

Reception to the Show:

Perhaps, the most exciting part of the whole project was the excitement it generated in the art world even before it opened. A large front-page story in the *Sunday New York Times* Art and Leisure section, just before the show opened, guaranteed critical interest. While it is significant to note that the show was covered by all the major art magazines and newspapers, it is equally important to examine critically what was said about the show by the critics. Holland Cotter began his article in the *New York Times* by commenting on the popular perception of Indian art in the West which could not accommodate any awareness of contemporary art:

"Contemporary Art in India? There is no contemporary art in India." So an academic friend tartly reminded me a few years ago. How could an avant-garde art exist any where in the "timeless" cultures of what we monolithically call Asia? If it did, it could not be any good. Too Western. Or too Asian. Or too little of one or the other."

Cotter went on to say that such views, while understandable, were wrong. However, the inherent prejudice of the remark which pitted the traditional in opposition to the modern, and "Western in contrast to an Asian, persisted in the comments by many other critics. While all acknowledged the importance of the show, and some talked about the work they particularly liked, many critics were unable to look beyond the Western prism they brought to the work and through which they judged it. Comments such as "the show is too full of installations, and weak paintings; after all installation art is already passe' in the West", or "the exhibition is too much about socio-political issues (following the trends of early 90s in the U.S.) and not enough about aesthetics" were routinely mentioned. At times, there was also a criticism of the fact that either it was too broad (too many countries) or not inclusive enough. What was rather special was that most critics were afraid to really engage with the work directly and write about it. While they complained about the socio-political content, they actually wrote more about that than the visual impact of the work. The artists who routinely were singled out were either those who seemed to embody more of the traditional Asian aesthetic (even if only superficially), such as Ravinder Reddy, or the artists who were on the opposite end of the spectrum in terms of the international conventions, such as the artist Choi Jung Hwa from South Korea. Interestingly, these artists also generated the greatest interest among collectors, gallery owners, and museum curators for possible acquisitions. Although there were a number of very fine painters in the show, the fact that their language was closer to the western form made it hard for the critics to actually relate to the work. This response was very much in keeping with the response of a critic to another contemporary Asian art show, "Scream Against the Sky: Japanese Art since 1945:"

"The pain of confronting culture as alien to the western minds as Japan's only increases as its forms converge with ours. ... Now we must deal with the screechy feedback of our own influence.. which can make a Gutai abstraction.. or neo-dada organizers seem at once childishly obvious in style and utterly opaque in nuance of intention. Recognizing the what and the how of many a work at a glance, I grasp for the why, and I come up empty."

What is significant about the comment is the admission that the "otherness" of Asian art is still easier for people to absorb and appreciate. As it gets closer or converges, there is very little effort to understand its cultural or aesthetic nuances. I would venture to say that the reason the critic may end up empty handed on the "why" of the contemporary Asian art is because he/she is unwilling to engage with the work on its own terms, give it more than a glance, and actually acknowledge that just as they have honed their critical skills on looking

and thinking about western contemporary art over a long period of time, they may need to spend more time, learn more about the Asian cultures and their artistic traditions, before they can make similar judgments by looking at the work at a glance. Just as one needs to take time in understanding and appreciating works that were made in different times and for very different cultural reasons, we need to give the same level of serious consideration to the study of non-western contemporary art. This is especially so, when the work looks deceptively similar to the one we are used to in the West. If we are too quick to see the contemporary Asian work solely in the context of globalising international art (mainly defined in Western Euro-American-centric terms), we lose the subtle culturally specific nuances and run the risk of dismissing it as "not different enough" or "too similar" to Western art.

In the new globalising world, where one talks of transnational economies and even transnational geographies of the metropolitan areas that function beyond national boundaries, there is a need to understand the contemporary, urbanized art world as an important part of what Saskia Sassen has called "strategic geographies" places and projects where one functions in a language that is at once transnational and locally specific. Where the norm may be national, but the form is multinational. If we can go beyond the preoccupation with qualitative labeling such as derivative or provincial or too much like something else - all labels and nomenclatures that tend to limit exploration of ideas rather than encourage further discussion, presentations of contemporary non-western art in the western world and elsewhere have a strong potential of playing a catalytic role in creating new transcultural realities that will form the back bone of the new millennium.

