

Other Side Art and Generosity of Spirit

Welcome everyone – I am Erica Green, Director of the Samstag Museum of Art – and I thank you all for coming today for our opening of the two final exhibitions in our 2010 program – ***Other side Art: Trevor Nickolls, a survey of paintings and drawings 1972-2007*** – and – ***A Generosity of Spirit: Recent Australian Women’s Art from the QUT Art Collection***.

Firstly – on behalf of the University of South Australia – may I acknowledge that we are meeting on the traditional country of the Kurna people of the Adelaide Plains. We recognise and respect the Kurna people’s cultural heritage and beliefs – and also their continuing relationship with the land – and we acknowledge their importance to the Kurna people living today.

Ladies and gentlemen – I am absolutely delighted to **welcome Trevor Nickolls today** – the artist whose survey exhibition is presented so splendidly here – around us – in our ground floor Gallery one. Welcome also to **Vivien Anderson** from Vivien Anderson Gallery who represents Trevor in Melbourne and is a long-time supporter of Trevor and his work – and also Angelique Tyrone – who represents Trevor in South Australia.

I am also especially pleased and grateful that the curator **Stephen Rainbird** – has come here from Brisbane today and will talk with us shortly about his exhibition – *A Generosity of Spirit* – which is in the upstairs galleries .

And may I additionally extend a very special welcome to **Mr Nigel Relph**, who is the Chair of the Samstag Museum of Art Board. Nigel has only very recently moved to Adelaide from the United Kingdom – to take up the position Pro Vice Chancellor, International & Development, here at the University of South Australia.

In fact – if you don’t mind – I’d like to take this opportunity to publicly congratulate Nigel on his appointment – and welcome him to his special role of working with the Samstag Museum.

Ladies and gentlemen – the two very thoughtfully curated exhibitions we are celebrating today are a tribute to the work of the Australian University art museums network – of which the Samstag Museum is proud to be an active member. You might not know – but the University art museum

sector is actually one of the biggest producers of original, high-quality exhibitions of contemporary art – and there is an increasing level of cooperation beginning to occur amongst us at a number of levels – including the exchange of exhibitions.

The first of our exhibitions today – ***Other side Art: Trevor Nickolls, a survey of paintings and drawings 1972-2007*** – is a project of the University of Melbourne’s Ian Potter Museum of Art – and its tour to Adelaide has been made possible by NETS Victoria.

Curated by Michael O’Ferrall – *Other side Art* is the first museum-quality survey of the work of renowned South Australian Indigenous artist, Trevor Nickolls – and brings together – for the first time – over fifty of his paintings from public and private collections across Australia – crystallising Trevor’s remarkable thirty-five year career into this powerful exhibition.

Trevor’s works reflect his personal experience as a Nunga man and his much-travelled relationship to land, place and history.

With **Yvonne Koolmatjie** – he is the only South Australian artist to have been selected to represent Australia at a Venice Biennale – in the official Australia Pavilion.

Known as ‘the father of urban aboriginal art’ – a description coined by Brenda L Croft – Trevor Nickolls is a graduate of the South Australian School of Art – and in the process of developing his own iconic language he has significantly influenced subsequent generations of urban Indigenous artists. As Michael O’Ferrall says in his catalogue essay

“.... Nickolls’s art traces a continuous and highly individual engagement with the burning issues that have animated the political and artistic landscape in Australia since the 1960s and his work articulates the broader collective concerns of a whole nation struggling to come to terms with its past – and fractured national identity”

So – with that as backdrop – I hope you can appreciate the tremendous significance of this influential artist, and the special insight that the exhibition offers us – in understanding the evolution of his art.

May I say – the Samstag Museum has a very longstanding commitment to presenting contemporary Australian Indigenous culture. While we don’t have anywhere near the resources of the big museums – the Samstag Museum has nonetheless over the years undertaken a number of

exceptional projects that contribute to an understanding of Indigenous culture – and of which we are extremely proud.

The distinguished artist – **Ningurra Napurrula** – a ‘first-contact’, Gibson-desert Aboriginal woman, who was associated with the very beginnings of the Papunya Tula art movement –enjoyed pride of place in Samstag’s inaugural 2007 exhibition – *Wonderful World*.

Ningurra’s work is about ‘the origin of things’ – and I felt that her presence was like a blessing on the birth of the Samstag Museum of Art.

