



24 HR ART

NORTHERN TERRITORY CENTRE FOR CONTEMPORARY ART

19 June 2000

Suzanne Spinner
10 Mozart St
ST KILDA VIC 3182



Cath Rowdler, Suzanne Spinner, Gary Lee, Mene Hoeschle, Steve Fox, Geoff Shermles, Carmel Young, Jackie Wurm, Pam Lofte

Dear Suzanne

Thankyou for participating in the commemorative exhibition *re-site*—examining 24HR Art's history, locale and concerns held 1—29 April.

During the course of the exhibition there were over 1180 visitors to the Gallery and Go Lo site, including the opening, sunset talks, artists' forum and closing performance and numerous people drove by the open air installation. Many commented on how well the work drew on elements of both sites using sounds, words, movement and images and I am still receiving feedback. Please let me know of any other coverage or comments you come across.

re-site stimulated debate and reflection on memories as well as future possibilities. Media coverage reached former members and Gallery goers, in addition to new audiences, including nationally through ABC TV's *The Arts Show*. Some documentation will be included in our forthcoming 10 year publication *The Hottest Gallery in the World* so stay tuned.

Thank you again for celebrating this 10 year marker and helping put 24HR Art more firmly on the map.

Warm regards

Jackie Wurm
Assistant Director and curator *re-site*

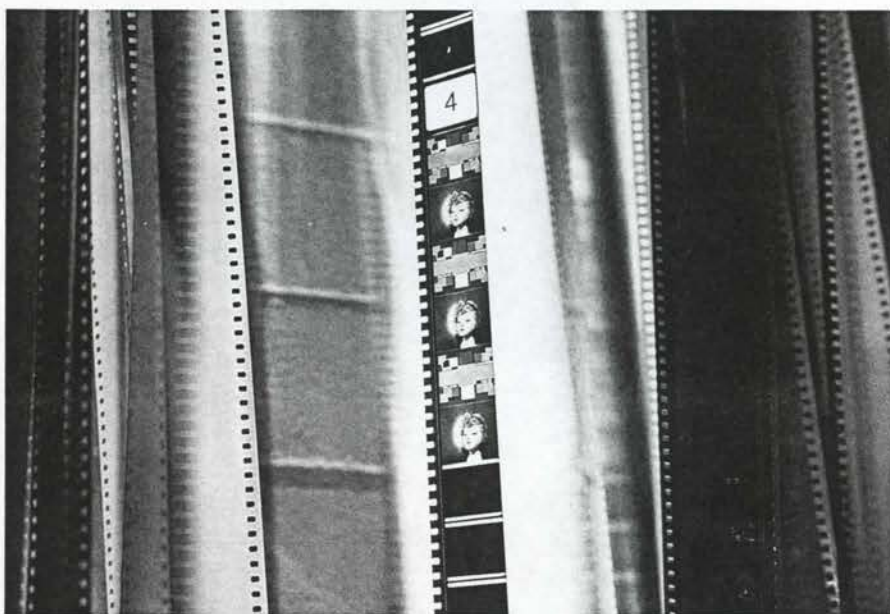
Re-site: Petrol station to cinema: 24HR ART

SUZANNE SPUNNER

Re-site celebrated ten years of 24 HR ART, the NT centre for Contemporary Art in a series of installations which examined history, locale and concerns across two sites, the present gallery in a converted cinema in Parap and the original location the former Go-Lo Servo in Fannie Bay now a vacant block destined for development. Some twelve artists were involved and all had a history of exhibition and association with the site from Brisbane-based installation artist, Franz Ehmann who was a founding member to former Director, Steve Fox who is now the manager of Maruku Arts & Craft at Mutijulu, Uluru and Cath Bowdler the current Director.