Enriching Encounters

Caroline Turner

Deputy Director and Manager, Exhibition and Cultural Development, Queensland Art Gallery

I would first like to thank the Japan Foundation Asia Centre for the honour of the invitation to speak at this Conference.

In the Foreword to the book of essays I edited in 1993, noted Asian cultural historian, Professor Wang Gungwu, wrote: "Do cultural exchanges enrich or impoverish the cultures involved?" He poses some important questions about cultural encounters in art and concludes by saying: "I would like to believe that artistic exchanges enrich the cultures involved. How enriching, however, depends on whether the imaginative and sensitive exponents of any art receive the respect of those who support and judge them."¹

Professor Wang's comments are especially relevant to the aims and processes of the Queensland Art Gallery's Asia-Pacific Triennial project.

The Asia-Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art was conceived by our Gallery as an exercise in building long term relationships based on mutual respect in order to open a genuine dialogue among artists, art critics, academics and writers within the countries of the Asia-Pacific region, including Australia. The project is focused on the living art of today and seeks to fill a significant gap in Australia-Asia cultural exchanges.

The Asia-Pacific Triennial was the first attempt by a state or national art museum in Australia to undertake a long term commitment to exhibit, document, research, publish and collect the contemporary art of the Asia-Pacific region in an ongoing series of major exhibitions, conferences, publications and acquisitions. My role in this project has been, with my Director at the Queensland Art Gallery, Mr Doug Hall, first to conceive the concept of the Triennial and, for six years to develop the policy, to direct the curatorial philosophy, and to guide the day to day management of the project.

Cultural exchange between Australia and Asia is now gaining momentum. These exchanges reflect changing perceptions at the end of the twentieth century and the growing realisation and understanding of Australians that our geographical position and future lie within the Asia-Pacific. The Queensland Art Gallery's emphasis on contemporary art has come about because we have been convinced that a knowledge of the changing societies of our region underpins Australia's engagement with the region. The extensive funding for the project has largely come from the Queensland Art Gallery's own budget and grants from the Australian and Queensland Governments but the exhibition is selected as an art exhibition, not as a formal Government exchange.

The First Triennial exhibition, held in 1993, featured 200 art works by 76 artists from thirteen countries and Hong Kong and was attended by 60,000 people. The Second Triennial exhibition held from September 1996 to January 1997 had over 100 artists participating from sixteen countries and 120,000 visitors. The success of the First Asia-Pacific Triennial was recognised by critics at the time, both within Australia and in the region. Redza Piyadasa in the *Malaysian Business Times* of 25 September 1993, for example, commented: "Those of us who were in Brisbane last week came away feeling we had been privileged to have been part

of an historical cultural event for both Australia and Asia". Critical reaction to the Second Triennial has been equally positive and especially from the Asia-Pacific region. Professor Patrick Flores in the *Diliman Review* (University of the Philippines) wrote: "The APT may well break the ground on which new ideas could flourish and engage the most tenacious and versatile legacies of feudalism, patriarchy, capitalism, racism, and elitist or party-led nationalism with the most innovative intellectual and theoretical technologies".²

Within Australia the audience and media response has been extraordinary. In our country there has been a reaction which recognises that the Triennial has changed the way many Australians see the region through its contemporary art. That reaction, with attendances doubling in three years, is overwhelmingly positive. John MacDonald, for example, wrote in the major Australian daily newspaper, *The Sydney Morning Herald* of the 1996 Triennial: "It is a show to restore one's faith in contemporary art."³

The Triennial process builds on the knowledge and experience of the growing number of Australians who have expertise in the region yet it also acknowledges our lack of knowledge. Fundamental to the Triennial's philosophy is that it is an evolving project based on genuine partnerships between colleagues within the region. Over 40 curators from Australia and the participating countries in the region were involved in the selections for the 1996 exhibition, and 77 writers from the region wrote for the catalogue. Together they built a shared vision for the project. The Asia-Pacific Triennial is a process as much as an exhibition and in six years has been an exciting voyage of discovery for the Queensland Art Gallery staff. This is an enormous project - intellectually and logistically the most demanding ever undertaken at the Queensland Art Gallery and possibly the most demanding ever undertaken in Australia. Unlike most international art exhibitions of this type, such as the Venice Biennale, selections are not based on nations choosing representatives. The concept of the Triennial, through multiple curatorship, is partnership in selections, the aim of which is to break down cultural assumptions and open up a genuine debate on the issues. In emphasising the teamwork and co-curatorship between selectors from different countries perhaps I should make the point that the Australian art for this last exhibition was selected by a Thai scholar. In each country Australians worked with experts in the art of that country. If there is a contradiction in the selections for the Triennials, with an inevitable national focus, this we have tried to resolve by an emphasis on context and themes rather than nations and national identity. In the end it is the voice of the individual artist which is of fundamental significance and we place great importance on giving artists a major place in our conferences and education programs. Artists today are global travelers. We have chosen to remain to a great extent within the bounds of physical geography, although the challenging issue of the exile and expatriate, "the geography of the mind", has been faced in our selections and the issue of artists "crossing borders" will be a feature in 1999.

