

ARTHUR WICKS

WORKS 1989-92



Works listed and discussed in this booklet relate to:

LAST WORK

an exhibiton at the CITY ART GALLERY
WAGGA WAAGA
10 July to 23 August 1992

PEACE CAR THROUGH EUROPE

a performance work in HOLLAND and GERMANY
using the ARMoured CAR,,
September/October 1990

assisted by the AUSTRALIA COUNCIL,
FOUNDATION de ACHTERSTRAAT,
DAAD,
KUNSTLERHAUS BETHANIEN

MACHINA:PERSONA

exhibited at the ART GALLERY of N.S.W.
10 February to 31 March 1991

It is planned to tour MACHINA:PERSONA
SOUTH and WEST late 1993 through 1994



CITY ART GALLERY 10 JULY 23 AUG 92
40 GURWOOD ST WAGGA WAGGA

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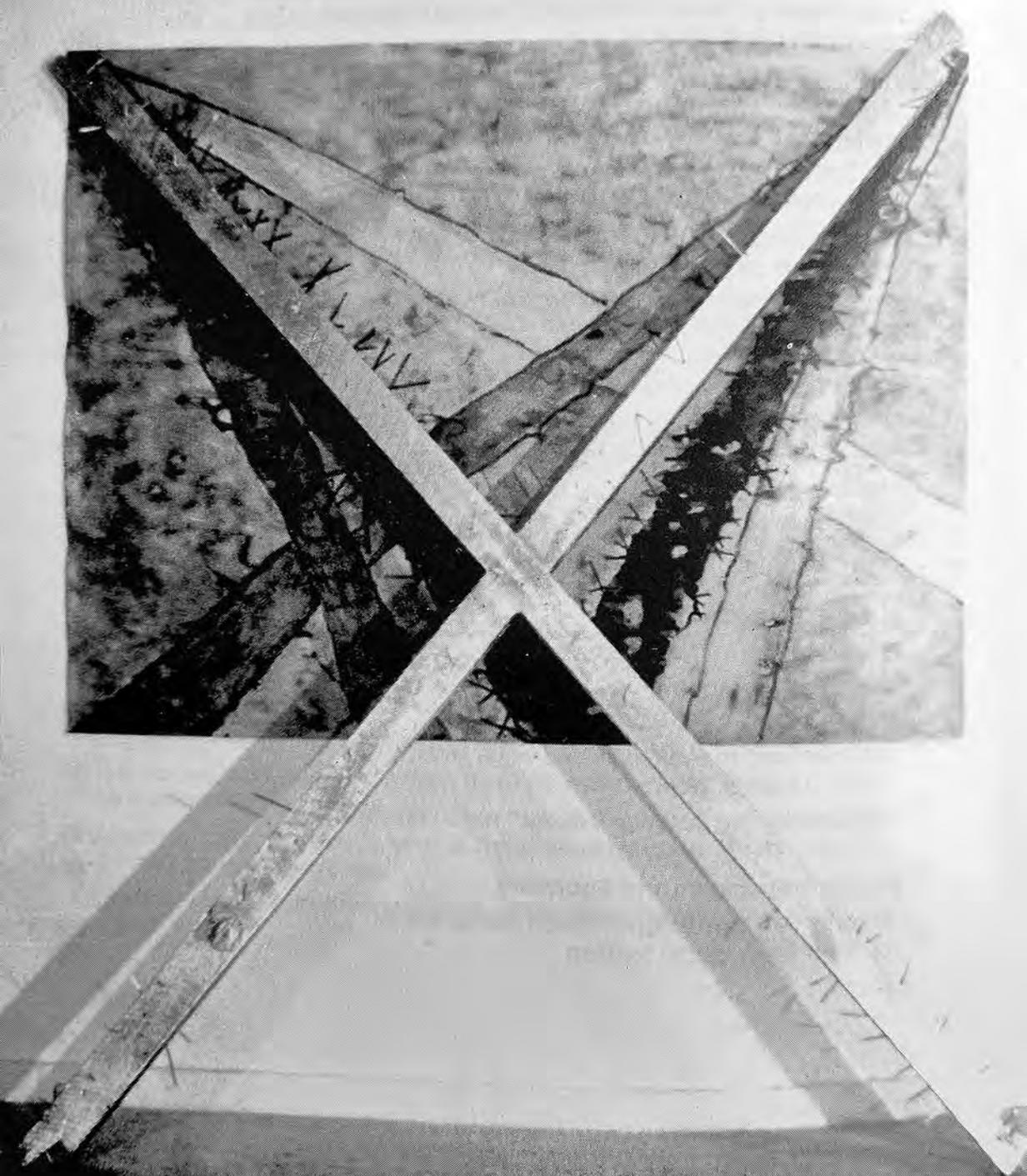
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VULCAN

The Solstice Voyeur appears dressed in an old lounge suit.

His face is covered with clay, or is it a latex mask of his face? From a small speaker attached to his lapel comes the **Vulcan** monologue.

In one hand he brandishes an electric megaphone. He directs the monologue through the megaphone from time to time, towards the audience.

The audience is standing in front of the furnace which rises to a total height of 8 metres above them.

The S.V. distractedly fumbles in his pocket to fast forward the tape.

The S.V. walks among the crowd still using the megaphone occasionally to stress one point or another.

The S.V. brandishes a sheaf of papers; they could quite easily be earlier drafts of this script; no-one is sure.

Hello. Fancy seeing you here. How are you? I'd like to spend some time just talking but I have to move on. There's a lot of other people to say hello to.*Hello! Well, well... long time no see. And how are you today?*

You don't recognise me do you! You've got a short memory! ... Long time no see..... Hello! I'm sure I've seen you before. ... Yes..... Well, fancy seeing you again. .. Well, ... hello... And how are you? And what are you doing here?... Well fancy that... Hello. Hello.... How are you? Good to see you here. What are you doing here?

Why are all these people here?

Well well..... long time no see..... Good to see you.

You'll have to excuse me. I have to keep moving. There's a lot of other people here. Hello! Fancy seeing you here! Excuse me a moment please... Hello!

Excuse me one moment. There's something I should get straight here. You'll just have to excuse me... **EXCUSE ME!**..... Look there's something I have to get straight here. Some of you think I'm here just to enjoy myself, aren't you! You're thinking that..... aren't you! Yes I can see you smiling there. You think I'm here to have a good time. But let me assure you... you're wrong. Yes, you're very wrong. I'm here to do a job.

I want to repeat that

I'm here to do a job

I want to repeat that

I'm here to do a job

I want to repeat that

I'm here to do a job

I want to repeat that

I'm here to do a job

I'm here to collect evidence. Ah, that gets you thinking doesn't it! I can see this puzzled look on your faces. Yes, Look me straight in the eye. Tell me, do you feel guilty? If I'm here collecting evidence **do you feel comfortable?** Well, well: just leave that for a moment..... No! How can I? The evidence is here in my hand! **This is the evidence!** Ah, you have second thoughts now, don't you! You're wondering what it is on these pieces of paper. The smile has left your face now. Well (ha, ha) you've got good reason, but for the moment, here it is. It's safe. This evidence..... it's safe,..... right here is my hand; in my right hand, right or left hand, in one of my hands,..... it's safe. *Hello, hello,..... excuse that outburst there. Here I am a visitor and taking advantage of your good humour and your patience. I'm really quite sorry about that. Hello,..... fancy seeing you here. Well you may be wondering what's brought me here. What is this evidence I'm talking about? I'm here to work with the earth and with the rocks. ...Like (the sort of) earth and the rocks that you see around here now. Common old garden earth,..... common rocks.*

The S.V. slowly circles through the crowd towards the mouth of the furnace.

At this point the S.V. is at the furnace grate. He lights the papers in his hand and torches the kindling in the grate.

The monologue now becomes shriller and louder. It is accompanied by the increasing roar of the furnace as the enormous updraft takes effect.

At this point the two fire brigades which have been on stand-by decide to douse the sparks which land on the nearby vegetation.

The S.V. has scrambled to the surface of the cliff above the audience and level with the furnace, but he is dwarfed by the inferno raging from the vent and the two arcs of water from the fire brigades which are being directed towards the volcano.

The S.V. appears to be still directing his monologue through the megaphone but he can no longer be heard.