Darwin sculptor, Geoff Sharples' *The architecture of history* consisted of ten black painted wooden columns arranged in an arc across the prime street frontage at Fannie Bay. It was intended to be read at speed by passing cars and paid tribute to the democracy of 24 HR ART Members Shows which annually testify to the inclusive ethos of the organistaion. In a contradictory but apt gesture these severe black plinths suggested those infinite possibilities. Meanwhile back in the gallery Carmel Young's *Surroundsound* soundscape recreated the decade in sound bites and included a priceless grab of Shane Stone, former NT Chief Minister, QC et al boasting that introducing himself in Asia as 'Minister for Culture gets you a great entree'.

The gallery is a notoriously challenging space to place work in because it includes the old cinema bio box but only about half of the cinema stalls area so it is high but not long. Cath Bowdler's *eye in the sky* utilised these old projection boxes, acknowledging a feature of the gallery most artists hope their audience won't notice. From each of them copious lengths of film spilt out in a torrent of unseen images, which nonetheless collected and reflected light off their surfaces. On the opposite wall Bowdler projected a series of slides of blue sky and clouds up high at the level that the film would have been seen reminding us that for most of its existence as a cinema it was an open air movie house, and that paradoxically if the film is to be seen then the sky like the cinema must be dark.



Cath Bowdler, *eye in the sky (detail)* installation in re-site at 24HR ART.

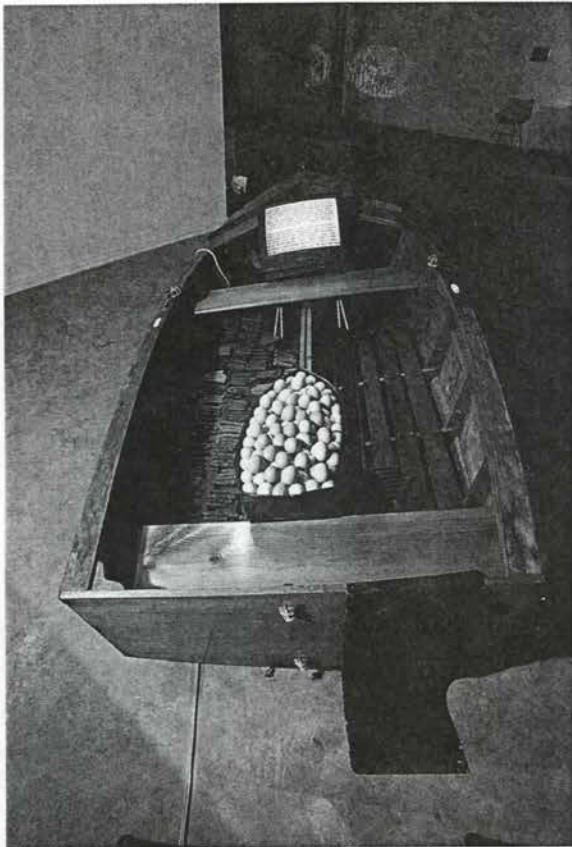
Alice Springs based artist Pam Lofts drew attention to what has been the gallery's most notorious constraint, the heat. When Lofts first exhibited in Darwin in 1994 there were no fans. Her *sandangle/fantale/fandancer/fantasy* dressed the fans in lurid red metallic fabric, slinky sheaths with black tulle tutu skirts which seemed to twirl with the movement of the fans. It was a rather gorgeous departure from her more familiar concerns with Centralian landscape and natural materials but I nonetheless saw a hint of the Centre, in a little grove of inverted grass trees fluttering and dancing in the torpid tropical breeze.

Franz Ehmann's *Open panorama: The drowned and the saved* was both the most evocative and most enigmatic of the responses to the site. A beautiful wooden dinghy made in Darwin was the cradle for another boat – a small black wax vessel piled high with eggs and a video monitor on the seat of the boat, on which are images of a piece of paper covered in writing that is slowly engulfed by a sea of milk so that the words dissolve as we read them. The words

are the artists wishes and include the wish to be John Howard's brain that could say an unconditional sorry to all the Indigenous people... the floor of the boat is covered in rows of wax fingers. Complete in itself, it did connect with the history of the old cinema that for a time was used as a storehouse for the NT museum's boat collection.

