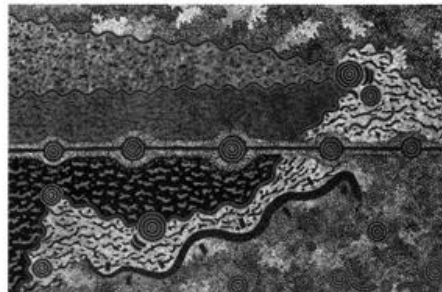# Sydney

PRINT November 1986

Thomas McEvilly reviews Sydney Biennale 1986

Heinz Emigholz, untitled drawing from "Die Basis des Make-Up" (The basis of make-up), 1974–83, ink on paper, sheet 20 × 24".

Michael Nelson Tjakamarra, Possum Dreaming, 1985, synthetic polymer on canvas, ca. 48 × 71¼". From Biennale of Sydney.

here. The confrontation of "disorder" (social rebellion) and "order" (consumer society) is manifested in Metzel's sculpture as the "counter-order," a paradox that art makes possible perhaps in order to move beyond the limitations of its customary domestication.

Heinz Emigholz
Galerie Eisenbahnstrasse

Since the early '70s the Hamburg-based filmmaker Heinz Emigholz has been producing films based on inflexible, predetermined structural concepts. His *Schenec-Tady 1 bis 3* (Schenec-Tady 1 to 3, 1975) is a "*Landschaftsfilm*" (landscape film), a quick-fire sequence of single shots taken by a camera mounted at a set point in the landscape and programmed to turn on its axis. The "naturalness" of the landscape is translated into a series of signs that thematize the artificiality of a representation. *Normalsatz* (Standard rate, 1981) places this theme into a social context, reducing language and the rituals of communication to essential repetitive patterns whose mechanics either alienate or amuse us. In *Die Basis des Make-Up* (The basis of make-up, 1982), over ten notebooks containing written texts, drawings, and pasted-in materials are presented page for page in film format. The time-lapse between successive still shots is so brief that the viewer cannot see anything distinctly. One's resulting frustration turns into the irritating realization that even if the time allotted to the forms in the individual frames were extended, the "reality" reflected in them would be hardly more

accessible: the signs would remain signs.

This is also true of Emigholz's graphic works, montages of images gathered from the most varied contexts that nonetheless fail to provide either a dreamlike narrative or a visionary setting. Rather, each work possesses something of a didactic crypticness, as if its meaning had been made deliberately inaccessible. His 1977 cover illustration for the periodical *Idiolects* is central to understanding the concept of these works. It is a rebus of found images that have been transcribed into his standardized style of black-and-white line drawing, a dictionary entry that perfectly synopsizes all of the works shown here. It does not represent a newly invented visual language but a "temporary" one whose syntactic structure is unstable, a series of obscure images loosely tacked on to one another. The series "*Die Basis des Make-Up*," 1974–83 (which provided the core material for Emigholz's film of the same title), creates an entire *orbis pictus*, then, but no explanatory code is supplied that would enable us to interpret what we are seeing. When asked, Emigholz is able to tell a detailed "story," often interwoven with personal experiences, for each image; but these insights by no means liberate the viewer, for they only heighten the hermeticism of the as yet unexplained images. This partial knowledge provokes the question, What is an image really, other than a *tertium comparationis* of two subjectivities?

—WOLFGANG MAX FAUST

Translated from the German by Leslie Strickland

Sydney
Biennale of Sydney

The sixth Biennale of Sydney, curated, as was the fourth, by Nick Waterlow, brought to Australia works by artists from 21 countries, including Chile, Cuba, India, and Papua New Guinea. About 25 percent of the participating artists were women. Four Australian aboriginal artists were represented, as was an aboriginal performance group whose work is based on tribal rituals. The fairly wide representation of women and ethnic minorities reflected a desire to be socially as well as artistically true to the overall theme of this massive exhibition, which was Post-Modernism, and attempts to foresee what it will develop into. Entitled "Origins, Originality + Beyond," the exhibition drew to Sydney several dozen artists and critics (including this one) for a ten-week round of lectures, panels, and performances, in which Post-Modernism was alternately lamented as a loss of moral direction and extolled as a sane corrective to Modernist extremes. For the most part, this discourse revealed an impressive lack of agreement about what Post-Modernism is—indeed, whether it is anything—and whether it's good or bad for us.