I have always said that it would be impossible to predict the outcomes of a project such as the Triennial and that is why I believe it is so important to commit to at least a ten year project. It now seems likely that the Triennial will continue into the next century. The major publications, conferences and education programs associated with our exhibitions are essential to their success. Our Triennial education program is wide ranging and includes lectures, videos, artist performances and talks, a school kit distributed free to schools throughout Australia, artist in schools program for visiting Asian artists, intranet and internet information. Several of our staff are learning Asian languages. We are planning to complement future Triennials with a further exhibition of twentieth century Western and Asian modernism for the year 2000. We have developed an important collection of

contemporary Asia-Pacific art and an extensive Library collection and arts research database. We are now working with Australian and international art and educational institutions, including in Japan, in documenting and researching aspects of the modern and contemporary art of the region. We also collect and show historical Asian art and have a program of major exhibitions from Japan, China, Korea and Indonesia of pre-modern art. We are now setting up a new Centre for the study of Asia-Pacific modern and contemporary art - the first such Centre in Australia.

The Queensland Art Gallery has become, through its commitment to the Triennial, the leading Australian institution in the documentation, exhibition, research and collection of contemporary Asian art. The Australian Triennial, of course, complements a growing interest in contemporary Asian art worldwide. Artists from Japan, China, Korea, Hong Kong and Taiwan are practising on a world stage and South East Asian artists have broken down the barriers and are now included in world Biennales and events. The pioneering Fukuoka Asian art exchanges, particularly the fourth Asian Art Show "Realism as an Attitude"; Kwangju Biennale (Korea); the Tokyo-based "Visions of Happiness"; the new Asian art show: "Now a Dream of the East" 1995; the Museum of Contemporary Art, Tokyo, exhibition, as well as Japan Foundation exhibitions, have been of great importance. Also significant have been exhibitions curated by other speakers here, such as David Elliott's exhibitions for the Museum of Modern Art, Oxford as well as the exhibition curated by Apinan Poshyananda for the New York Asia Society, whose Director, Vishaka Desai, has developed a new contemporary focus for the extensive program of Asian art of that institution. Exciting possibilities are presented, I believe, by potential partnerships and shared projects between those institutions worldwide working in contemporary Asian art.

The Australian Triennial project through its multiple international curators has built multiple viewpoints. We have not adopted a single theme for either of the two previous exhibitions, although the First Triennial in 1993 was based on the general concept of "tradition and change", with the idea of bringing the past into the present, and the Second Triennial on "present encounters". The Third Triennial will be based on a concept of "the future". The importance of context, of both the ancient and more recent past, has been reinforced in the Triennial exhibitions. We are all participants in the voyage of time and time can have different meanings. One of our Polynesian Conference speakers reminded us that for his people: "the future is behind us: the past in front of us."⁴ We accept that contemporary art reflects the challenges of contemporary societies. As Australian born critic Robert Hughes, writes: "Art is rarely...untouched by the deep currents moving in the society around it."⁵

While the Triennial has thus far had no overall constricting theme, many themes have emerged. Among these themes are identity; the place of tradition within rapidly changing societies; the issues of religion, ritual, mysticism and spirituality; the role of women; social and political concerns reflecting everyday events; migration and alienation; human sexuality and desire; the family; the interior world of the mind; the urban transformation; and the worldwide problem of environmental degradation. The Triennial has been deeply affected by the strong and idealistic voices of the young committed to the concept of art as a means of shaping a better future.

While the Triennial has no one theme, it does have a thesis: that Euro-Americentric views are no longer appropriate in judging the art of this region. There is increasing questioning in this region of the imposition of Western cultural values and continuing Western cultural imperialism. Australians have proved that they are willing to listen to what the artists and

critics from the region have to say about their art. The changing nature of the world at the end of the twentieth century has forced a new appraisal of the art of the region, but there is considerable evidence that what is happening in contemporary Asian and Pacific art is still not fully understood in the West.