When Meng Ng-Hoelsche first exhibited at 24 HR ART her works were abstract lithographs referencing Asian symbols. Now she lives at Daly River where she is the Art Advisor and her current work is hand made glass. For RE-SITE she made a series of glass plaques each embedded with archaeological fragments – bone, a sea urchin shell, rusted tin and bits of fencing wire and dirt and sand all sandwiched between glass sheets and fired in her bush kiln. Some elements under the intense heat had changed form completely, melted and dissolved others still revealed their original form. Hung just off the wall these plaques produced a subtle coloured shadow, another trace of the past.

Trevor van Weeren's computer projection, re-(site) 'a fictional memory about



Franz Ehmman, Open panorama: the drowned and the saved, mixed media.

unwritten/forgotton histories' used archival photographs to interrogate the primal site, the Aboriginal territory of Darwin. It began with landscape images of the land as it looked pre-settlement/invasion, succeeded by a binocular peephole view showing how the land was surveyed and annexed by other eyes mediated by other instruments of sight. Under the title 'looking for the natives' a succession of images of anthropological exotica picturing the Larrakia people culminated in historic postcards entitled 'Port Darwin Natives' and 'natives in threatening poses'. Then an image of Kahliin Compound with children behind a wire fence and finally a recent photograph of the Go-Lo site with its enhanced pink NT Planning Authority Proposed Development Site notice which was overlaid by an animated montage showing the growth of Darwin in Escher like progression as one high rise monument supplanted another - 'a natural environment that presents a severe challenge to European based civilisation'. The contemporary Larrakia story was referenced in Gary Lee's essay 'Down Memory Lane to Vimy Lane', a personal account of the history of Parap Pictures and the meaning of both these sites for Larrakia people and other long-term Darwin families.

For Aboriginal artists, site usually means a particular part of the country that is their place and Dolly Nampijinpa Daniels and her granddaughter, Corina Nakamarra Granites

Painted a water dreaming in traditional dot style. The canvas sat on a base made from a rolled up swag and blankets recalling Daniels' long collaboration with Anne Mosey. Over the decade they produced a series of side by side installation works about their different perceptions of place, a number of which had been shown at 24 HR ART.

Steve Fox's *for this mob* was installed in the entrance porch to the gallery and was a recognition of the many Longrassers who have camped there over the years. It was addressed to one person, an Aboriginal woman from Yirrkala whom Steve had known from his days as Art Advisor there. Written directly on the wall around a simple outline drawing of an Aboriginal woman he tells the sad and awful story of Yilia, who was, 'my friend - my Yapa - a great artist, she did many good things, she was my age' and how she drifted into Darwin with her old Balanda

man and got drinking and died -in her man's arms on the bus on the way to hospital' after her liver burst and an ambulance never came. On the floor of the porch positioned so you had to step on, or awkwardly over it to get in the gallery door, was a narrow strip of foam rubber with the word SHELTER cut in as bas relief. This bed rested on some sheets of cardboard discarded by the Chinese restaurant next door, and on one corner the words 'good luck brand' could just be read.

