



# IPPHY DROPS INI

*and Rips*

7 - 28 NOVEMBER, 1993  
IPSWICH REGIONAL ART GALLERY



## FOREWORD

This exhibition, **IPPY DROPS IN...and rips**, has been one of the most interesting and successful of the community projects the Ipswich Regional Art Gallery has supported to date, and reinforces the Gallery's commitment to raising professional standards in the Ipswich and region arts industry, through supporting developmental arts projects.

Young Ipswich video artist and Masters degree student, Katrina Versace, came to us late in 1992 with a unique idea – to document the incongruous, but prevalent, surfing culture of Ipswich – a city geographically devoid of waves! Although Katrina was initially only seeking a sounding-board for her concept, we immediately saw the potential of the idea and from endorsing it, gave her not only the freedom, but the necessary infrastructure support to develop her notion into a professionally curated exhibition. We considered it essential that Katrina acquire curatorial skills through working closely with an experienced, independent curator. Elizabeth Bates, Education Officer at the Queensland Art Gallery, former Director, Araluen Arts Centre, Alice Springs, and inveterate surfie chick, fitted the role perfectly. Elizabeth's own exuberant vision, coupled with her extensive experience, ensured the project developed strength and coherence. An Exhibition Development Fund Grant from the Regional Galleries Association of Queensland, made available through the Visual Arts / Craft Board of the Australia Council, allowed us to employ both Katrina and Elizabeth to work on the genesis of the show.



Finally, another interpreter for Katrina's vision was also sought – a photographer / artist who would not only be responsive to the sentiment of the show, but who would individually explore the exhibition's concerns and issues. That artist was Queensland photographer Doug Spowart. At the commencement of the project, Doug was unknown to Katrina, but almost fatalistically he had produced a number of works which played with the same theme of environmental interlopers.

**IPPY DROPS IN...and rips** is a witty, fresh and penetrating exploration of the local culture of an inland regional community. We congratulate Katrina, Elizabeth and Doug for their creativity and commitment and look forward to this exhibition developing new audiences for the Ipswich Regional Art Gallery.

ALICE-ANNE McROBBIE – Director, Ipswich Regional Art Gallery

## **DROPPING IN**

If I was to 'drop in' in the city of Ipswich, I would expect patty cakes and pots of tea; the atmosphere would be convivial, friendly and relaxed. However, if I was to do the same at any of the surfing beaches of South-East Queensland I would attract abuse, due to my complete lack of etiquette, for in this environment to 'drop in' has the aura of intrusion and warfare.

Ipswich is a city located forty minutes drive west of Brisbane. It was the site of Queensland's first coal discovery, railway line, newspaper, and grammar school. It has remained a mining community and service town for surrounding



industries, including the large Amberley airforce base on its outskirts. The culture of any community is contained in its various rituals and activities, and the culture of Ipswich is as complex as its diverse history and sociological structure.

The etiquette of the surf may be lost on much of the Ipswich community, but although 100kms from the nearest 'break', it supports a popular subculture group, that by its very nature could be seen as displaced. Like many other urban centres, it has its share of weekend expatriate surfers; however, for many of Ipswich's residents, heading to the coast is purely a pipedream. Despite this, they still immerse themselves in the culture of the surf, following its style and aspirations with cultist dedication. Ipswich's 'Claytons' surfers far outnumber their surfing counterparts and are very much the public face of the subculture.

**IPPY DROPS IN...and rips** examines this interest in a way of life that is culturally and geographically alien to the city of Ipswich. This is not an unusual trend for subcultural groups, as they inevitably exist in defiance of what they perceive to be the dominant culture of their environment. The choice of an unrealistic model is common to these groups, where marginality and confrontation become attractive.

Despite the plethora of Australian world champion surfers, the surfing subculture has always been viewed as marginal. Much of this must stem from the recreational mode in which the sport developed. Since the first brave Australians bathed in public at the beginning of this century, we, as a nation, have heeded the call of the sea.

Once the Surf Lifesaving Association helped to promote the image of the bronzed Aussie as the typical Australian,





the beach became the ideal destination for anyone, from anywhere. The surfboard arrived, conditions and geography were perfect and Aussies caught on quickly. By the 1960s we were stomping, bleaching our hair and a new sport, with its accompanying cultural traits, had developed.