Cultural interaction is not always on terms of equality. Lingering historical and present tensions make the world an uneasy place and contemporary art continues to reflect those uncertainties. Today's contemporary art of the Asia-Pacific is a product of tradition, historical cultural encounters extending back over the centuries, the confrontation with the West in more modern times and the recent economic, technological and information changes which have pushed the world towards a global culture and greatly accelerated those interactions. We seem to be entering a new world era of both globalism and its counterpoint, regionalism, where regional and local identity is a vital factor in the face of attempts to find or force commonality.

Cultural interaction is no new phenomenon in the Asia-Pacific region and has taken place over the centuries. In Asian art the span of ancient cultures overrides later Western influences on the region, which may come to be seen in the future as relatively superficial in the context of history.

Artists today have to deal with a myriad of changes in making sense out of contemporary events. Some reject tradition and history; others embrace it. In many cases artists are focusing on re-examining the uniqueness of their national, regional, local or individual identity. Others explore universal themes. The truisms of a twentieth century global culture are challenged by the survival of cultural traditions thought lost. What is very clear in the art coming out of the Triennial exhibitions is a fundamental challenge to the concept of a universal global culture. It is a significant paradox also that while new national and regional local identities are at times being asserted, it is the artists' sophisticated knowledge of, engagement with, and sometimes rejection of, internationalism that has inspired some of the most interesting recent art.

The most consistent feature of the art of this region in my opinion is its rejection of a hierarchical internationalism in art, particularly that aspect which can now be seen as in many ways an aberration of the Cold War.

At the 1996 Asia-Pacific Triennial Conference in Brisbane, David Elliott posed the significant question - who defines modernism, post-modernism or post-colonial? ⁶ At the 1993 Triennial Conference speakers had stressed the need to canvass new ideas which crossed national boundaries. Geeta Kapur (India) talked of the necessity nonetheless of context. Chinese artist Xu Hong noted: "When you look at a leopard through piece of bamboo you can only see one spot." Marian Pastor Roces (Philippines) outlined her unease at the possibility of forcing another mega narrative and advocated new intellectual tools be developed for the discourse. ⁷ Apinan Poshyananda (Thailand) pointed out the significance of cultural syncretism in Asia. ⁸ Speakers emphasised issues such as overlapping territories, displacements, the need to expose difference, marginality and even tensions, rather than to impose sameness. At the second conference in 1996, attended by 600 people, the largest art conference ever held in Australia, speakers again stressed the need for continued appreciation of the complexity and diversity of the art and asked new questions about "identity" in an Asia-Pacific context. These papers have now been published. ⁹

I would like to illustrate some of the points I have made by showing some examples of the diversity of art in the 1993 and 1996 Triennial exhibitions.

Conclusion

To conclude I would like to make five points:

1. Understanding contemporary Asian art needs thorough research and scholarship, including a knowledge of the modern and pre-modern art of the cultures involved, and a long term commitment. I hope we can see more collaborations between institutions worldwide involved in studying and researching, as well as collecting, contemporary Asian art.
2. Our objectives should be artistic and scholarly, not political. I believe that artists do have an important role in the complex cultural interactions of our world. This is not to give artists a political role but to understand that art is fundamental to societies.
3. A realistic assessment of practical difficulties must take into account, but not be ruled by, current problems such as between China and Taiwan. Nevertheless, political realities have to be negotiated.
4. We need to be open to history as well as to the future, to be inclusive rather than exclusive, to be willing to override national boundaries and other dividing lines as well as media divisions and hierarchies in art and we need to recognise traditional and indigenous art.
5. The key to the Asia-Pacific Triennial exhibitions, and to future projects in contemporary Asian or Asia-Pacific art, in my view, is an appreciation of context, complexity and diversity, and a commitment to genuine partnership between curators based on mutual respect. To make artistic exchanges enriching, we need, as Edward Said wrote in another context, to understand what we have in common and respect what is different.