BUT NOT THAT COMMON! I've made some awful discoveries. It will probably alarm you as much as it's alarmed me. You've been disturbing it all.

You people have dug too deep.

You have removed too much of this earth and these rocks.

None of us realises what lies below all of this. If you did you would never have touched it! Never have scratched the surface in the first place and these forces that are down below once trapped, could soon be released again. We've all been just too greedy!

So this is the evidence right here!

But,..... but..... I'll destroy it. That's our secret, OK. I had a task to do here. I've got this evidence but for all our sakes I **will destroy it!**

But still, it's a lesson to be learned... a lesson..... you musn't forget it.

Thank you, thank you, don't forget it,...this lesson, **please.**

Thank you. So I'll destroy it now. Just give me a few minutes.

There's no problem about it. I can destroy it. **I can destroy it.**

Some of you may think that we're approaching the end..... This isn't the end. Excuse me one minute.

*You people at the back there, don't go away... not yet. **This is not the end.....***

*I repeat **This is not the end.** It's not the beginning either. **BUT YOU MUST NOT GO AWAY.** Not yet. Come back please. Come back. Could you please bring those people back. Thank you.*

No, this isn't the end. The end happened a long time ago. Long ago. None of you can remember the end can you? Well that's of no consequence. That really does not matter because I'm here to remind you about that event,..... about the end,.... that point of time you've all forgotten about.

Are those people back again? Yes, stay there! Stay there!

As I said this isn't the end but it's not the beginning either. So where are we now? What point am I up to? Ah, yes. If we're not at the end and that's long past. We're past the end,.... long past it,..... We're on borrowed time. And as soon as you've borrowed something, what does it do? It collects interest! Time collecting interest. You can be sure of that. So here we are now... past the end,..... living on borrowed time.....**This is another lesson**

LESSON 2. There's more to say.....There's more to say. You must bear with me.

YOU MUST LISTEN.. THERE'S MORE TO SAY...MORE LESSONS,.....

.....FROM THIS EARTH AND THESE ROCKS.

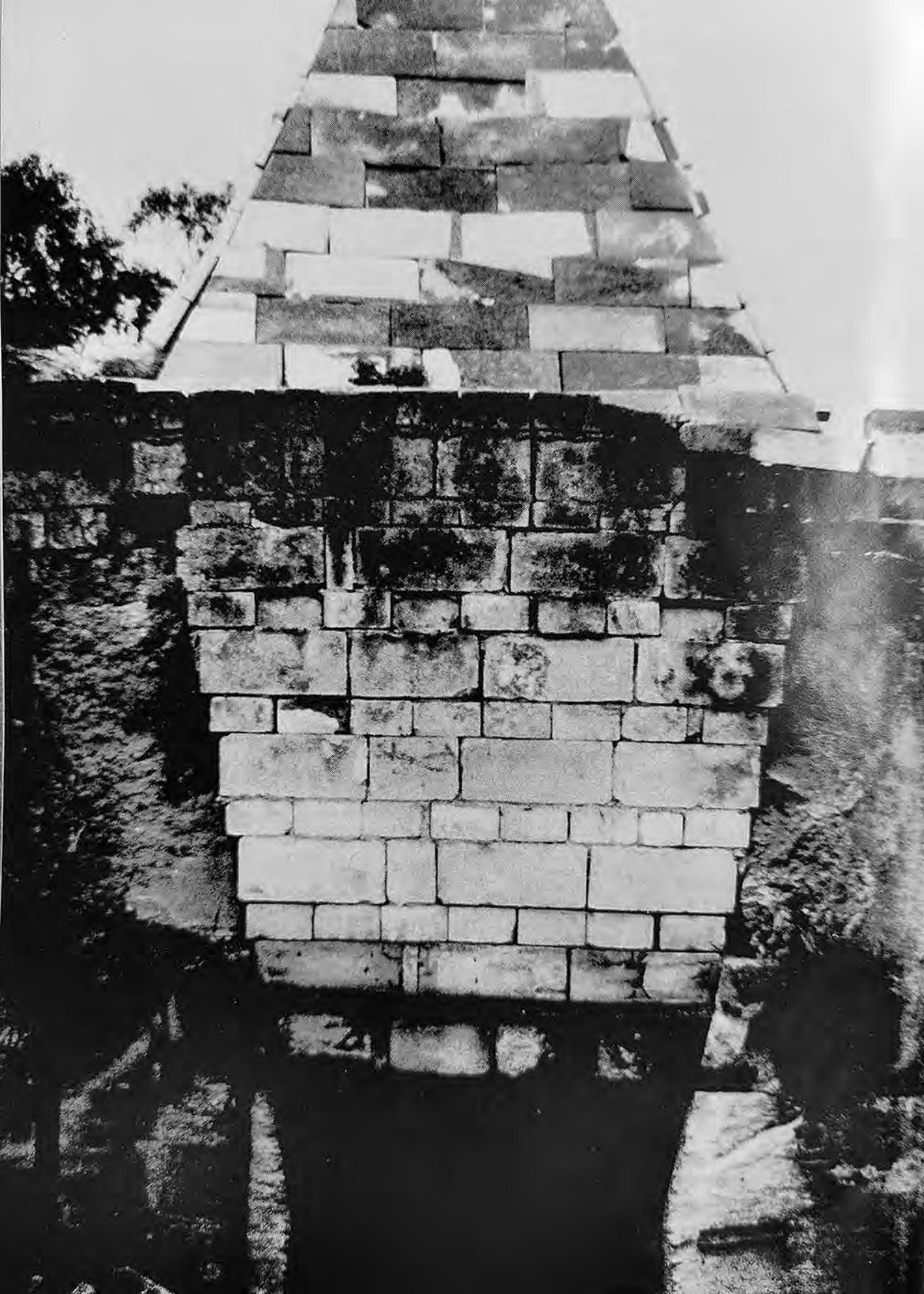
I REPEAT THERE ARE MORE LESSONS.

Arthur Wicks 16 June 1989

for the project "**The Quarries: an Archaeology**"

