

20 February 2009

Sharon Grierson MP

Opening remarks

Campus as Place (NSW 2308) by Philip Pollard and

Footprints in the Forest by Soozie Coumbe

I acknowledge that we gather together on Awabakal land and pay my respects to elders past and present and any Indigenous elders here tonight.

Firstly, I'm sorry I'm not Richard Leplastrier who had intended to officially launch this exhibition. Add that minor detail to these 2 amazing exhibitions, and I think you can understand why I might feel just a little intimidated. But it is a privilege to launch with you these two very different exhibitions, united in their sensitive translation of place and the reciprocity that exists between the human experience and the natural and built landscape.

Campus as Place (NSW 2308) by Philip Pollard and *Footprints in the Forest* by Soozie Coumbe, form part of a Doctorate and a Master of Philosophy respectively. They hang from extensive experience of 2 unique places, carefully analysed, interpreted and documented in learned and important theses. Exposing the many layers that lie below these exhibitions and doing justice to that scholarship demands further consideration by all of us.

Soozie's *Footprints in the Forest*, arises from a personal path tread in the forest landscape around her home - the forest of the valley of Tanban on Eungai Creek – a tributary of the Nambucca River. Soozie reveals the footprints of others who trod in that forest, exposing the human interaction and endeavours over time and allowing us to reflect on twin experiences - the impact of the forest on the human, the impact of the human on the forest – mirrors of each other that tell different but intertwined stories.

There is something so stable about the tree form – a stability and reassurance however that is dramatically changed by felling and fire. Two linked images, each uniquely different.

The depiction of the axes – symbols of progress by everyman, symbols of mastering of nature, symbols of enrichment and of destruction; tell a story of man's interaction with the forest and allow the forest to speak to us about that interaction. The neatly folded blankets –

coloured by natural dyes from the forest, bundles of order and comfort and security for the soldier settlers— just as the forest itself provided security and comfort and order.

The woven nests tell a twin story too – the story of the forest as a refuge and host – but look closer and you will see the nests are woven from telecommunication wire left behind on the forest floor – the detritus of man’s interactions and communications with each other.

There is an acute sensitivity in the media and form chosen by Soozie to depict this story of human engagement in *place* - the detail, the tactile, the complex and simple, pay homage to the forest in its eternal, all-seeing form.

The ceramic axe heads – formed and shaped by human hands. The white woven branch shapes, binding and connecting human activity to the forest. And discover the topographical maps of the area hugging the axe handles – further connections between human existence and the forest. The skeleton arrangement of the branches evokes indigenous x-ray art form. And the beams and metal spikes embedded in the charcoal, symbols of both creation and destruction.

Conflict and acceptance provokes the question –Is the landscape a sacrifice to human endeavour or a patient and everlasting observer, the holder of stories over time?

Thank you, Soozie, for drawing us into the exquisite nature of this experience and dilemma. At a time when our Victorian friends are beset with forest bushfires of a new magnitude may there forever be footprints and forests and artists like you who explore the spaces between.

Philip’s Campus as Place (NSW 2308) tells a less ephemeral story, one hidden only to those who do not want to see. If you have been an inhabitant of this Campus then you are drawn by this exhibition into an important discussion where the conclusion hangs suspended.

Philip’s thesis documents the constructed physical environment and its interplay with the natural environment on campus over a 15 year period from 1990 -2005. The exhibition reflects parts of that story, the complete art work is outside in the campus place.

It begins with the restoration of a wetlands created when the municipal dump - man’s special donation to nature, stopped the water flows created a swamp, providing a potential extension

to the fledgling Shortland Wetlands and now featuring as part of the International RAMSA wetland. From the creation of this special environmental learning space, the methods used - collaboration, the focus on synergies between the landscape, learning and sustainability, were then applied to the built form on campus. The process of data collection and validation so important to measuring and maintaining the health of the wetlands were retained to measure the health and effectiveness of the built form, the natural landscape and the spaces in between, or those third spaces that Architects understand.

A special series of buildings are featured in Philip's work- this Gallery, Biraban, the ICT building, Design building, Life Sciences and the Architecture studios as well as the places they create and co-exist within.