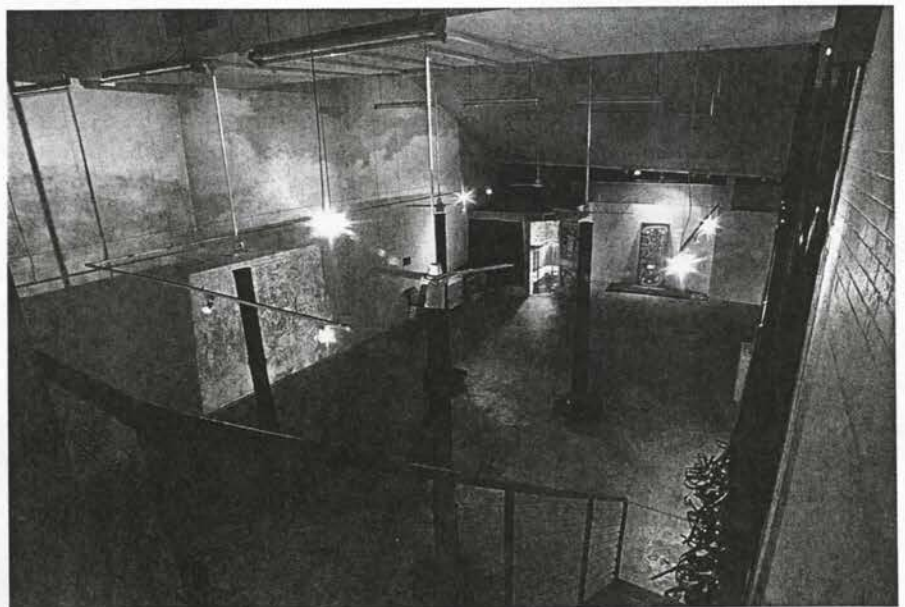
When Fox was Director of 24 HR Art he says he struck a deal with the itinerants who camped in the porch during The Wet, 'keep the place a bit clean and try not to piss here, watch over the gallery at night and we would all be happy'. But that was then and in recent years things have got a lot harder in Darwin for the Longrassers. These days such accommodation is rare. In a recent interview Anne Phelan, a prominent Gallery owner and dealer in Aboriginal art was described as making 'no apology for the fact that mandatory sentencing and the police action she demands when things get rough outside (her gallery), is applied primarily to Aborigines'.¹

In the Forum held in association with the exhibition, a secondary school student asked the artists to tell her whether it was art or politics they were on about. The answer is both and cannot be otherwise because in every sense the exhibition was a RE SITE. It was about the sites, it made us look at these places afresh, it was about the movement between the sites and across the larger site, and it was a recitation of the strengths of contemporary art in the NT and also necessarily a reminder of the complex and fraught connections between art, politics, history and place.

¹ A Plague on their houses by Murray Mottram, The Age, March 18, 2000

Suzanne Spinner was invited back to Darwin for Re-Site by 24 HR ART and contributed an essay to the catalogue.

Unfortunately she could only stay for the first week and missed out on the closing performance by Bihla Smith and Barbara Pitman which reprised, with new eyes and older bodies, a performance they made ten years before.



Installation shot of re-site showing Pam Lofts fandangle/fantale/fandancer/fantasy.



Ingo Kleinert, 100% Tracey 95.6 at 24HR Art

Hottest little gallery in the world

24HR Art, the NT Centre for Contemporary Art, opened 10 years ago in Darwin. It is called 24HR Art because it began life in a disused 24 hour petrol station.

In 1994 it moved to its present site, the former Parap Cinema beside the Saturday market. 24 HR Art has been dubbed the hottest little gallery in the world and, despite the installation of ceiling fans, on a steamy day in March or November, it is. Not surprisingly, at one point its logo incorporated a melting digital watch showing 24.00 over a ubiquitous tropical sunset.

24HR Art is, like the 12 other contemporary art spaces dotted around the country, jointly funded by federal and state or territory governments to exhibit and promote cutting edge art. Although it can sell work, it is not required to; its charter is to show work that is not easily marketed either because it is ephemeral or installation, performance or multimedia-based or simply new and unfamiliar to audiences. However the gallery is significantly different from the other contemporary art spaces that make up the national chain because it is in Darwin and the NT is different in ways that qualify, constrain and expand the opportunities for contemporary art practice.