at Mt Gambier and performed there April 1989

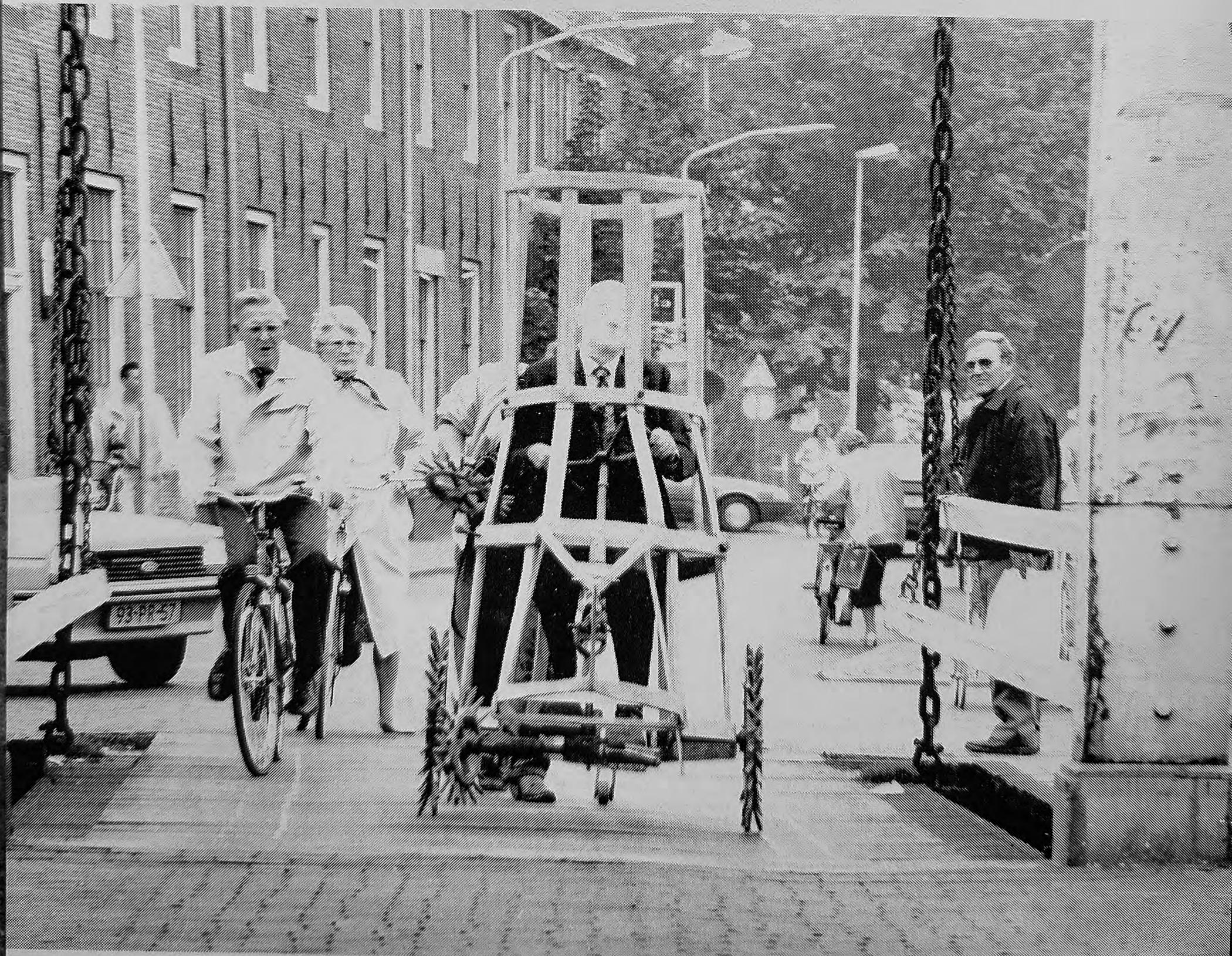






PEACE CAR THROUGH EUROPE

A PERFORMANCE WITH THE ARMoured CAR
AND THE SOLSTICE VOYEUR
WHICH BEGAN IN HOORN, HOLLAND ON 27 SEPTEMBER 1990
AND ENDED IN BERLIN ON 22 OCTOBER 1990



Arthur Wicks

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Wagga Wagga NSW 2650
Australia

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MEDIA RELEASE

PEACE CAR THROUGH EUROPE

"Peace Car through Europe" is the work of an Australian artist, Arthur Wicks. The project consists of exhibiting and performing with a specially constructed "armoured car" in several European countries, starting in Hoorn near Amsterdam and completed in Berlin a few weeks later.

As we approach the end of this millenium I become very conscious of the role of the machine - its apparent strength and scale, but more importantly, its increasing irrelevance and uselessness at this point in our history. Each of my machines (and this is the third in a series) work in an ironic and "out of sync" way. Their appearance and function are at odds with one another.

The "armoured car" for instance, appears ready to "attack" and "defend" - but against what? It has survived an action that we can only guess at. Its functions have been programmed by forces that are no longer relevant. Only a ritualistic and meaningless pattern of behaviour remains.

The "car" was made in April 1990 and used in a performance in the Assembly Hall of the Australian Defence Force Academy in Canberra on 3rd May 1990. The performance was the "Escape of the Solstice Voyeur: Episode 2: the BATTLEFIELD".

The "car" is made from laminated wood and is a working pedal-driven object. Its dimensions are 278cm long, 103cm wide and 238cm high.

This work is financially assisted by de Achterstraat, Hoorn; Museum Fodor, Amsterdam; DAAD, Berlin; the Künstlerhaus Bethanien, Berlin; the Australia Council.

The itinerary was:

Hoorn, Holland	27/09/90 - 02/10/90
Museum Fodor, Amsterdam	03/10/90 - 08/10/90
Potsdamer Platz - Brandenburger	
Tor - Reichstag, Berlin (West)	09/10/90 - 17/10/90
Kino Babylon, Berlin (East)	18/10/90 - 22/10/90
Return to Australia	25/10/90

ARTHUR WICKS

5 NOVEMBER 1990



PEACE CAR THROUGH EUROPE

ROMANCE WITH THE WINDMILL
AND THE SOLAR STEEL VOYEUR
SUNNY DAY IN THE NETHERLANDS
WINDMILL MUSEUM IN Zaanse Schans



MUSEUM

FODOR

Keizersgracht 609
1017 DS Amsterdam
Telefoon (020) 249919

P E R S B E R I C H T

Vrede auto dwars door Europa

Nummer:

Datum:

2 oktober 1990

ARTHUR WICKS

Dit project bestaat uit tentoonstellen en performen met een speciaal gehoude 'gewapende auto' dwars door Europa met als startpunt Hoorn bij Amsterdam en als eindpunt Berlijn een paar weken later.

Nu we het einde van dit millenium naderen dringt de rol van de machine pas echt tot me door, zijn kracht en staat maar nog belangrijker zijn toenemende onbelangrijkheid en nutteloosheid op dit moment van onze geschiedenis.

Mijn machines werken ironisch en 'out of sync'. Hun verschijning en functie zijn in tegenspraak.

De gewapende auto bijvoorbeeld lijkt klaar om aan te vallen en te verdedigen - maar wat? Hij heeft een actie overleefd waar we slechts naar kunnen raden. Zijn functies zijn geprogrammeerd door krachten die er niet meer toe doen.

Slechts een ritueel, een gedragspatroon zonder betekenis blijft over. De auto is gemaakt in april 1990 en werd gebruikt in een performance in de Assembly Hall van de Australische Defensie Macht Academie op 3 mei 1990.

De performance was 'Ontsnapping van de Zonnewende-Voyeur; Episode 2: 'Het Slagveld'.

De auto is van hout en is een werkend object, aangedreven door pedalen. De maten zijn 278x103x238.

U kunt hier getuige van zijn in Museum Fodor, zaterdag 6 oktober aanstaande, om 12.00, 13.00, 14.00, 15.00 en 16.00 uur.

De performance duurt ongeveer 10 minuten per keer en speelt zich af tussen Museum Fodor en de Vijzelstraat.

Dit project is mede mogelijk gemaakt door financiële bijdrage van: Achterstraat, Hoorn; DAAD, Berlijn, Künstlerhaus Bethanien, Berlijn en the Australia Council.

ENIGMATIC CAMPAIGNS OF THE SOLSTICE VOYEUR

Wagga-domiciled performance artist Arthur Wicks, alias the Solstice Voyeur, is safely back in Wagga following his assault on Holland and Berlin in September and October.

In Arthur Wicks's words, the purpose of the project was "to exhibit and perform with a specially constructed armoured car through Europe," starting in the Hoorn near Amsterdam and completing the project in Berlin a few weeks later. "As we approach the end of this millenium I become very conscious of the role of the machine - its apparent strength and scale but more importantly, its increasing irrelevance and uselessness at this point in our history. Each of my machines (and this is the third in a series) work in an ironic and out-of-sync way. Their appearance and function are at odds with one another".

The armoured car was constructed in April 1990 and used in a performance in the Assembly Hall of the Australian Defence Force Academy in Canberra on 3 May of that year. Made of laminated wood, the car is pedal driven.

"The armoured car appears ready to 'attack' and 'defend', but against what?" says Arthur. "It has survived an action that can only be guessed at. Its functions have been programmed by forces that are no longer relevant. Only a ritualistic and meaningless pattern of behaviour remains."

The seeds for the Solstice Voyeur's European assault were sown some seven years ago when Wicks spent 18 months living in Berlin. "I've always had this idea of doing something about the division of East and West", says Arthur. "The strong fragmentation in Berlin in 1983 was felt by everybody. Last year, when the wall was crumbling, metaphorically and then physically, the idea returned to me. I now had the armoured car and used it for a performance in Canberra in May 1990. I was fortunate in getting an Australia Council Fellowship. This was the financial backstop. When Rene Block from Berlin was in Australia I was able to talk with him about what was happening, and to organise some additional financial help. A drip feed is better than no feed!"

"The irony is, the situation in Berlin was changing rapidly. The Wall was being removed. The speed at which things were moving was disorienting everybody. Nothing prepared me for the chaos of Berlin. You could have been living there for 40 years and you'd still need a map to get around the entire city. The other Eastern countries are now finding their feet and their freedom and are coming in to Berlin. Just about all of these people had formerly been denied consumer goods. Berlin is suddenly finding itself the fulcrum between East and West. I decided to take the Solstice Voyeur there."