The artwork was exhibited in several venues. Painting was found primarily in the traditional museum building of the Art Gallery of New South Wales, sculpture in a massive building on a pier in Sydney Harbor, and performance at the Art Gallery, the Performance Space Theater, and else-

where throughout the city. As in any show of this size, the curator made countless decisions that could be second-guessed by others. Most of the works chosen represented three types or categories of art. The central category comprised the self-consciously Post-Modern work, often quotational. Already, a pretty standard list of artists has grown up for this type of work, and the majority on that list were here: Jiří Georg Dokoupil, Eric Fischl, Gérard Garouste, Neil Jenney, Vitaly Komar and Alexander Melamid, Thomas Lawson, Sherrie Levine, Carlo Maria Mariani, David Salle, Nancy Spero, Imants Tillers, and so on. Much of this work was impressive and elegant, from Tillers' parody of an Anselm Kiefer to Salle's familiar *Sleeping in the Corners*, 1985. Some of it was callow and mechanical, like Philip Taaffe's mock Bridget Rileys and Barnett Newmans, which seem to lack the critical sense so fundamental to appropriation work of this kind. Confronted with so much self-referential art, one had to be impressed all over again with the depth and intensity of our culture's connection with painting, which is, as it were, ritually exorcised by works as different as Bertrand Lavier's acrylic-daubed walls and Glen Baxter's cartoonlike parodies of painterly intention and discourse.

A second class of works was less definitively Post-Modern, and, however radical in terms of method and material, retained a classical Modernist air of religiosity or transcendence. In terms of the show's conceptualization, this work illustrated a sense of "origins" that played off against the Post-Modern par-

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This exhibition served two divergent purposes well. It showed the one-foot-in-Modernism-the-other-in-Post-Modernism situation that Western art is now in, and pointed to the desire to give an account of the moment that would be true to both. It inserted Australian artists into the international discourse forcefully and impressively. All this unfolded in a surround of local problems or tensions—audiences sometimes hostile to contemporary art or its discourse,

unsympathetic newspaper critics, a naive cult of personality, a limp response to feminist concerns—that gave outsiders a sense of the difficulty of this undertaking as well as of the need for it.

—*Thomas McEvilley*

Arakawa, *The Virgin, the Vivid, the Fine Today (no. 2)*, 1985–86, oil, acrylic, and pencil on canvas, 5' 10" × 6' 10" including frame.

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—THOMAS McEVILLEY

Tokyo

Arakawa
Satani Gallery

Arakawa was an important leader of Japan's neo-Dada movement around 1960, but moved in 1961 from Tokyo to New York, where he now lives. His work is characterized by its flat geometrical surfaces and by delicate combinations of various kinds of signs, including words, phrases, sentences, numbers, arrows, straight and curved lines, circles, and so on.

For this exhibition, Arakawa created a series of six acrylics, titled "The Desire of the Diagram," 1986, which he dedicated to Shuzo Takiguchi. Takiguchi, who died in 1979 at the time of Arakawa's last major retrospective in Japan, was a friend of both André Breton and Joan Miró, and was himself an important Surrealist poet. As an artist Takiguchi also took up decalcomania only two years after Oscar Dominguez's invention of this technique. Furthermore, as a very influential advocate of contemporary art and a supporter of young artists, he pioneered Japan's avant-garde art scene after World War II and until his death. He also greatly influenced Arakawa: for instance, it was through Takiguchi that Arakawa came to know Marcel Duchamp personally. We could not imagine Arakawa today

without this experience of Duchamp—and of Takiguchi.

In the present series, in addition to various signs that he always uses, Arakawa quotes the city map of New York, as well as that of Shinjuku, Tokyo, where Takiguchi lived. He also carves up the four hieroglyphs of the name "Takiguchi Shuzo"—*Taki, Guchi, Shu, Zo*—repositioning them so that they overlap and pivot around a point. Further, he applies the traditional technique of anamorphosis in one of the paintings, in such a way that the face of the viewer seems to be projected onto the painting. Arakawa combines these themes with great tact to produce a delicate atmosphere.

Nevertheless, he aims not only to produce visual pleasure but above all to express his abstruse metaphysical concept of "spacetime" through subtle and beautiful optical effects, by which he attempts to encompass the entire range of existence, from the "I" (both Arakawa's individual "I" and, at the same time, the collective "I" of all human beings) to "spacetime." The word "Blank," written into one of the paintings, is an essential concept of Arakawa's spacetime theory, which is neither the East Asian concept of *Ma*, that idea of timeless time through which we human beings achieve a sense of eternity, nor the concept of spacetime of contemporary physics. " 'A maker' [of spacetime] cannot know of its own reassembling in spacetime and this brings us to Blank," Arakawa has written. "Spacetime is that set of conditions which determines 'a maker,' if not 'the maker itself.' "

Viewing his work with this under-

standing enables us to recognize Arakawa's underlying purpose. This series will undoubtedly be recognized as one of the high points of his art.
—YOSHIRO NAKASHIMA

152