Thinking was freed from past constraints - cross discipline collaboration, the use of limited design competitions, consultation with all client groups who would use the buildings, wide consultation & engagement would become the norm. And with the needs of the wetlands shaping the process principles of land and catchment management as well as conservation and sustainability were embedded.

Landsoft, a new land management approach shaped the design of built forms and the landscape. Permaculture, mulching, native species selection, constructing mounds and swales to direct water flows into the wetlands, all came together to persuade percolation and slower movement of water around the site, deepening the top soil, increasing the moisture content and over time replacing the dry sclerophyll campus forest to the more fire resistant environment usually found along creek banks and beds. This was a wonderful feat of adaptation. If like me you see Mother Nature as quite fickle and whimsical in her feminine ways, perhaps you too will be amused and impressed by the subtle coaxing of her on this campus site to give of her best. Well done to everyone involved!

In the built form depicted around us here, the very special suite of buildings co-exists within the landscape, rather than imposing themselves upon the landscape. Spaces were created that empower the users. From the shared seeds of ideas, places were created that nurture ideas, enhance the human experience and increase the enjoyment and appreciation of the place they create – both natural and physical entwined in a symbiotic relationship. The character and sensitivity of those intertwinings created 'the third spaces' - those synergous places where the interaction and engagement is deeper, where intellect is encouraged to meet the soul.

The Biraban building, place of the eagle hawk includes a spirit wall, earth walls and rain that falls in a waterfall wall. Moving walls and frames bring the outside in, making the bush tucker plantings and the wonderful sculptures of the Art Node an accessible experience. I'm not aboriginal so I can't be sure but I would think that indigenous students who study there would glow with cultural pride in a building that embraces them rather than alienates them.

Look at the photos closely and you will see a myriad of innovative design features – rooves like broad brimmed hats, twin rooves that capture breezes and shelter, ramps and walkways that connect more than just buildings, all working in tandem with nature.

The suite of buildings, some depicted here won over 50 architectural design and environmental awards – which included 2 Blackets, 2 Sir John Sulmans, 3 Alfred Sharp landscape awards one a special National Banksia award for sustainable design over 10 years. The Biraban building took out the highly prestigious and competitive Sir Zelman Cowan award for architecture, beating Melbourne's Federation Square in the process!

From this amazing achievement which belonged to so many, Campus as Place (NSW 2308) hosted weekly tours, featured in international publications and was part of a Memorandum of Understanding with the Rocky Mountain Institute and Newcastle City Council through the work of Pete Dormand. Amory Lovens, the founder of RMI, Houston Eubank and David Suzuki came to Newcastle and I as a new member of parliament made sure my shadow minister visited to see this wonderful living transformational place. Campus NSW 2308 was a sustainable living learning centre engaging with an international fraternity of scholars and kindred souls. Fulfilling the true learning exchange purpose of a university!

Philip's exhibition only skims the surface of the human stories created through respect for place. And if you like I have been missing 'FRAGILE' from outside the Auckland Street Law and Grad School building, you can at least revisit that affection with the photograph displayed here. I miss greeting 'FRAGILE' every morning as I drove to my office, especially on those mornings when I felt a little on the fragile side myself.

Philip's work ends with a Postscript which speaks for itself. It reflects on natural and physical places transformed in a different way – a mighty tree felled, a landmark building altered and a vision lost - *Campus NSW 2308* as an integrated, holistic place now degrading through ignorance and exclusion. A place now determined by a master plan, no longer guided

by a philosophy of collaboration and sustainability or a brief that demands that natural and physical spaces and structures are created that will nurture the land and the mind and engage the soul, so that the greatest potential of the human spirit is achieved.

So watch the DVD of outrage by those who understood and study the before and after photographs that depict the actions of those that didn't. And applaud the work that Philip led and the body of work that tells this important story. Work that only a very special and creative artist could achieve

Again, I'm privileged to officially open these exceptional and well curated exhibitions. I congratulate both Soozie and Philip and wish them success in their theses and future endeavours. May you both go on to create and interpret for us wonderful places.

Sharon Grierson MP

Federal Member for Newcastle