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Wicks left Australia on September 25, spent 2 weeks in Amsterdam, 10 days in Berlin, two days in Hamburg and one day in Frankfurt.

In Holland, the Solstice Voyeur pedalled his armoured car through Hoorn, the old village on the seaboard, and Amsterdam itself. "In Holland everyone owns a bicycle," says Arthur. "People got the idea that I was going to pedal all the way to Berlin". The Dutch appreciated the irony. Their sense of humour is deeply ironic, and the armoured car really appealed to them. They seemed to understand what I was doing."

However, in Berlin Arthur found the atmosphere very different. "The intrinsic fun and jollity of Holland seemed to evaporate there," he says. "There was a feeling that communication was an enormous problem for everybody, and that it was very difficult to get things done. I resolved to pursue a trek between certain parts of Berlin which were now accessible, but which weren't in 1983. So it became a metaphorical or mental trip, even though of course it actually happened. At each point I had to get permission to get into areas closed off to the public. Nobody really knew who could give that permission."

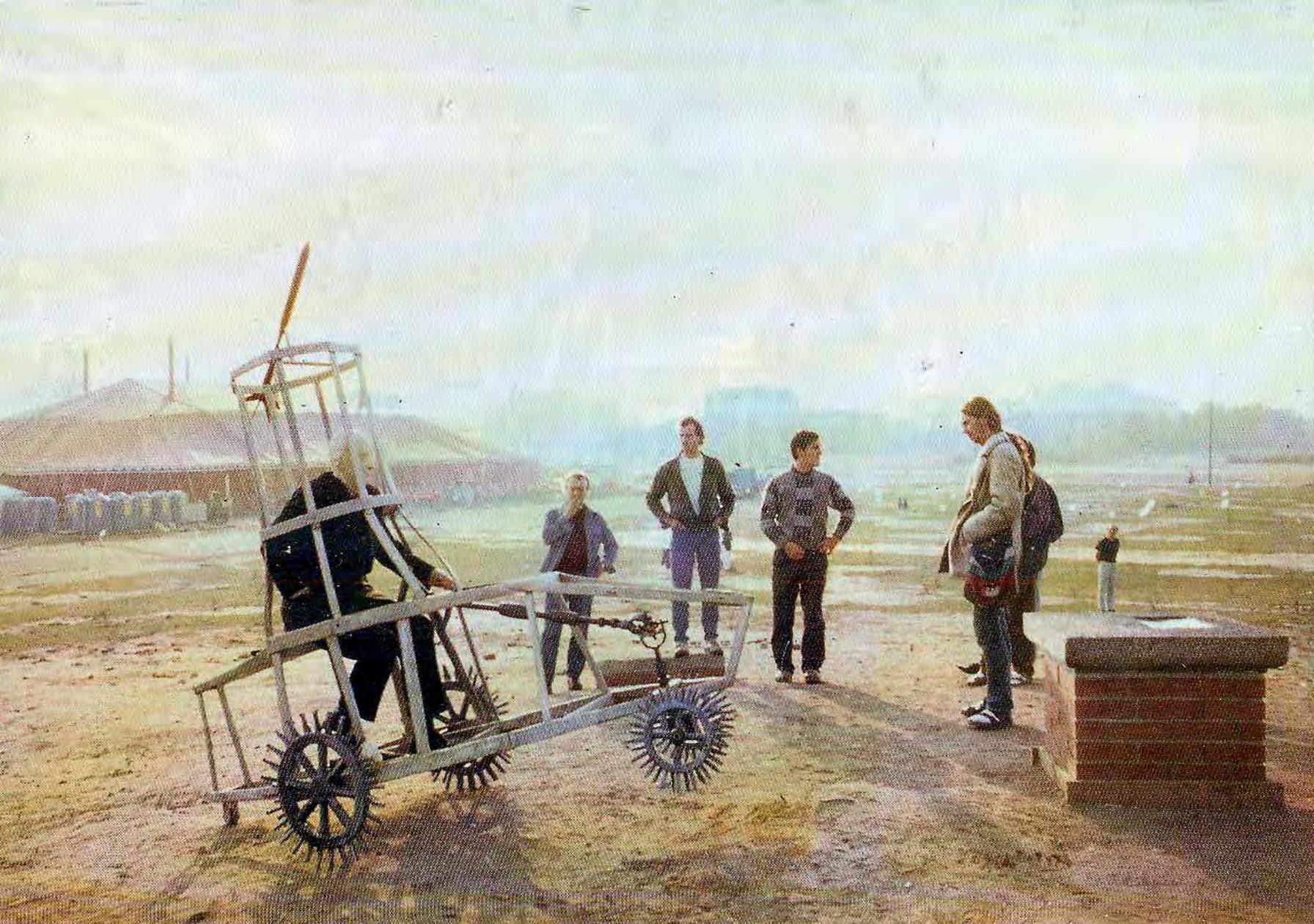
"The trek in Berlin began at Potsdamer Platz where a small section of the Wall had been left as a reminder. Berlin is a city which contains traces of all the events of the 20th century. There's always a double edged sense of failure and victory. The trek continued across Potsdamer Strasse, over the old S.S. Bunker where there is an obelisk reminding people that from here the German forces were launched against Poland, and along the one and a half kilometre wasteland stretch - prior to the Wall, the centre of Berlin - across to the Brandenburg Gate. Then I drove down past the Soviet memorial to the Reichstag, the old parliament. In Holland and Berlin I had a small siren going in my lapel."

Arthur Wicks says there was no opposition to the armoured car and its siren-sounding occupant at any time. "Generally, people were quizzical," he says. "Some people in Berlin found it alienating." The armoured car and the Solstice Voyeur came to rest finally in East Berlin at Kino Babylon.

Adrian Wintle

The Daily Advertiser, Saturday, November 17 1990, pp 34,35.





AT THE EDGE OF TIME

The "Peace Car" of Arthur Wicks in Berlin.

The City was, and is, the centre of German history: **Berlin The Place** where the event occurred, was the nucleus of this history. On the 18th October, nearly a year after the Wall fell down, the **Peace Car** of Arthur Wicks rolled from Potsdamer Platz to the Brandenburger Tor. At that point of time Potsdamer Platz was still devastated land, overtaken by the historic events of the previous months. But still it seemed to belong to a different time. Of this period only relics now exist: a hill under which supposedly lies the *Fuhrerbunker* of Adolf Hitler: roads which are reminders that Berlin was the liveliest place in Europe in the twenties. In this specific location moves a contraption which in its own way is out of time. But it is imprinted with this history.

Arthur Wicks's **Peace Car** is the third in a series of machines in which the artist reflects on mechanisation. He sees the machine as a moment of expression of this century and in this sense he is connected with the Futurist Movement at the beginning of this century. The machine is nowadays only a reminder of its development, for today, instead of material content, we favour streams of information. The same holds true for the armoured car of Arthur Wicks. It spans different times because it copies the original form of a mechanical apparatus and at the same time confronts us with the possible loss of all machines.

Mechanisation is perceived only as an irony. The functions are maintained solely by fake. Symbols, like a sort of rocket, are moving around without creating any real threat. The armoury is a dummy. The motion always comes to a stop because the machine, the car, seems to be programmed to become non-functioning. The artist moves the machine, but one can guess the exhausting effort needed to do that. He is at the one time the mover and the moved. The interdependence between man and machine cannot be more clearly stated. In the background there are glimpses of Charlie Chaplin in "Modern Times", but the **Peace Car** is like the farewell song, the *Abgesang*. There is, however, an irony in this "sculpture" of Arthur Wicks.

Berlin is the right place for this *Abgesang*. The present is filled with the past and pregnant with the future. The city was the ending point of travel for the Peace Car through Europe, beginning in Holland and ending in Hamburg via Berlin. Because there appears to be no base for comparison, the differences between these cities becomes more evident. Every city is connected to its own special period of time. For example, Hamburg was a dominant harbour in the time of the Hanse. Now it seems that Berlin is the centre of a new, free Europe.

