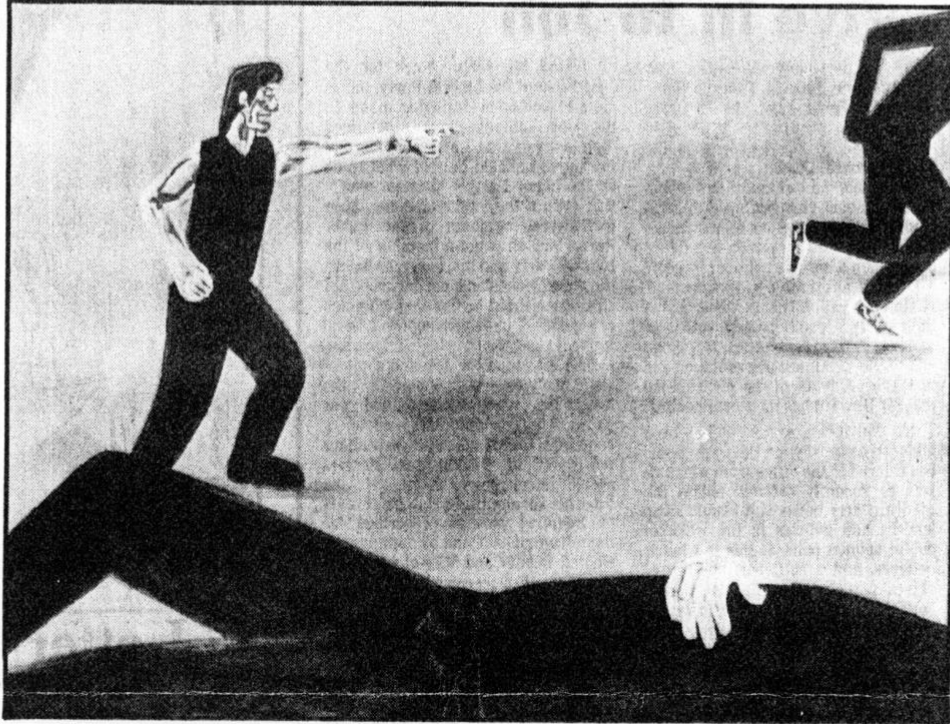


A runaway impression wins coveted fellowship



Hit and Run by Jon Campbell . . . 'in painting an essence rather than a physical reality I don't give all the details'

I LAST wrote about the Keith and Elisabeth Murdoch Travelling Fellowship in 1983.

At that time, like the other critics, I was an outsider passing judgment on a display of selected works after the winner's name had been announced.

The \$12,000 Fellowship, a descendant of the old National Gallery Travelling Scholarship, which was first awarded in 1887 to John Longstaff, is held every two years and is open to qualified students of the Victorian College of the Arts who have graduated in the previous four years.

When it was announced last night at the Victorian College of the Arts Gallery opening that the 1987 Murdoch Travelling Fellowship had been won by Jon Campbell I wasn't a bit surprised.

As one of the judges — along with Frances Lindsay, director of the Melbourne University Gallery, and Gareth Sansom, Dean of the School of Art (whose role was that of a devil's advocate) — I was, on this occasion, in the privileged position of having seen all the submissions and not just the ones considered suitable for public exhibition.

Entering the gallery on judging day and seeing the samples of each artist's work, I was struck by the difference between the 1983 and the 1987 entries.

Four years ago I had commented on the eagerness of the young artists to embrace the latest developments in painting's rapid rehabilitation in the '80s. It seemed to me that many of the competing painters were content to use contemporary German neo-expressionism (with a few glances at the Italians) as a

Jon Campbell's *Hit and Run* was the obvious winner, says ROBERT ROONEY, our Melbourne art critic and a judge in this year's Keith and Elisabeth Murdoch Travelling Fellowship

stylish springboard for their own work.

However, in 1987 there is among the entries no one dominant mode of expression. Although painting is still the preferred medium, sculpture is gaining a foothold in quantity if not quality.

Of the sculptures which caught my attention, mainly because I couldn't help bumping into them, were Loretta Quinn's kitsch grotto *Islands* encrusted with shells and Luanne Noble's Gaudi-like mirror and mosaic group installation which I prefer.

Outside, Malcolm Bywaters' thoughtfully slapped together

I have already seen, and in some instances came by courtesy of Melbourne commercial galleries.

I must admit that I was immediately attracted to Jon Campbell's paintings *The Car or the Head?* and *Hit and Run*. A closer examination of the other artists' works did nothing to alter my opinion that he should be number one. Fortunately, Frances Lindsay agreed with me.

In the interview, Campbell admitted to an interest in the paintings of Leon Golub and Alex Katz, but his own work is far from being derivative of the two Americans.

No mode of expression was dominant this year

wooden figures showed some advancement on his post-graduate work in 1986.