It is not hard to understand the attraction of the surfing world. It promises much to its followers. It is physical, aerobic, open air and hence deemed healthy (the Queensland Cancer Council and my skin specialist may well disagree with this), while offering the opportunity to commune with nature. As the ultimate expression of escapism and hedonism, it is obviously an attractive cultural option. This was the popular culture of the 1960s and 1970s – a way to ‘drop out’ from the conservatism of the post-war era. It heralded a new breed of down dressers and sat nicely with long hair, hippy beads and vegetarianism.

Curiously enough, it has had a popular resurgence as a 1990's subculture. Some may argue that this is commercially led, having become a million dollar industry and therefore its popularity has been carefully constructed. Dressing down has now become dressing up, with brand name surf clothes as important in the rag trade as other labels. However, for the non-participant, this subculture can provide more than a dynamic dress code. With a regular dose of heroes and a variety of easily obtainable resources – readily available in cities and towns like Ipswich – it offers an effective recipe for contemporary life.

Culture incorporates beliefs in ideals that ultimately generate sets of rules for living. The surfing culture, irrespective of the environment in which it exists, offers a neat package to the young (and not so young). Despite its growth as



a popular industry, it will inevitably foster values that do not fit the status quo and remain attractive for the same reasons that thirty years ago, we put on our sneakers, dropped in and ripped.

ELIZABETH BATES – Exhibition Curator

## **KATRINA VERSACE - VIDEO ARTIST**

Katrina was born in Ipswich in 1968. She graduated from the University of Queensland with a double major in Art History (1989) and is presently completing her Master of Arts in Film and Television at Griffith University.

In 1987 while Katrina trained as a camera-operator with the Ipswich based company, Curtis Video Productions, she began experimenting with video genres and 8mm film. The first completed projects were *Farewell, Alice Bell*, which incorporated archival family 8mm film with contemporary video footage, and *Efil Elcyc*, which was shot on 8mm film and edited onto video. (Efil Elcyc showings: Melbourne 1992 – St Kilda Film Festival; Brisbane 1991 – First Festival Fringe, Artform Express, Film Facts/Amnesty International Fundraiser)

As an independent video artist, Katrina endeavoured to present her work within a multi-media format. During Brisbane's First Festival Fringe in 1991, she projected both vintage and contemporary 8mm film footage onto poets at *Artform Express* (Shamrock Hotel) and co-ordinated *Video Drapes* (Brisbane Jazz Club), where her video clips were projected as a backdrop to live musicians. An extension of these concepts, *A Stone in the Pond* (Fridays, Riverside Centre), combined the projection of video clips that were inspired by the poetry and music of Brisbane artists, with



their live readings, music, dance and mime.

Her first independent film-making experience was during the 1991/92 summer as set dresser for the short 16mm film, *Megacorp* (Winner of the 1993 Queensland Young Filmmakers Award).

Katrina began work at the Ipswich Regional Art Gallery in 1992 and has this year been given the opportunity to develop her Masters topic into an exhibition, thereby gaining an invaluable combination of academic, artistic and curatorial experience.

## THE VIDEO

### **“IPPY DROPS IN...and rips: A Slagheap Surfari”**

It seems perfectly natural to me that in Ipswich people lead a double life as surfers, but that's probably because my lifestyle has always incorporated studying and working in Ipswich, with coastal escapades as often as possible.

I originally came up with the idea of combining / contrasting / clashing the images of surfing and Ipswich in a video. The concept jarred so much, it was ironically appealing. This idea has now been developed into my Master of Arts project in the form of a written dissertation, the production of a video and a photographic exhibition.

As well as highlighting the absurdity of actually trying to 'surf' in Ipswich (by having local surfers undertake a 'surfari' on a coalmine slagheap), the video places surfing 'types' in stereotypical Ipswich scenes to grate on the audience's sense of place. It also creates a mythology that exposes why Ipswich surfers desire to escape the sweat and toil of



our coalmining heritage, and deserve to enjoy the exhilaration of riding waves.

The stylistic approach is derived from an attempt to integrate and manipulate the genres of classic surfing movies, contemporary surfing videos and music clips, which have all contributed to the distribution of the surfing culture in Ipswich.