A project that I curated many years ago for the 1994 Adelaide Festival – **ngurra camp/home/country** – involved a collaboration between Ann Mosey and the brilliant Dolly Nampijinpa Daniels – a Walpiri woman and traditional dreaming owner – sadly now passed on – who transported her astonishing Yuendumu humpy home to Adelaide – and recreated it in the old University Art Museum at Underdale. The catalogue essay was presented in the Walpiri language – something that I don’t think has ever subsequently been matched.

Last year we presented **Skin** – works from this University’s **Max Hart Collection of Aboriginal bark paintings** – curated by Susan Jenkins – and we also presented **Yvonne Koolmatrie’s** marvellous, beautiful, Eel Trap – woven from the sedge grasses of Ngarrindjeri country and specially commissioned for the University Collection.

I was delighted to see Yvonne’s Eel Trap featured in **Hetti Perkins’** superb three part series – ‘art + soul’ – shown just recently on ABC television – and filmed by Warwick Thornton – which reminded us of the profound significance, power and depth of Aboriginal culture – in all its forms – and how Aboriginal culture of the past, informs everything about the present.

Next year we are presenting **Stop(the)gap/Mind(the)gap: International Indigenous art in motion** – a major ‘international Indigenous moving image’ project – developed for the 2011 BigPond Adelaide Film Festival, in partnership with the Samstag Museum of Art and curated by Brenda Croft.

So – as I say – Samstag has an ongoing commitment to celebrating Indigenous culture – and – why not? As Hetti Perkins says – quoting her famous father, Charles Perkins – “**we can’t live in the past, but the past lives in us**”.

Today we are pleased – and proud – to celebrate Trevor Nickolls.

I would particularly like to acknowledge NETS Victoria for their generous support in enabling this important exhibition to travel to Trevor's hometown – South Australia. NETS have underwritten the tour of the exhibition – and without that support we would not have been able to include an exhibition of this calibre in our program. My thanks to our colleague university art museum, the Ian Potter Museum of Art – and the exhibition curator Michael O'Ferrall – for their scholarship and determination to make this ambitious survey of Trevor Nickolls' work possible.

Please note that you might like to join us in a few weeks – on Saturday 27 November at 3pm – to hear Trevor Nickolls talk about his work and life. An ezine reminder will be sent out leading up to this event.

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Now – if I may quickly turn to our other exhibition – which is presented in the upstairs galleries – ***A Generosity of Spirit: Recent Australian Women's Art from the QUT Art Collection.***

It's not my intention to talk too much about *A Generosity of Spirit* – because we are very fortunate to have the exhibition's curator – Stephen Rainbird – here to do just that!

But I must thank Stephen for coming to Adelaide today. Stephen is one of Australia's most experienced curators working in the University art museum sector. He was the driving force in establishing the Queensland University of Technology Art Museum – and in developing the enviable QUT Art Collection from which the works in *A Generosity of Spirit* are drawn.

And most recently – he has been responsible for establishing QUT's brilliant new William Robinson Gallery – in what was Queensland's original old Government House. One of Stephen's special skills – by the way – is his ability to attract substantial financial donations and gifts of works of art to his cultural projects.

I – for one – would like to know some of his secrets!

I must mention that this exhibition also acknowledges the generosity of QUT alumnus and benefactor **Betty Quelhurst** (1919–2008), whose long life was sustained by her commitment to her art. During her later years she turned her attention to philanthropy and became an important supporter of the QUT Art Museum. I understand Betty's relatives are here today.

A Generosity of Spirit: Recent Australian Women's Art from the QUT Art Collection features key works by twenty prominent contemporary Australian women artists. I won't name them all – you can enjoy finding that out as you explore the show. Stephen has acquired the works for the QUT Art Collection over the last four years.

So – I give my thanks to our colleague institution – the QUT Art Museum – and particularly to Stephen Rainbird, a colleague whom I value closely. The exhibition title says it all: *A Generosity of Spirit* highlights the importance of giving and generosity – and that is something which underpins the work of art museums and cultural activity generally. So thank you to QUT and to dear Betty Quelhurst – for her inspiration and selflessness.

Indeed – thank you all for your support of the Samstag Museum – and for coming today. Can I suggest that we take a small break to refresh your glasses – and then we can convene upstairs at 4pm – where Stephen Rainbird will talk about the exhibition – and perhaps share some of his secrets about acquiring works of art for a public collection.

Thank you all – I'll see you upstairs – soon.