Notes

¹ Wang Gungwu, "Foreword" in Caroline Turner (ed.), *Tradition and Change: Contemporary Art of Asia and the Pacific*, University of Queensland Press, p.vii

² Redza Piyadasa, "Review", *Malaysian Business Times*, 25 September 1993; Patrick D. Flores, "In Search of a Contemporary Idiom", *Diliman Review*, Vol.44, No.4, p.51

³ John McDonald, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 5 October 1996

⁴ Dr Jonathan Mane-Wheoki speaking at First Asia-Pacific Triennial Conference 1993

⁵ Robert Hughes, "The Cult of Identity", *The Australian*, 24-25 May 1997, Features, p.3

⁶ Quoted by Fumio Nanjo, *Mainichi Shimbun*, 2 December 1996

⁷ Quoted T.K.Sabapathy "Developing Regionalist Perspectives in South East Asian Historiography", *The Second Asia-Pacific Triennial Catalogue*, 1996 p.13.

⁸ Apinan Poshyananda, "The Future: Post-Cold War, Post modernism, Postmarginalia", in Turner (ed.), *Tradition and Change*, pp.3-24

⁹ Caroline Turner (ed.), *Present Encounters, The Second Asia-Pacific Triennial Conference Papers*, Queensland Art Gallery, 1997

SLIDES FOR PAPER BY CAROLINE TURNER

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|------------------------------|-------------------------|
| 1. Kathleen Petyarre | 2. Michael and Anna Mel |
| "Mountain devil lizard" 1992 | APT 1996 Performance |
| 1993 Triennial | 1996 Triennial |

This work by Australian Aboriginal artist, Kathleen Petyarre, relates to the absolute inter-relationships in Aboriginal art between land and culture and to the ceremonies for the Mountain devil lizard, including the body paints and decorations for those ceremonies.

The inclusion of the Pacific gives the Triennial some of its unique features and is a distinctive part of the exhibition, raising its own issues, particularly in defining what is contemporary art.

In the 1996 Triennial exhibition Michael and Anna Mel returned to traditional culture with headaddresses, body paint and performance to challenge our concept of what is contemporary art in a Pacific context. Both educated in Australia, Michael with a PhD, they wish to avoid the trap of non-Western art codified by the West. Instead they seek to reveal a living and changing cultural tradition, challenging Western interpretations.

They state: "Our role as contemporary artists in Papua New Guinea is to be able to draw on our rich heritage and enunciate and revitalise these processes and practices today." The inclusion of indigenous or tribal art challenges curatorial notions of what is contemporary. I believe Australia can make a contribution to this debate through our position that indigenous Aboriginal art is contemporary art.

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| 3. Zhang Xiaogang | 4. Choi Jeong Hwa |
| "Three Comrades" 1994 | "Super flower plastic spring" 1995 |
| 1996 Triennial | 1996 Triennial |

Zhang Xiaogang's "Three Comrades", shown in 1996, is a work using the visual rhetoric of the Mao era in China to comment on the loss of individuality in China and idealisation in the interests of ideology.

Choi Jeong Hwa from Korea in 1996 presented viewers with a huge synthetic tulip as well as with an inflatable garden comprising palm trees and flowers. His plants were kept alive by an air compressor and remained vividly coloured and attractive 'for ever', never wilting or dying. The work challenges the concept of real and invented or natural and man-made.

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| 5. Wu Tien-Chang | 6. Cai Guo Qiang |
| "On the damage to 'spring and autumn pavilion' - Dream of past era I" 1995 | "Dragon or Rainbow Serpent: A myth glorified or feared" 1996 |
| 1996 Triennial | 1996 Triennial |

Wu Tien Chang from Taiwan in 1996 addressed the edgy uncertainties and nostalgic aspects of Chinese culture in contemporary Taiwan.

For the 1996 Triennial, Cai Guo Qiang, who works in Tokyo and New York, was preparing a gunpowder explosive event inspired by the commonalities of the Australian Indigenous Rainbow Serpent and the Chinese Dragon, using the Brisbane River as a conceptual metaphor and physical location. This gunpowder drawing, made by small explosions on paper, is the plan for that proposed event. The work links ancient wisdom with contemporary life and culture.

7. Montien Boonma
"Lotus sound" 1992
1993 Triennial

8. Sulaiman Esa
"Garden of mystery I" 1992
1993 Triennial

Both these artists were represented in 1993 and both works are now owned by the Queensland Art Gallery, as are the works by Zhang Xiaogang and Cai Guo Qiang.

Thai artist Montien Boonma's profound Buddhist meditation piece, "Lotus sound", is made up of ceramic bells and golden lotus petals.

