



F. X. Harsano's *Security Approach*: a warning that we are all targets

ART

Power and oppression

The art of social commentary and conscience on display

By Dorothy Erickson

The third Artists' Regional Exchange in Perth – a biennial event facilitating exchanges of ideas on the visual arts in Australia and its neighbours – has a stimulating group of exhibitions on show.

Many of the participants conducted residencies, tours and talks throughout Australia and South-East Asia.

The fruits of these visits are often the most considered works in the three venues: the new Perth Institute of Contemporary Arts (PICA) hosts performance works and installations; the Art Gallery of WA has Nolene Lucas' installation produced during her residency in Bangkok; while at the Laurence Wilson Art Gallery artists exhibiting include Malaysian Wong Hoy Cheong, Filipino Alan Rivera and Australians Douglas Sheerer, Glen Clarke, Jill Barker and Pamela Croft.

Croft, an urban Murri from Queensland, has teamed with European-descended Barker to build a cultural bridge between the two Australias. The result is a



The Story Bridge, by Barker and Croft

multi-layered installation story that seeks to explore lifestyles, peoples and how they are earthed. It tells of protector spirits who guard and guide urban Aborigines as their culture changes through interaction with whites. *The Story Bridge*, with delicate and evocative text, refers to the rainbow serpents of the rivers of Perth and Brisbane, markers placed on bridges, storytelling common to both of their life practices, secrets and hidden agendas.

The work, using rows of gum leaves – to be read as text and incorporating photographs of the ephemeral markers – is a poignant statement saying that, just as the work is altered by decay, so the narrative needs to be reassessed and changed.

The work of F. X. Harsano, a leader in the New Art movement of Indonesia, is social commentary of a different kind. On

display in two venues, it speaks of power and oppression. The PICA installation, created during a residency in South Australia, is loaded with complex symbolism – at the simplest level, a seat of power surveys the others signified by ranks of crimson-stained cloth and broken twigs.

At the Laurence Wilson Gallery, Harsano has *Security Approach*, screen-printed fabric installed on human-sized frames. Each image has a rifle sight targeting the anatomy – a warning to beware. A lone panel, inset with a mirror, alerts the viewer to the fact that oppression is a universal condition. It can take many forms and most of us are targets: people whose land is resumed by a council or a supermarket shopper coerced into purchasing by the might of multinational manipulation. These pieces and many more provide thought-provoking displays that remind us that art can have a social conscience. ■

ARX3 is in Perth until May 24

1968

*That was the year, she said,
When I for seven days
Shared a Venetian bed
With one who went his ways
Without complaint or praise.*

*And all of that debauch
Which I can now recall
Is how we used to watch
Wave-glitter on the wall:
That, and the year, is all.*

Graeme Wilson