On the evidence of so many familiar names and works among the 42 applicants, it would seem that it is no longer the case (if, in fact, it ever was) that young artists are being given a raw deal by galleries and have few opportunities to exhibit.

A large proportion of the fellowship entrants have had solo exhibitions and have been included in group shows. Consequently, a number of the submissions consisted of work

Of his own work Campbell has written: "I think differently about how I paint from one work to another. The consistency between the work is to do with the ideas — a fight, a guitar player, a suburban beach. They are stylistically different because the images hold the painting together."

"There is a similar reality from a street rumble to a party. I kind of see myself as part of all the figures in the painting. I could be one of the people, yet I haven't painted myself consciously. The interaction of figures is enough for me to consider now."

"In *Rumble* (a work not submitted), I could have painted something in the background to state a time or place but this scene could have happened anywhere I didn't specify. To work out how to paint five or ten figures is enough."

"In painting an essence rather than a physical reality I don't give all the details. Again in *Rumble*, I could have given one figure a red shirt or a jacket, black pants. The red sometimes describes a figure, makes the shadow, or is blood. I work almost everything out on paper."

"Realism . . . I never stick with it. I always end up doing something different and making another picture out of it."

What clinched it for me, however, was Campbell's strong folio of drawings and "bits and pieces", of which several were actually miniature paintings. (Many submissions were weakened by careless selections of drawing.)

His simple, sometimes cartoony style could deceive some dim-witted observers into thinking that he can't draw, but I found them to be witty, accurate notations from his own experiences.

They made me think that when Campbell gets to New York he should forget the art galleries and concentrate on the city and its people.

If I had to choose a runner-up, I would say that David Palliser deserves a special mention. At this early stage in his career he seems to have trouble translating his personal imagery (a type of biblical surrealist fantasy) into completely satisfying paintings.

Palliser's drawings, on the other hand, are often more convincing. When he overcomes these problems, with a bit of luck his work should move ahead.

ARTS

Artistic chums in a bicycle mood

ART

Melbourne galleries:
On Your Bike,
George Paton Gallery;
Suburban Stomp,
200 Gertrude St Gallery

ROBERT ROONEY

nised several names. Why mention it at all? I do so because the exhibition, which is part of the Spoleto Fringe Festival, is a perfect epilogue to my recent remarks about Spoleto's pathetic representation of the visual arts.

After dodging a sudden downpour, my next stop was the Melbourne University. Swiftly negotiating the path between stalls selling hippie clothes, pottery and "homemade rainbow candles" (Ugh!), I arrived at the George Paton Gallery. Its latest exhibition, *On Your Bike*, is an all-chums-together display of paintings and sculptures by four bike-riding artists: Anton Hassell, Tim Jones, Jon Campbell and Stuart MacFarlane.

If it's not a bird and it's not a plane, then it's probably both — and a sculpture by Anton Hassell. His *Bike Plane* has a metal bird body shaped like a battered side-car, a propeller beak and dubiously aerodynamic wings, while *Birdbike*, which makes a rather obvious comment on American imperialism, is a giant camouflaged eagle carrying missiles in

its beak. Both pieces are supported by a rough assemblage of rusting bike frames and wheels.

I really hated Tim Jones's sculptures of horses and armoured knights (after Uccello's *The Rout of San Romano*) in his show with Hassell at 70 Arden Street Gallery a few months ago. I prefer less illustrative works such as the shroud-like monolith made of wooden lathes in a recent 200 Gertrude Street Gallery sculpture exhibition. Jones's bike sculpture *Boyfriend for the Little Duchess* looks a bit like a Dalek sporting a spiky Red Indian head-dress, but it could also be a wooden cousin of John Walker's much-abused *Infanta*.

Jones's wood-engraving *Looking for Warm Air Pockets* is a miniature version of the same subject, presumably an actual event, as Stuart MacFarlane's painting (and drawing), *The Bike Rider*, which shows a naked male bike-rider being pursued by a police car. The charcoal drawing of a bike-riding female flasher and the oil *Lillian and Small Bike* are also suggestive of certain sexual connotations in the exhibition's title.

I can see why some of my oversensitive colleagues have dismissed Jon Campbell's work. Subtlety and sensitivity are not among the strong points of the paintings of macho-aggro in Campbell's exhibition, *Suburban Stomp*, at 200 Gertrude Street Gallery; nor is stylistic consistency, so he says. In them, images of the street and the outsiders' rumble are cut back to the bare essentials in basic graphic

styles that reduce his brawling subjects to dark silhouettes or forever simulations of a two-color woodcut's extreme contrasts. Sure, Campbell is uneven, but at the moment a few examples of his slapped-up aggression are preferable to galleries full of wimpy sensitivity.

Campbell's contributions to *On Your Bike* are, in fact, fairly consistent in style. They are images of drinking and people enjoying themselves as much as he seems to enjoy painting them.

Untitled by Jon Campbell:
his stepped-up aggression
is preferable to galleries
full of wimpy sensitivity.