The **Peace Car** itself had its premier in a performance in May 1990. One episode of this performance was called **the BATTLEFIELD**. In a special way this holds true for Berlin today, because these battles can also be fought on economic grounds. The work of Arthur Wicks reacts to this situation in a double sense. In the background arises the question of technology, which has developed out of different ideological systems. The artist doesn't give an answer, but the question itself is meaningful, because it is stated in a non-verbal form. Maybe it is the distance of this Australian, Arthur Wicks, from the real events, that make it possible for him to react in such an impressive way to the historic upheaval in Berlin and Europe.

Thomas Wulffen

Berlin, January, 1991

















DEM DEUTSCHEN VOLKE



MACHINA: PERSONA

AN EXHIBITION HELD AT THE ART
GALLERY OF N.S.W. BETWEEN
10 FEBRUARY AND 31 MARCH 1991

ALL ABOARD FOR THE TRIP TO NOWHERE

The four sculpture machines by Arthur Wicks ("up to his tricks", as used to be said) at the Art Gallery of N.S.W. are satirical parodies on the machine age but, like art, as Oscar Wilde opined, are utterly useless. They are made of wood, painted to effect an archaeological patina, for indeed they look like the first awkward models for an armoured car, a rowing boat on tram tracks, an observational helicopter **Solstice Observatory** and two robot crosses on rails; the bogies carrying earthbound missiles.

They look as if they are made of bricoleur materials that resemble rods and lathes of metal. But all, including the wheels and the cogs like the enormous pale pink ones in **Solstice Observatory**, are made of wood. At times the wood is elegantly turned and the balance of shapes has all the exquisite fragility associated with early aeroplanes. By way of contrast the bulky, solid, wooden forms of the Robert Klippel in the entrance foyer are wedged in the earth while Wicks's absurdities are about to levitate as space flows through them. Wicks denies solidity in emphasising the beautiful oddities of machine structures. All is made of ribs, antennae and armatures.

Some think he is provoking the public into considering the absurdity of the machine but artists such as Wicks have more complex aims. In 1970 the one-time Power Gallery bought Gianni Piacentino's useless bicycle. **A Nickel Plated Framed Vehicle**, with two wheels but no seat, pedals or handlebars. Piacentino was later included in a selection of Kassel Dokumenta that treated vehicular forms as fascinating founds objects. Most looked like elegant toys incapable of dominating lives like the real thing.

Again in 1976 that gallery bought Fumio Yoshimuro's **Tricycle** made entirely of linden wood - seat, chain with moveable links and all. Like the Piacentino it is for people such as mankind, who are going nowhere. It is usually hung from the roof.

SOUTH WALES INVITE YOU TO ATTEND THE OPENING

THE PRESIDENT AND THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES OF THE ART GALLERY OF NEW

"MACHINA: PERSONA"
by ARTHUR WICKS 10 Feb - 30 March
1991

OF THIS EXHIBITION AT 2pm ON SUNDAY 10 FEBRUARY 1991

RSVP 1ST FEB (02)2251778
FAX (02)2216226



Yoshimuro, a New Yorker, did not carve the chain until purchase was guaranteed. These pieces are meticulously finished - unlike Wicks's inventions - for he is the rough bush carpenter, rougher than you'll find anywhere and master of the makeshift, seemingly temporary devices like the treacherous wheel spikes in his **Armoured Car** with its unclad turret surmounted by a red rocket.

The objects, especially when he drives them are allegories of vain, harmless, forgiveable endeavour - like tilting at windmills. They are not about greed or gain but endurance and survival. The **Survival Boat** being designed to run on tram or train tracks in time of adversity. The oars protrude from it like pleading, clumsy hands. It is the awkwardness that evokes pity. **Survival Boat** when not in use, is mounted on a stand like an exhibit or relic. In 1970 Robin Page's smoothly executed print **Survival Pipe** entered the Power collection with a large pipe from which a cigarette hung on davits. It was witty and involved a stamped statement about the "survival principle". Wicks made his piece in 1984 and suggests that the possibility of survival is a dodgy, half-baked idea.

In 1968 Pontus Hulten's exhibition **The Machine as Seen at the End of the Mechanical Age** at New York's MOMA, traced the relation of art to the machine from Karl Marx's 1856 expression of disappointment through Futurism, Duchamp, Picabia, Man Ray and Tatlin to Charlie Chaplin's **Modern Times** and **The Great Dictator**; the little man at the end of the latter film saying, "*machinery that gives us abundance has left us in want more than machinery we need humanity*". Charlie Marx had said, "*machinery gifted with the wonderful power of shortening and fructifying human labour, we behold starving and overwork it*".

To keep a balance it should be noted that the exhibition warned against the attempts at the total engineers of life; where the technician was glorified. Le Corbusier writing in 1925 that "*engineers are healthy, virile, active and useful, moral and happy*". Such terrifying stuff that no wonder Pontus Hulten writes in the catalogue introduction of the sapping of faith in technology and confidence in rational behaviour as a result of dropping of the bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki - "*the most terrible shock the world has ever received*". The exhibition's wonderful catalogue had a tin enamelled embossed cover that opened on hinges; its first and last pictures dealing with Jean Tinguely's **Homage to New York** that destroyed itself in MOMA's sculpture garden on March 17, 1960. Tinguely's machines usually have humour without proclaiming along with Wicks the "*increasing irrelevance and uselessness*" of the machine. Incidentally, the former Power Gallery's Tinguely is the noisiest art work in Australia.

All this is by way of hinting that Arthur Wicks occupies an important place in any exhibition considering art and the sociology of the machine. The pity is that eventually we might have to ask the computer about Arthur's contribution.

Elwyn Lynn

Extract, **The Weekend Australian**, February 23-24, 1991 (Review 8)

WHAT CULTURE MEANS FOR OUR POLITICIANS

I cannot help wondering, however, whether effective promotion by the gallery could not draw in more people for something truly delightful and incisive, like Arthur Wicks's impossible machines currently showing on the floor below. There is a skeletal helicopter, all of wood and pedal-driven, mechanically functional yet flightless, which is like the late Industrial Age's nostalgic reminiscence of Leonardo's notebooks. Then technology was all hope and the ambitions of the spirit; now it is disillusion and the instrument of our self-destruction. There is a boat, too, whose oars end in hands and serve, through a system of cogs and shafts, to drive the craft on a pair of wheels. Also constructed of wood, poignant and absurd, the boat is designed to run on a railway track or the rails of a city tram, creating an eloquent interference in the smooth functioning of a mechanised urban environment. At once heroic and ridiculous, such an action is an affront to the utilitarianism that dominates our lives; at the same time, the very inefficiency of the machine reminds us that it is powered by human labour.

Arthur Wicks stands out in the sameness (conformity in the frantic pursuit of distinctness) of so much contemporary culture as an unaffectedly, in fact, incurably idiosyncratic artist. He once said that the Australian environment "*tends to exclude human presence*" and that the attempt to live here, especially outside the big cities, is "*accompanied by an element of anxiety and vulnerability*". No doubt instinctively drawn to the point of maximum tension (just as he once did a series of performances on the San Andreas Fault in California), Wicks has lived for many years in what appears from Sydney's perspective, the deepest provinces. It may seem a paradox but it is perhaps a lesson that he has become an artist of international stature based in Wagga Wagga.