Since the photographs are an extension of the video concept, there is a deliberate interplay between the two mediums. Video facilities such as animation and chromakey, that would enable us to present the surreal image of people 'surfing' the Ipswich landscape, have been absorbed, more appropriately, into the photographs, while the video concentrates on identifying Ipswich surfers and their involvement with both cultures.

The video's intention is not to establish a surfable environment in Ipswich or to debate whether these people are try-hards or hardcore, but ultimately, the video will simply prove that these people do exist, that they successfully survive the difference in cultures and enjoy life!

**K.V.**

## **VIDEO CREDITS**

**WRITTEN, DIRECTED AND PRODUCED:** Katrina Versace; **INTRODUCTION AND CO-WRITER:** Denis Quinn; **CINEMATOGRAPHY:** Daniel McArthur, Gary Smith, Katrina Versace; **LOCATION ASSISTANTS:** Helen Dodds, Penny Moore, Samantha Shepherd; **EDITING:** Samantha Shepherd, Katrina Versace; **POST-PRODUCTION SOUND:** Shahzdeen Saunders, Steve Schmidl, Samantha Shepherd, Katrina Versace; **MUSIC:** Michael & Brett Nolan, Carl Young; **TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE:** Fiona Bishop,





Gilbert Sauvage, Ben Stewart; ADDITIONAL FOOTAGE: *The New Ipswich* © of Film Australia, *Madmen, Saints and Sinners* © of Chris Bystrom; GRIFFITH SUPERVISOR: Bernadette Flynn.

**SPECIAL THANKS TO:** Kev and Jo Versace; Greg, Paul, Danny, Scott and Dom (slagheap stars); Management and Staff of Aberdare and Oakleigh Collieries; Jonathan Dawson, Anna Dean, Pat Laughren, Tony May and David Saunders (Griffith Uni); MaryAnn and Chook; and all the Ipswich surfers willing to be interviewed!

## **DOUG SPOWART - PHOTOGRAPHER**

Doug Spowart was born in Numurkah, Victoria in 1953 and became a resident of Queensland in 1968. In 1972 he completed a Certificate in Photography at the Queensland College of Art. He became a Master of Photography of the Australian Institute of Professional Photography in 1992.

Doug Spowart's personal work has been displayed in nine major solo exhibitions and projects. As a prolific exhibitor, his imagery has been included in 41 major group exhibitions throughout Australia and in three international showings in China, Japan and Noumea. In 1992 his work was included in a major international collection called The World's Top Photographers.

In the professional photography arena, Doug has been the recipient of many major awards, including: Queensland Professional Photographer of the Year, 1990, 1991 and 1992; the Ilford trophy at the A.I.P.P. National Print Awards 1990 and 1991; the Inaugural Athol Smith Award for Black and White Excellence, 1991; the A.I.P.P. Illustrative



Photographer of the Year 1983; First Prize, Nature Scientific Section of the Hasselblad Masters Exhibition, 1991 and 1992.

As a practicing art photographer, his work is held in many national, state and regional galleries including the Araluen Arts Collection, Alice Springs, City of Waverley Art Gallery Photography Collection, Griffith University Photography Collection, National Gallery of Victoria (L Cacciola), Queensland Art Gallery, Queensland University of Technology Art Collection, Toowoomba Art Gallery and Ipswich Regional Art Gallery.

## **ABOUT THE IMAGES**

The notion of 'inland surfers' is one which I find invokes a variety of incongruities, split personalities, geographic dysfunctions and cultural gulfs. My images then had to express these assumptions. For over twelve years, I have utilised the technique of photographing found objects held before the camera's lens. To me it seemed logical to employ this device to conjure up images with humorous and often anomalous associations. I would like to thank Jane Lewis, Joli, Shorty SSP and Sarge, for allowing their photographs to be appropriated in this way.

The portrait images are straight documents of situation and subject, with the only liberty taken being the substitution of work clothes for surfing attire vis-a-vis. Once again the objective was to supplant normality for the surreal. To the subjects, who were often very brave to cross dress for the camera, I offer my thanks. **D.S.**

All photographs in this exhibition have been produced using Films and Papers supplied by Kodak (Australasia) Pty. Ltd.



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