Malaysian Sulaiman Esa's work, "Garden of mystery", reflects an equally profound belief in Islam.

9. Nalini Malani
"Body as site" 1996 (included
works from Mutant series and wall
drawings entitled "women")
1996 Triennial

10. Chen Yan Yin
"Discrepancy between one idea"
1996
1996 Triennial

Nalini Malani from India has worked in theatre, video and installation. These drawings, two of which were purchased by the Queensland Art Gallery, are part of her "mutants series" which encompasses events such as nuclear tests in the Pacific at Bikini atoll in 1954 and subsequent deformed babies born to Micronesian mothers, as well as the violent effects of colonialism in the Third World. The cave-like setting of the installation conjured up a long tradition of cave painting and Hindu mysticism.

Chen Yan Yin from China produced one of the most discussed installations at the 1996 Triennial. Her work draws upon themes related to female experiences, both physical and psychological. Her installation "Discrepancy between one idea" comprised hospital intravenous bottles and tubes, fresh roses, and a video projection, and is a metaphor for the flow of life and love.

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| 11. Vasan Sitthiket | 12. Kamin Lertchaiprasert |
| "Buddha returns to Bangkok '92"
1992 | "Problem-Wisdom" 1995 |
| 1993 Triennial | 1996 Triennial |

Vasan Sitthiket in 1993 utilised violent imagery in an immediate reaction to the Coup of 1992. Vasan's work is an outpouring of grief. A poet painter he reflects his feelings in the painting "Buddha returns to Bangkok" showing the Lord Buddha in front of scenes of degradation and corruption.

Kamin Lertchaiprasert trained in Bangkok and New York. The 1996 Triennial presented "Problem/Wisdom", a sculptural installation of 366 papier mache objects, which we purchased, made of recycled Thai newspapers. The work was completed over the course of two years. During the first year the artist focused on various problems currently facing Thai society. During the second year he sculpted the objects and reflected on solutions for each specific problem. The work is deeply informed by Buddhist beliefs.

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| 13. Nguyen Xuan Tiep | 14. Vu Dan Tan |
| "Song of the buffalo boys II" 1990 | "Monsters, devils and angels" 1996 |
| 1993 Triennial | 1996 Triennial |

Nguyen Tiep in 1993 revealed a poetic and even sentimental return to a Vietnamese childhood of old pagodas, Buddhist symbols, flutes and village life in "Song of the buffalo boys".

Vu Dan Tan in the 1996 Triennial created three-dimensional sculptural pieces using recycled cigarette packages and cardboard boxes. His imagery includes mythical creatures such as lion-dogs, phoenixes, monsters, devils and women-angels. His work is informed by his spiritual and metaphysical beliefs.

Both these works are owned by our Gallery.

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| 15. Roberto Villanueva | 16. Mark Justiniani |
| "Ego's grave": Performance 1993 | "Edukado" 1994 |
| 1993 Triennial | 1996 Triennial |

The work from 1993 by Philippines artist, the late Roberto Villanueva, reflected an aspect of Asian and Pacific art that defies rationalist interpretations. Roberto drew inspiration from ancient animist beliefs and Shamanistic rituals to quiet spirits in the Philippines. In so doing he enlarges the focus of his art to include whole communities and their beliefs. He chose to do a large installation called "Ego's grave" which involved a pit lined with wet clay that was then fired in a huge burning ceremony. The performance was central to the concept of this artist. Many artists found this work profoundly disturbing at the time and, indeed, it seems to have been an uncanny presentiment or prediction of Roberto's own death from leukemia, a disease diagnosed a few days after the performance. Roberto himself seems to have felt some uneasiness at the work as he finally decided to fill in the pit in an all night ceremony

involving Aboriginal Australian participants.

Mark Justiniani, one of the founding members of the important mural painting collectives Salinpusa and Sanggawa, in 1996 presented mixed media works from his recent series "White Rain". This series is a sustained meditation on the colonisation of Philippines. The artist has used a strong anti-colonial reference in the Jeepney decoration (Jeeps left behind by American troops) to comment on the insensitivity of American education where A was for apple but apples did not then grow in the tropical Philippines. The white rain refers to continuing first world cultural imperialism.