When viewed creatively, these constraints, in particular a small population and vast distances, have become its greatest opportunities. Even remoteness from the southern metro centres of influence is not always a bad thing as Thelma John, former Assistant Director said in 1994: "Biennales in distant cities represent what we, the inhabitants here like to think we have escaped from." Remoteness is relative and 24HR Art is in the midst of the land and the Aboriginal artists who work in and from it. It is also closer to Asia and so an ongoing dialogue with contemporary artists from South East Asia has been a

feature of its program through artist exchanges, workshops and residencies.

Contemporary artists and curators continue to be inexorably drawn to the NT as a site of the exotic, the authentic, the 'other' Australia and come to make contact with the land and (Aboriginal) culture. 24HR Art has frequently brokered and mediated that contact, to ensure it is a 2-way exchange that feeds and informs local artists and audiences. Visiting artists and curators invariably call in and get a fix on the place, they are welcomed and briefed at the centre before they venture out; visits to artists and communities are arranged and specialised guides found to introduce them to the country and the art, even to billet them and drive them back to the airport. Local artists have made many valuable and lasting professional contacts during the long drive to Kakadu.

24HR Art's strength has been its democracy and inclusiveness. The themes for the Annual Members' Show have been well chosen to trawl up potent images already rife within the community: dogs, cars and tourism had something for everybody, as did snakes, serpents and crocodiles, and roadtrains coming at the height of Jabailuka protests attracting the yellowcake spin. This year the decade was celebrated with a reprise of the first show, *Ideal Format*, with 300 postcard size canvas boards being sent in by past and present members. The responses to *Ideal Format10* typify the diversity with a number of artists making pieces related to the recent demolition of the Hotel Darwin, others responding to the issue of mandatory sentencing, while another artist makes a feast of Hockney's *Grand*

Canyon in 8 tiny panels.

A distinguishing feature of 24HR Art has been the generosity and panache of its openings. They are significant events with well-chosen speakers, interesting catalogues, themed art food and special entertainment where every opportunity is taken to involve different elements of the community. A feature of *Snakes and Serpents* was a regular gig for the local snake guru who brought his bag of live and deadly pythons into the gallery every Saturday morning during the show. Since returning to Melbourne 3 years ago, my children have been appalled at how boring art openings are in the big smoke and have stopped coming with me: "You call that an opening! Nobody spoke, nobody sang, nobody performed, and where was the food, and why did they all go home so early?"

Over the decade, contemporary art has successfully insinuated itself into the social life of the community. Going to see the latest exhibition has become part of the ritual Darwin Saturday morning activity: go to Parap Market, have a laksa and a satay, order a green pawpaw salad, buy a bunch of giant heliconias and then check out the art. The daunting task for the Director and the programming committee is to tune the mix, follow the harder more conceptual show with another more accessible one, and provide a window for every opportunity.

At times, 24HR Art has been required to function more like a community art space, responding to groups as diverse as the Homebirth Association and the Greek Glendi committee; but this too has been a strength. It

has taken on curating and exhibiting Year 12 student work in an annual *Exit Art* show and offers an exhibition in the first year out to a graduate artist chosen by the Director from the Northern Territory University Art School. Under the direction of Steve Fox it initiated a prison art program focusing on Aboriginal artists which resulted in a near sell-out show at a commercial Aboriginal art gallery in town.

24HR Art has promulgated both celebrations and critiques of the place in important exhibitions like *100% Tracy* which focused on artists using corrugated iron as a way of reconfiguring the traumatic experience of the cyclone, and more recently with *Veneer*, which interrogated the new built environment of Darwin and the erasure of the tropical vernacular architecture. At the same time, 24HR Art functions as a cosmopolitan centre and point of connection for the dissemination of the hot issues, current in the rest of Australia and internationally, and last year it jointly hosted NxT, the first NT Multimedia Symposium.

Ten years on, 24HR Art's achievements are manifold and manifest and a real home now exists for emerging and established contemporary artists in the NT.

Suzanne Spinner was invited back to Darwin by 24HR Art to join in the 10 year celebrations and wrote an essay for the catalogue of RESITE which examined 24HR Art's history and locale.