

# On reflection

## Mirror Mirror: Then and Now

Samstag Museum of Art  
May 14 – July 6, 2010  
By John Neylon

We all know that Narcissus had one very special Facebook friend. Useful things these reflective surfaces, be they a forest pond or the stranger who stares you down in the bathroom each morning. It's been an uneasy relationship, people and mirrors. Medusa and Snow White's Wicked Step Mother can vouch for that. And Alice would surely never trust one again after all she'd been through. Of all the virtual realities humanity has encountered thus far, mirrors have been the slipperiest of companions. Artists have known this for a long time. It could be argued that some of European art's most enigmatic images have involved mirrors in some way. Consider Diego Velázquez's, *Las Meninas* (1656). This is perhaps the most famous "mirror painting" in the history of art. The king and queen's daughter, the Infanta, is shown in the foreground. But is she the true subject of this painting? The reason this is not clear is because the artist has introduced some clever visual games involving reflections. In the background there is a framed unit in which the king and queen appear. It is not certain if this is a painting or a mirror. Whatever the viewer decides significantly

changes the meaning of the work. The presence too of the artist standing in front of his canvas looking towards the viewer might suggest that he's working on the painting that we happen to be looking at right now. Which sort of makes the viewer the artist. No wonder different generations of artists have gone nuts over this picture. Édouard Manet's *Le Bar aux Folies-Bergères* (1882), has had a similar impact. *Le Bar* is one of his best-known and critically acclaimed works. In it, the mirror running the length of the bar creates a "world within a world" which encourages the viewer to feel that he or she is standing in the crowd, looking at the barmaid who is looking back – a kind of visual "loop tape" designed to raise questions about the real subject of the painting. Keep this kind of historical context in mind when approaching *Mirror Mirror: Then and Now* because without it, some of the works' agendas will seem meaningless or trivial. The exhibition brings with it its own slice of history. The crisis and paradigm shifts in art practice associated with 1960s – 1970s Minimalism, Post-Object and Conceptual art led artists to use strategies that confronted old ways and offered new ways of thinking about and making art. This exhibition is in part about the role that mirrors played and continue to play in this process.

Why mirrors? Dr Ann Stephen, curator of *Mirror Mirror* believes that mirrors have played a compelling role in contemporary art. "Artists from Manet to Van Eyck and Magritte have

always been fascinated with mirrors. Mirrors are a source of reflection and self-representation and artists engaged them to tease out the roles of artist, spectator and voyeur. The works in *Mirror Mirror* show artists' continuing fascination with mirrors, particularly the way they appear almost everyday but are full of conundrums, engaging the viewer and artist alike in all kinds of puzzles." The *Then and Now* aspect of the exhibition refers to its time slices, broadly 1960s – 1970s, and contemporary. *Mirror Mirror: Then and Now* presents classic mirror pieces from the 1960s and early 1970s by major artists Robert Smithson, Michelangelo Pistoletto, Art & Language, Ian Burn, Joan Jonas, Robert Rauschenberg, Yoko Ono, Meret Oppenheim, Richard Hamilton and Shusaku Arakawa. Alongside them are works by contemporary Australian artists – Robyn Backen, Christian Capurro, Peter Cripps, Mikala Dwyer, Alex Gawronski, Callum Morton, Eugenia Raskopoulos, Jacky Redgate and Robert Pulie.

*Mirror Mirror* is one of very few exhibitions to be presented in Adelaide since the early 1970s which foregrounds conceptual art practice (of the 60s – 70s period). *Some Recent American Art* at the Art Gallery of South Australia, plus the Gallery's Artlink program and the thrust of the EAF and (then) CAC programmes offered

**"Strange new correspondences reverberate between these 1960s and contemporary artworks."**

extensive exposure at the time. But apart from individual works embedded in general gallery hangs, material evidence of this period and its agendas is thin. How contemporary audiences might cope with the non-sequiturs of Ian Burn's *Mirror Piece* series or Art & Language's entropic "paintings" such as *Untitled Painting (Mirrors)*, (1965), a mirror placed on a canvas covering its entire surface, may prove to be a test of how much patience can be extended to art agendas which have lost their urgency or logic. Having said that, Burn's straightforward comment that "Mirrors interest me because they separate what



Left: *Mirror Mirror - Then and Now*, Richard Hamilton.  
Bottom right: Gabriella Bisetto, *The Ocean Within* (60% of body weight is water), 2007.



## OUT & ABOUT

### ERITREAN BASKET WEAVING WITH MILETE-TSEGA OGBALIDET

**When:** Tuesdays, May 4 – June 29, 2–5pm  
**Where:** Glandore Community Centre, 25 Naldera Street, Glandore, SA  
**Cost:** \$60 Craftsouth Members, \$90 non-members (incl materials)  
Facilitator: Milete-Tsega Ogbalidet learned how to weave the graphic, colourful designs of Central Eritrea's Meblee Kursi baskets from her mother and family when she was a child. In this workshop, participants will use brightly coloured wool and plant fibre to make a traditional flat plate.

### EMMA HACK (AS PART OF THE PENOLA COONAWARRA ARTS FESTIVAL)

**Where:** Penley Estate Winery, Mcleans Road Coonawarra  
**When:** Throughout May with official opening, demonstration and food on Saturday May 8, 10–4pm  
**Phone:** 8736 3211  
Adelaide artist Emma Hack will be exhibiting her latest works at the Penley winery through the month of May as part of the Penola Coonawarra Arts Festival. Visit on May 8 for a chance to see Emma work live and enjoy fabulous food and wine.

### YULPARJA ARTISTS OF BIDYADANGA PRESENTED BY AP BOND IN ASSOCIATION WITH SHORT ST. GALLERY

**Where:** AP Bond Art Dealer, 135 Magill Road, Stepney SA 5069  
**When:** April 22 – May 15  
**Email:** tonybond@bigpond.net.au  
**Phone:** 8363 1351

## Architecture without Paper.

The Hawke Centre at UniSA presents the Kerry Packer Civic Gallery.

Latest exhibition:  
**Architecture without Paper.**  
Open until Wednesday 26 May.

Visit the Kerry Packer Civic Gallery  
Level 3, Hawke Building,  
50 North Terrace, Adelaide.  
Open weekdays 9am – 5pm.

First shown at the Venice Biennale  
2008 *Architecture without Paper* is  
a repertoire of young



**OILS & WATERCOLOURS**  
2 - 22 MAY 2010 by Di King & Alan Louis