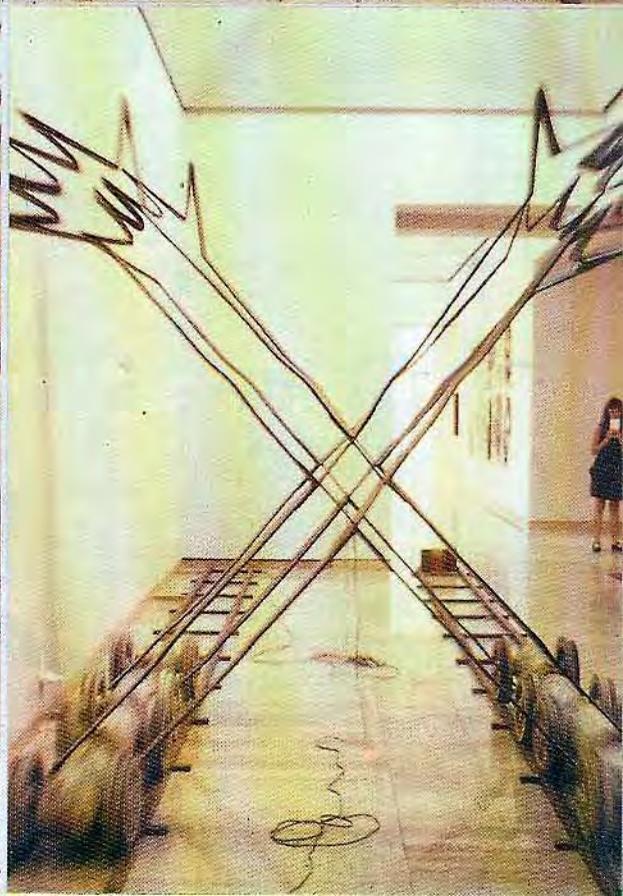
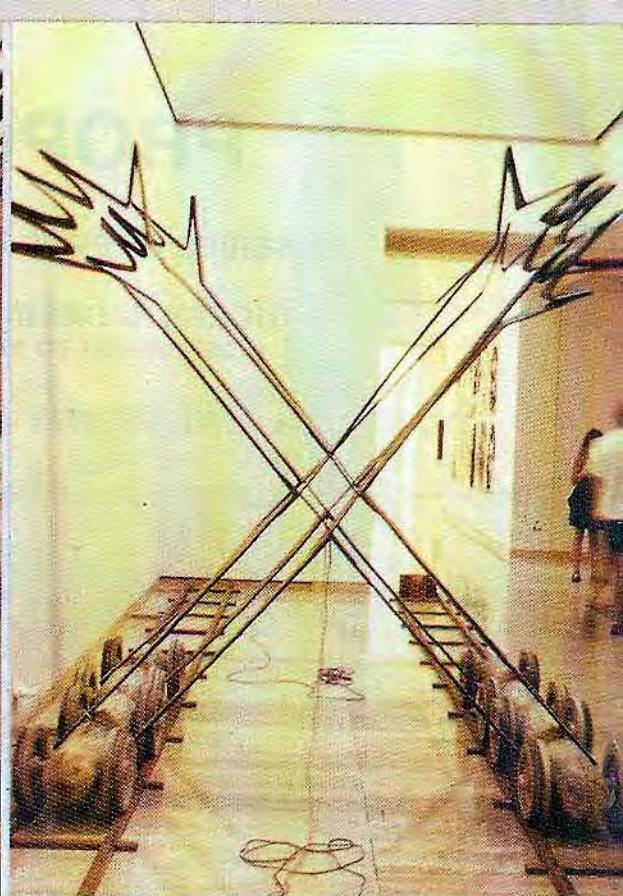
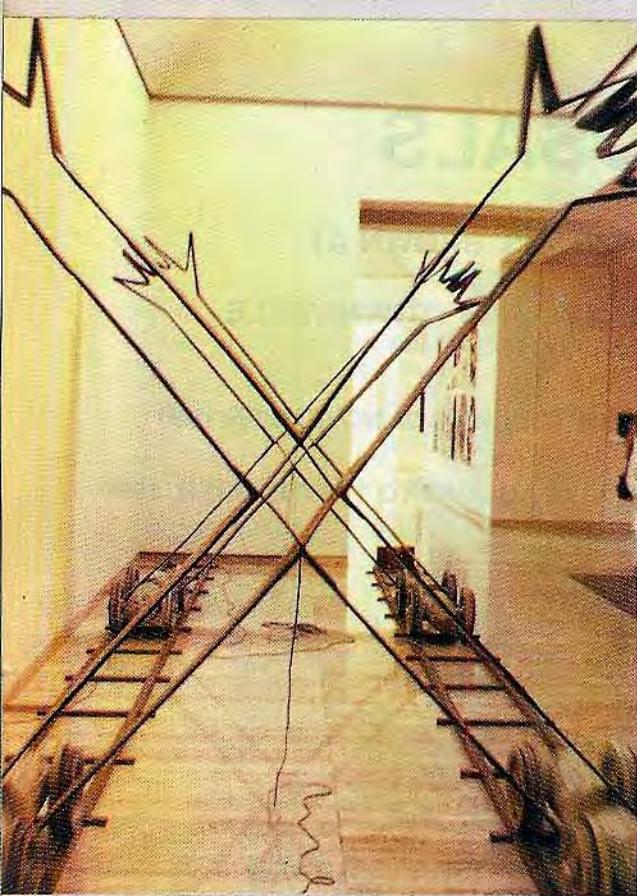
His latest overseas project was driving another extraordinary vehicle through the streets of Amsterdam and Berlin. His **Armoured Car** is, like the helicopter and boat, an open-work construction made of wood. It is pedal-driven, with wheels that run on short radiating spokes; on top, it bears a rather scrawny red missile. The vehicle itself is accompanied by a video and photographs of Wicks pedalling it in Amsterdam and the historically scarred places of Berlin. It is not easy to drive or to control, and the effort and difficulty of his progress are as touching as the construction itself, at once ingenious and crude.

Once again, it is as though the hard shell of power and efficiency of the real armoured car had been stripped back to reveal a frail and clumsy device, driven by an even more frail, straining body. Hence the irony of the artists's remark to the Dutch interviewer on the video: when he asserts "*this is a machine of war*", we should understand too: "*a machine of war is this*".

Christopher Allen Extract, **Sydney Morning Herald**,
Saturday, March 2, 1991, p.48.







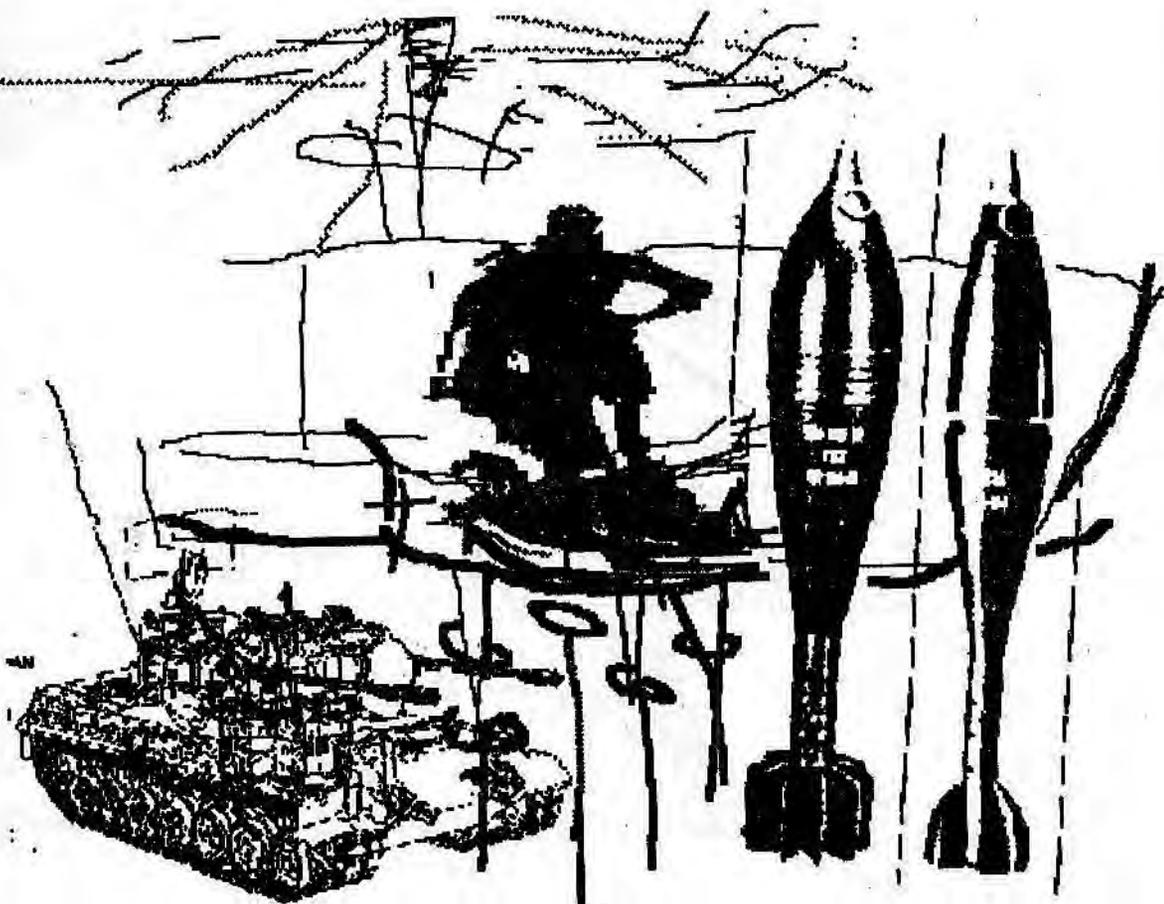
PROPOSALS

A SERIES OF PROPOSITIONS SHOWN AT:

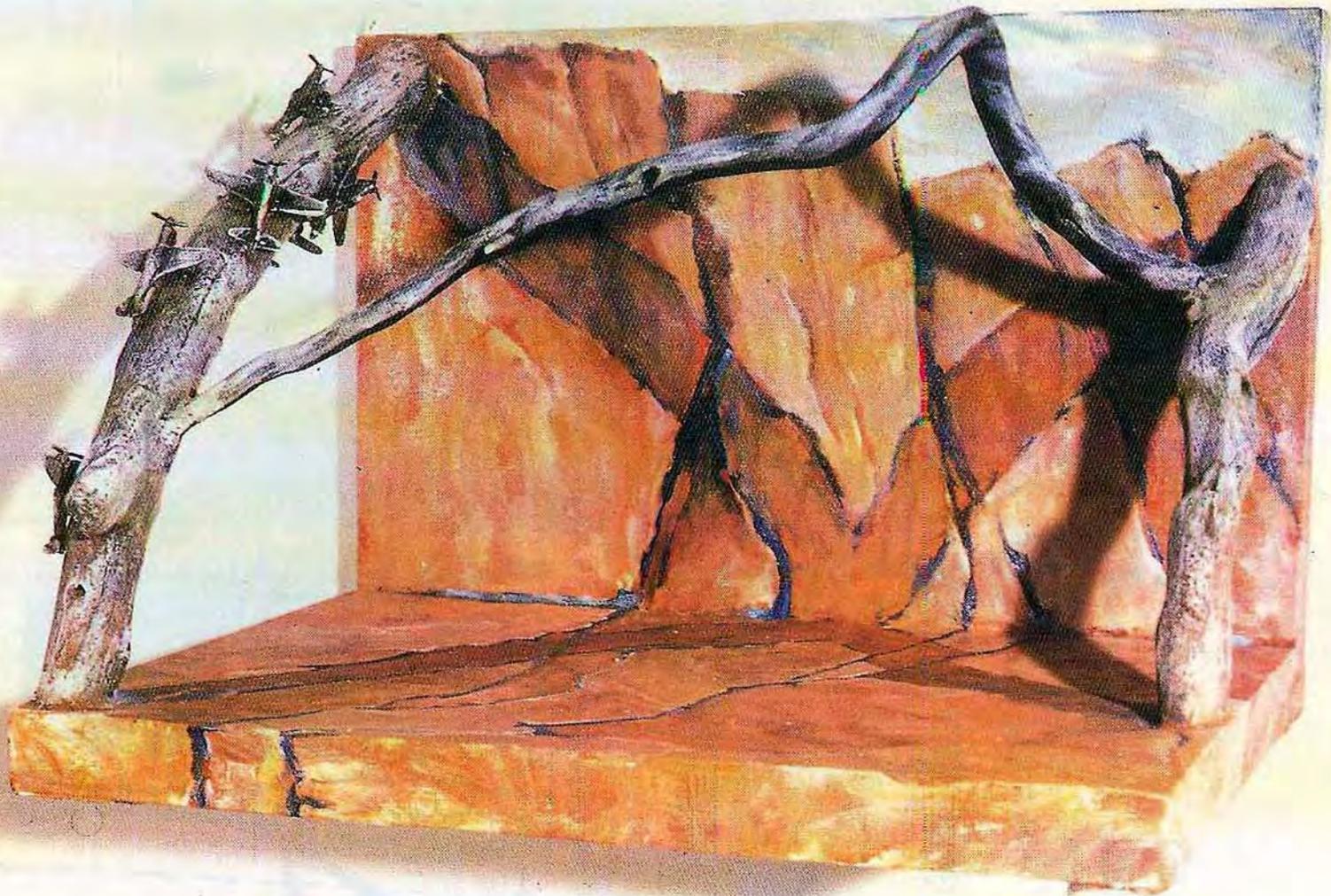
PERC TUCKER REGIONAL GALLERY, TOWNSVILLE
29 AUGUST TO 17 SEPTEMBER 1990

DC ART GALLERY, SYDNEY 30 OCTOBER TO 24 NOVEMBER 1990

BEN GRADY GALLERY, CANBERRA 16 AUGUST TO 1 SEPTEMBER, 1991







PROPOSALS

Returning to Townsville on his second visit, the first being in 1988, Arthur Wicks has brought his **Proposals**, a series of small-scale artworks that straddle the disciplines of painting and sculpture.

The **Proposals** mostly share a common structural element, a canvas plane that cantilevers out at right-angles from beneath its vertical counterpart. The "stages" that are created provide a series of miniature venues for dramatic and comic productions where the props, it seems, have overwhelmed and banished the actors, successfully claiming the stage themselves.

As a scientist knows, and Arthur Wicks was once one; elements, when combined do not simply form a mixture, but totally new and different substances called compounds. Arthur Wicks combines physical materials and visual imagery as if they were chemical elements; so that scenic vistas, driftwood, children's toys, primitive mechanics, electrical circuitry and paint are brought together to form an intriguing new compound.

Could the new compound equal "X", the recurring symbol in **Proposals**? What is "X"? Is it algebra? A cross? The signature of an illiterate? Does "X" mark the spot? Is it a kiss or a helipad? In **Flying Sculpture Landing**, three rough wooden legs affixed with aircraft wheels assemble at "X", while the 'copter blades whirl in the paint behind and a model helicopter perches remotely above. The model is intact, complete but distant, while the legs in the foreground appear preposterous. Moreover, they are missing their fuselage; it has been sheared right off and is nowhere to be found - a definite cause for concern! Metaphorically, we might see the model as just that; a "model"; an ideal dreamed of, but unattainable, while the legs expose an unpalatable truth. Whether of wood, or flesh and bone, these legs are of organic, not mechanical origin. This might also describe a world where technology alienates and anonymously destroys its "organic" users. Should we be surprised that these legs have been broken? They were never really intended for such use. Nonetheless they remain upright. Why? That is anyone's guess. All we can be sure of is that they remain at "X".

Arthur Wicks brings with him a long history in conceptually based performance and installation art. This extension of visual art, like chemistry or theatre, assimilates materials, skills and imagery into a single work or event. The individual constructions for these events are often visually strong enough to stand alone as sculptures. An implicit love of materials and the making process governs all his work. In the performance "**The Escape of the Solstice Voyeur**", a see-through pedal powered wooden helicopter is as much a kinetic sculpture as a prop.

In 1985, Arthur Wicks rowed his **Survival Boat** along the tram tracks of Swanston Street in Melbourne. As Tony Bond observed, "*the way the event looks is profoundly memorable. Wicks is a conjurer of psychologically significant images*". His work also provides an elegant vehicle for a black but playful sense of humour. In **Littoral Zone Between High and Low Tide** boats appear to be attached to ludicrously viscous, chisel-like pinnacles that rise out of what is probably a pre-cyclonic ebb tide. In **Witness for the Solstice Voyeur** the ultimate in weather-beaten faces (actually a clump of painted driftwood) is equipped with a mechanical voice. We turn a handle

and it speaks from rural Australia, a clanking clunking wooden language that needs no translation.

The **Proposals** were made with North Queensland in mind. Wicks admits he is "*deluded by the notion of the North*". Indeed for many southern Australians, North Queensland takes on near mythic qualities especially as a southern winter sets in. Arthur Wicks, "deluded" as he is, implicitly recognizes a tourist brochure appeal. His palette is never far from the warm, bright and primary. His content is however, another matter. The darker, danker and macabre underside to the intense beauty of North Queensland draws his attention. The poisonous fruits of some rainforest plants, the strangler figs, the seductive but deadly Boulders near Babinda. It is this sense of covert nastiness that tempers the **Proposals** and gives them such a biting flavour.