17. Wong Hoy Cheong

"In Search of Faraway Places" 1996

1996 Triennial

18. Nindityo Adipurnomo

"Introversion (April the twenty
-first)" 1995-96

1996 Triennial

Wong Hoy Cheong from Malaysia in the 1996 Triennial treats the history of his own family in an attempt to better understand the history of his country and the aspirations of present day Malaysia. One of these works was purchased by the Queensland Art Gallery and shown recently in Tokyo.

Indonesian artist, Nindityo Adipurnomo, who has studied in The Netherlands, says: "I constantly experience a terrifying confrontation of Western and Eastern values. But it is fascinating because in this confrontation the flames of tradition, change and renewal are contained". His "Introversion" purchased by the Queensland Art Gallery consists of 21 mirrors on which are superimposed the carved wooden konde (traditional Javanese hairpiece). The work pays homage to the 19th century noble woman, Kartini, who advocated women's emancipation in Indonesia.

19. Dadang Christanto

"For those who..." 1993

1993 Triennial

20. Heri Dono

"The chair": Performance 1993

1993 Triennial

Dadang Christanto from Indonesia called his 1993 work "For those who are poor...suffering...oppressed...voiceless...powerless...victims of violence...victims of justice". Dadang's work expresses social concerns but what he calls the "primitive touch" is a symbol of empathy with ordinary people. He asked our audiences to leave flowers in memory of those who had suffered in any way, in any country. By the end of the exhibition the floor was heaped with flowers and poems, showing that visitors returned especially to leave those tributes. Dadang's belief, echoing an ancient Indonesian saying, is that art should speak from the heart, and our audience responded from their hearts. The work, which we purchased, continues to arouse these emotions.

The Indonesian artist, Heri Dono, whose extraordinary images are drawn from ancient wayang puppetry and modern television, combines humour with biting social comment about global injustices. His work is also based on the question of how art can serve humanity. The idealism of these young Asian artists, and their connection to community life, had a profound effect on Australian audiences who saw the exhibitions.

21. Shigeo Toya
"Woods III" 1991-92

1993 Triennial

22. Takashi Murakami
"The hellish madness of the game
has come to an end leaving you
hanging" 1994

1996 Triennial

Shigeo Toya's "Woods III" in the 1993 Triennial was one of 203 subsequently purchased by the Queensland Art Gallery. It reflects the strong identification with nature in Japanese art.

Takashi Murakami was trained in traditional Japanese nihong-a painting. His painting combines traditional techniques with popular post-War culture imagery, revealing the paradoxes of post-modern Japan. We purchased Murakami's painting which is also a self portrait. The balloon "The Hellish Madness of the Game has come to an end leaving you hanging", where the baseball bat-shaped balloon looks narcissus-like into a mirror, is based on a Japanese computergame puyopuyo, described by Professor Midori Matsui as a "revelation of nothingness".

23. Yasumasa Morimura
"Blinded by the light" 1991

1996 Triennial

24. Yukinori Yanagi
"PACIFIC Ant Farm" 1996

1996 Triennial

Yasumasa Morimura's work "Blinded by the Light", is based on the 16th century Breughel painting, "The parable of the blind". This work is a response to a contemporary consumerism, particularly in the context of the 1980s Japanese bubble economy and now forms part of the Queensland Art Gallery Collection.

This installation by Japanese artist Yukinori Yanagi seen in 1996 "PACIFIC Ant Farm", is part of his series of works in which national flags in coloured sand in the plastic boxes are disrupted randomly by the living ants. The work reflects complex ideas about global society and dissolving borders and inevitable historical change in cultures. This work served as an important symbol of the 1996 Triennial.

Cultural Encounters through Contemporary Art

Graeme Murray
Director, The Fruitmarket Gallery

CULTURE:

"Customs, ideas and attitudes shared by a group transmitted from generation to generation by learning processes rather than biological inheritance; adherence to these customs and attitudes is regarded by a system of rewards and punishments peculiar to each culture."

Arthur J. Deikman
Lecture, 6 March 1987

From the late eighties I have made a number of visits to Japan, Korea, China and India. I desired to see, first hand, what work was being made in the field of Contemporary Art, during a period of continuing rapid change and dynamism in the culture and economies of these countries. Previous study and research, commencing with the History of Art, had given me some background. I was interested in seeing to what extent the contemporary art practice was 'anchored in' the particular culture, its history and beliefs and to what extent international communications and the concomitant information from other cultures had been taken up.

