acute as well as funny. Solemnity would probably garner more critical recognition, a more ‘serious’ reputation—but he deserves that already.

Ian North was showing in *New New’s* SASA Gallery venue. And this work, too, had immense presence. It consisted of a large and long Australian landscape photograph, of mostly middle and far distance: farmland, trees, some fencing, much open space, some bleached and dried long grass nearer to, some wire or iron guarding a plant, some cloud: pale greens and the creams and grey-pink of sapling and gum. Evocative, but understated. No great rhetorical play, no great picturesque ploy. North has long been preoccupied with landscape and the conventions of its representation and their meaning. In this respect the work was unsurprising, but it was a visually arresting work—that induced in the viewer identifications and responses to the landscape *and* the attendant self-conscious revisions, so that the experience was quite involving. ‘Ploy’ there was, in the mounting above the picture of a pantheon of art-historical, philosophical and other names. These added a weighty, slightly portentous feeling to the work, if not quite to the picture itself. Again, as with Collins, though not vitiatingly, a distance between elements of the work—between the photo and a conceptual aspect that was gestured at, hinted at, adverted to. Those names, were they all dead serious, I wondered—and the quote from morose old Rothko—an artist whom North is on record as regarding over-rated—to the effect that *an art without passion is nothing?* Really? North’s work exuded great *sang-froid*.

The names North cited, all looking rather funerary, were of theoreticians of landscape and ecology and earth-sciences or were artists. I like Horace Trenergy, but he stood out, for me, as did Mandy Martin and Edmund Hillary—and probably I am wrong to be surprised at the last. (The roll-call was as much an argument or an educative provocation as it was a key to the work.)

Craige Andrae landed back on the scene, courtesy of *New New*, with an amusing street sculpture—a giant, peeing puppy in Adelaide's Young Street. Amusing in Keith Haring-style. Or in the style of Mambo.

Paul Sloan had a drum-kit in the centre of his space (at Galleria) and around it was ranged a sequence of watercolor works, more graphic than painterly. These performed with Sloan's usual totally casual authority or sureness, almost ostentatiously cavalier, so that one applauds their daring as much as their success. I find Sloan's work often rather poignant in its distillation of the animus of particular styles of representation. It is as though he locates the style's vulnerability and ambition, its weakness and its 'idealism', its foolishness. It was good work, overall, but not pitched as intensely as his Hugo Michel or AEAF exhibitions of recent years.

My view of Paul Hoban is too fixed now by my own previous commentary, though regularly Hoban's work defeats that cloud of suspicion/argument/pigeon-hole, or tests all those things again. There were a number of paintings that seemed to combine what had been distinct approaches or methods: the large, cup-sized dots, generated by a principal of transposing words for colours into another language and where the letters had particular, arbitrary, colour values allotted to them; and another that used, well, 'other' devices and procedures to generate composition and incident and maybe 'facture'. The works in question had the intriguing 'look' of the latter class of work but with the admixture of the anaesthetically placed 'dots', which in these pictures were monochrome I think. It seems to me that these procedures and devices—probably not well accounted for in my description of them—have always been a means of evading 'intention', or of escaping too much and too predictable control on the artist's part. Which is the artist's business, but hardly ours. Still, the art-public seem mesmerised by the rumoured, mooted, imputed presence of these rituals and procedures. Hoban must find this weirdly predictable in itself—and a kind of contradiction. Anyway ...

More simply amusing (though for all I know / for all *you* know, just as curiously derived) was Hoban's picture of a pair of tigers with their faces replaced by holes: like side-show exhibits into which one would throw balls?

Warren Vance produced a sequence that didn't immediately suggest 'Warren Vance'—though they were delicately beautiful, tender. And these are all terms that apply regularly to his work. Here he showed a sequence of small monochromatic sepia scenes of Old (Northern) Europe: fairytale, comforting, melancholy.

Nasim Nasr's piece was a film of Islamic women writing on a wall and of their words then erased or eradicated: the stilling of protest, or of women's opinions, values etc. (Or were they being 'retracted'?) It looked great: bright Middle Eastern light on rough walls, the dark of the traditional Islamic clothing, the texture of the writing on the wall and the drama of its denial or reversal as it is

cancelled. The tropes, the format, are familiar from the work of other, well-recognised artists on the Biennale circuit. That aside, it was good work.