As a title, **Proposals** suggests a set of plans or even scaled-down prototypes. Clearly the manipulation of scale is the most noticeable artistic device in operation here. In **Landing Strip**, tiny aeroplanes cling to a gnarled branch that becomes huge; arching across a space of potentially geographic proportions. One of the simplest tricks to be played with scale is the shadows. In many of his performances Arthur Wicks incorporates a powerful footlight to cast huge and emphatic shadows. In **Intersection** a wooden cross casts a "shadow intersection". The "intersection" becomes so real that it remains even after a low-slung light is switched on. So real in fact that lorries rush along it to collide. But at what point do they collide? At point "X" of course!

It may be surprising to some but Arthur Wicks identifies a common source for much of what constitutes these **Proposals**; the theatre, the science, the organic and mechanical, the humour and most noticeably the astonishing juxtaposition of images in a relationship of scale. The common source is a box approximately the same size as each of the Proposal pieces and found in almost every home too. It is a TV and the only difference is that **Proposals** are tuned to a channel no ordinary TV receives; that is Channel "X".

With Wagga Wagga N.S.W. his home base, Arthur Wicks finds a rural setting ideal for his preoccupation with materials that honestly display their physical shortcomings. There is more than a little of the bush carpenter here at work. The use of objects that obviously have had a past, interests him. In **Antipodean Landscape and Shadows (Inhabited)** Wicks releases "X" from its sculptural mooring with the aid of two lethal, nail-ridden, secondhand timber beams. They form the "landscape" with their chrome-painted, "city slick" tawdriness; meretriciously drawing our attention to the true and honest "rural" timber beneath. The ink drawing indicates a series of "shadows" that could be streets, but streets in danger of fading away; the cruel nails of "X" becoming their almost endearing inhabitants. What then has happened? By reaching the floor **Antipodean Landscape and Shadows (Inhabited)**, finds "X" the "shadow caster" revived and in a dangerous mood. The shadows have lost power, and are becoming faint, perhaps due to their missing cantilever. Their paper support hangs precariously and painfully from the puncturing nails of "X". What we are witnessing can no longer be a **Proposal**, where mere shadows assert a life of their own. This must be something else; **COULD IT BE THE REAL THING?!**

George Hirst 1990

Perc Tucker Regional Art Gallery, Townsville

MASTER OF "ANXIOUS OBJECT" PROVOKES THOUGHT ON FUTURE

The American art critic Harold Rosenberg coined the expression *anxious object* for the type of contemporary art which makes the viewer feel uncertain about the nature of the art experience. An *anxious object* has a certain subversive quality which undermines our expectations of what constitutes a genuine work of art. It evokes a feeling of uncertainty as to how we should react; it provokes a response but never dictates the nature of the response.

Arthur Wicks is the great master of the *anxious object* in the context of Australian art. His fantastic functionless machines, bizarre structures and solemn performances relate directly to the machines constructed by Dada and Surrealist artists earlier this century which made us question the belief in a rational technological future.

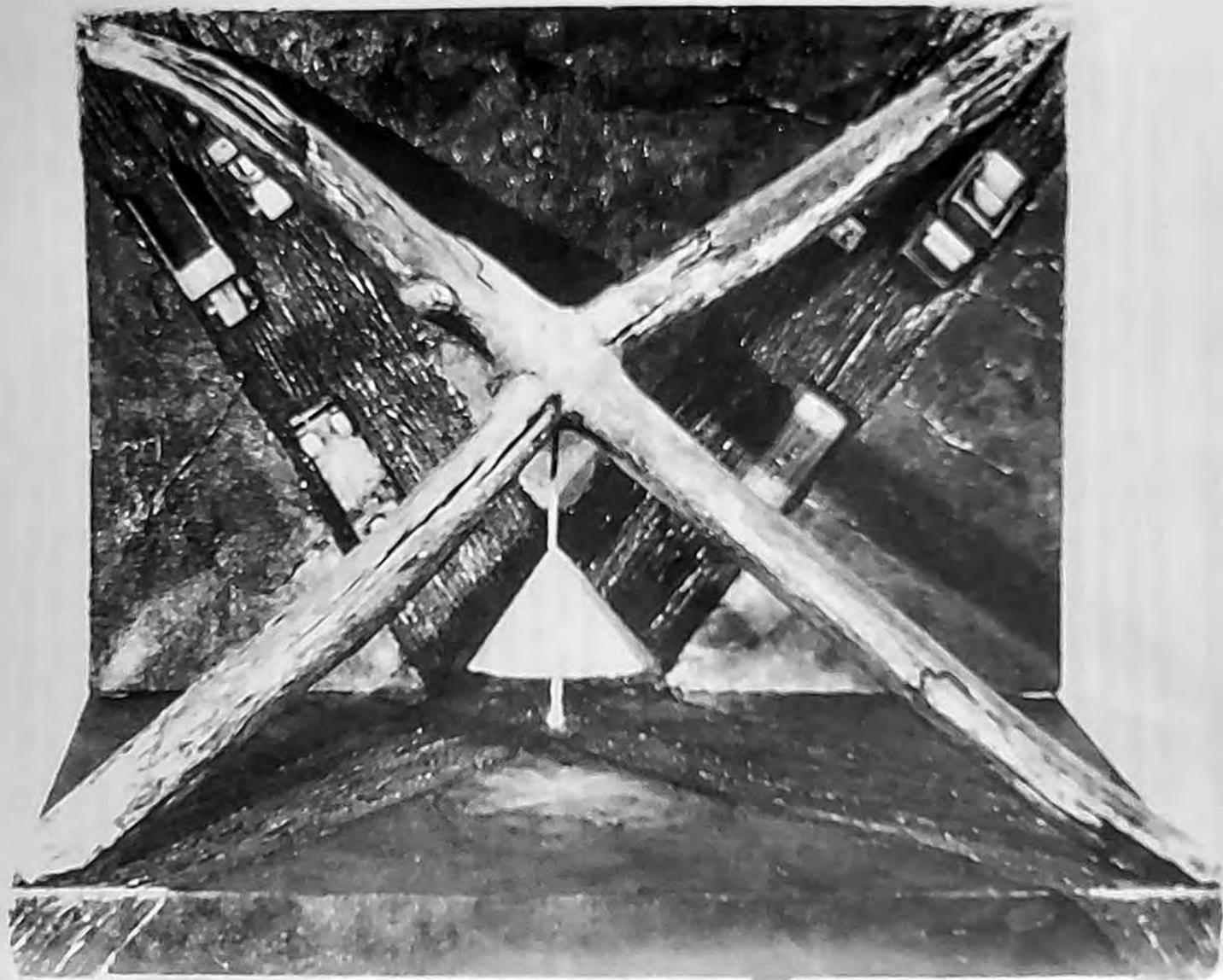
The **Armoured Car** (No.1) which forms the centrepiece of the exhibition, like its predecessor the **Survival Boat**, is a complex structure which reverses the last century of automation creating a machine which maximises the effort and minimises the mobility. It is constructed out of simple, natural objects with wooden spokes for wheels, which inevitably causes one to question the ideas of locomotion, the environment, progress and man's impact on a finely balanced ecology. There is also a questioning on a much more personal level concerning the vanity of human ambition; the desire to become an alchemist and to defy the natural laws.

Although Arthur Wicks was born in Sydney, he has chosen to live in Wagga, away from the big urban centres. Much of his art has an ecological approach and is constructed with items from his immediate environment; yet he uses these materials to make comments about flying machines or Solstice Voyeurs. His **Landing Strip** (No.2) consists of a constructed stage with oil on linen to which branches have been attached which are literally being used as landing strips by tiny toy aircraft. The concept is funny and absurd, in a sense a pun on **landing strip**, but implied in the work is a whole series of questions which each of us has to face individually.

Arthur Wicks's **Proposals** is a series of provocations designed to make us stop and question where we are going. His series of witnesses and guardians alert us to an approaching chaos, but there is no easy panacea suggested except the need for courage, humour and a personal quest.

Sasha Grishin

Extract, **The Canberra Times**, Monday, August 26, 1991, p 20





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