I was looking, of course, for artists of perception, clear in their assessment of what is going on and capable of making work whose presentation could give rise to a greater awareness of the elements of the modern international problematique, and whose ethics enable them to transcend current Western notions of the artist as individualist, romantic, dissident - separated from society. They should also be above the coercion of economic and social gratification.

I was interested to see how much of Western and Central European legacies in thought were operational. Religious history includes Egyptian, Greek, Roman, Hindu Shamanist, Parsee, Christian, Mohammedan, Confucian, Taoist, and Shinto forms of worship and belief. Buddhism, for example, spread from India to the East - what was its current operation? What were the dynamics between the art of these countries and what I knew previously, in the West, where the cult of the individual 'great artist' has been in full swing?

"It may be that cultural clash is a condition of the human race, at least in it's present stage of development. If we are to get away from it we shall have to develop a better understanding of groups and living in groups."

'A Clash of Cultures - The Malaysian Experience'
David Widdicombe

Recently the West has focused on this geographical area with the end of the British lease of Hong Kong and the celebration of 50 years of Indian independence from Britain - and of Korea from Japan. Such milestones encourage evaluations of available historic documents to see who really did what.

In London, recently, there have been major focuses on the art of other cultures - The Festival of Islam, for example, and the Japan Festival in 1991. An article in the *Sunday Times* of 27

July 1997, pointed out that following this 33% of people surveyed said they now have a more favourable view of Japan than before it; 71% said they now wished to visit Japan. Currently a focus on Korean culture is being presented in London. Such an international centre encourages state and business partnership support to promote and present aspects of their culture for greater visibility and presence on the world stage - and no doubt, increase of sales of their business products, Hyundai cars, for example. Before long there will be more cars in Britain than people, if present trends continue. What would the Romans have thought of that?

At The Fruitmarket Gallery our remit is to present exhibitions of the best national and international contemporary art. Internationally, over the last five years, we have presented major exhibitions from Australia ("Aboriginal Art, the collection of Donald Khan"), West Africa ("Photographs of Malick Sidibe and Seydou Keita"), Japan ("Liquid Crystal Futures"), Korea ("Information and Reality") and China ("Reckoning with the Past"). An exhibition of contemporary Indian art is currently in the planning stage. This interest in other cultures stems from the necessity to be aware of what is going on in other countries globally - to search for the bigger picture, so to speak. It is also a search for future partners working on the same wavelength. It is not an interest in the 'exotic' or otherness of these cultures. The more I see of cultures outside the West, the more I see well intentioned people working through our common destiny within the trappings of different race, religion and cultural ideas. The contradiction in modern times is perhaps that, whilst at face value, all cultures and their histories are now available and apparently accessible by plane and television scanner, our ingress into these cultures is destroying these very traditions. Hopefully, however, we can work together to save what is essential, to achieve a harmonious balance in our common destiny. We are all born to live, to die. Co-operation for a good and meaningful future evolution should surely be our aim.

There are many historical contacts between Scotland and the Pacific Rim. 18th Century immigrants to Australia and New Zealand led to the development of many communities. Australia's relationship with the UK continues - their investment in the UK is ahead of Japan and Korea. The UK is the second biggest investor in Australia. There is a great awareness here of the recent Brisbane Triennial and forthcoming Sydney Biennial. In the UK, and indeed throughout Europe, there is also the continuing participation in the major international arts events - Venice, São Paulo, Johannesburg, Kwangju and so on. With India there is the colonial heritage, but the great example of a country moving from feudalism and colonialism into secular modernism in fifty years. Today, the subcontinent life is changing rapidly through increased mobility. Artists are borrowing from traditions - their own traditions are being diffused. However, hopefully, sensitive interaction and good direction will lead to cultural rejuvenation. With Burma, Japan and Korea a substantial series of business partnerships continue to develop.

Although we are now dealing with information as a global village, we must not forget that cultural influence is as old as time. What seems to be a problem today is the volume of information to be dealt with - how do we deal with what is essential, weed out the rest and apply what is useful, where it is needed? Because I come from the West I do not find the remnants of Western style art practice very interesting when I encounter it in the East. Art colleges may have opened in India in 1857. Studio practice has led to the adoption of easel painting modes. What I am interested in is not one culture copying the indoctrination of another, but the essential genius of these cultures - and how that is useful for the future. To adopt this and that, to select from here and there may be pleasurable, but may be a self