Brenda Croft has been showing recently many photographs that are lasting in their impact, often because they don't come across as being concerned *with* impact: brownie box snaps of her parents in their youth and young adulthood (so, an Aboriginal man leading a middle class life—which is interesting for the degree to which it can seem a surprise, a kind of category aberration, and then each image sticks because the experiences seem so vivid and to be of a disappearing 'recent past', ours as well as hers. of Holdens and hills hoists, paling fence backyards). Her *New New* piece was a long sequence taken on a drive through some part of rural or outback Australia: a long line at eye-height around the gallery, small standard-size prints of the photos running around a wall (or two?) of the (SASA) gallery, possibly in exactly the order they were taken: a road movie, one that invited all sorts of response at various times, responses to do with land management and land degradation, urban/country binaries, race relations, and regular kinds of recognition.

Aldo Iacobelli, at CACSA, showed a sequence, or a suite—it was these more than it was an installation—of pieces that I took to be a counting of the ways in which 'we're doomed'—by climate change, principally. Central was a large black and white painting of 'dead ducks' in silhouette. A pile of the 'same' skinned rubber ducks lay at the foot of the picture. There was a line of small, dark drawings each featuring a paper boat afloat, perilously, on a stream. An enamelled sieve had small enamel snails escaping from it in a pattern radiating out across the wall. And so on.

Also at CACSA was Yoko Kajio's long, dreamy film—a focusing on habitats where human activity is present but not entirely dominant in its meeting with nature: parklands, beaches, slightly waste areas. The film was a casual collocation of such liminal territories and slightly wistful.

Mark Siebert has been a standout over the last few years—but he is away, lost to us, and lost, perhaps, to Art. (The catalogue artist's statement is a Rimbaudesque tale of his dissolution in Asia, drug-addled, coarsened, tough, not up for art.) In characteristic style, though, he has sent footage purporting to show his bohemian anti-art life. We see him playing chess, a hand regularly picking up the glass and drinking, drinking. Almost like a discipline, right? Early in 2011 he will be showing at Greenaway Gallery, once more to shock the unshockable art world.

Siebert's was one of the works less favoured by the gallery space that was the Galleria. It disappeared a little. So did Louise Haselton's. Paintings found it hard to hold their own against the busyness and sometime gloom of the Galleria space. Vance's were small enough to bring the viewer close and thus negate the

surrounding wall, but larger works would mostly have benefited from white gallery wall. Christian Lock's pictures managed even so to look pretty good.

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The exhibition's catalogue has it that *New New* is a survey of Adelaide art of the last ten years. It was big enough and fairly inclusive, but it felt more like a survey of right now. No one likes everything and I found some of this dull, predictably enough. A good proportion of the artists have not put much of a stamp on the decade, being either under-powered, too recent or, as in Christine Collins' case, working elsewhere. And there were the wild-card entries like Craige Andrae, encouraged thereby to get back in the game.

Sam Songailo's Neo-Op Art wall paper gave the Galleria entrance a great lift. Missing, if this were to be a survey of the decade, were Sarah CrowEST, Bianca Barling, Peter McKay and Matthew Bradley. CrowEST has been away a few years, but can hardly be forgotten. Barling has barely left. As have Michele Nikou and Marcin Kobylecki. Michael Newall has been gone *too long?* and Sam Small? (Of course some will have had shows immediately in the offing, like Michael Kutschbach—showing now at Greenaway—or have been otherwise too busy or not in the mood. And curators must make *some* choices, granted.) Annette Bezor seemed a big name to leave out. As did Fiona Hall. Though Hall may now count as international. The gender ratio was about thirty to fourteen, incidentally. Women must try harder?

Peter McKay will have ruled himself out of the show as one of its curators—the other being CACSA director Alan Cruickshank—but McKay's work has been a telling factor within Adelaide art. As has Matthew Bradley's. But Bradley must have been extraordinarily busy actually doing the set-up for the Galleria exhibition to have worried about being represented. It was an immense feat. The curatorial effort and the administrative push to solicit funding and support must have been equally enormous. The sponsors should be happy with the result.