



Anne Graham

6 - 22 April 2006

SHERMAN GALLERIES



IN THE KITCHEN, Echigo-Tsumari Art Triennial, Japan, 2000. Courtesy the artist and Sherman Galleries, Sydney. Photograph: Yas Kumagai

An Art of Conviviality

As jazz aficionados were fond of remarking, 'the joint is cookin'! Here, in the small back space at Sherman Galleries, there's no joint in the oven but there's certainly a lot of cooking and other culinary activities taking place. Vegetables are being chopped at a preparation table. Meals are being cooked and served to visitors on the verandah. Pickles and jam are perhaps being made. At first sight it is unclear whether the gallery has become a home-science laboratory or a soup kitchen, or whether it has been commandeered as an off-studio site for yet another TV celebrity-chef show. On closer examination, though, there's more than cooking and eating going on – recipes are being exchanged and there is even a garden growing, with plants being propagated from seeds of the produce consumed on the verandah. Exactly what visitors will eat and what plants will be propagated is speculative, given that the artist's produce will be supplemented by whatever veggies or fruit visitors choose to contribute. Leftovers and rubbish will be converted into compost and possibly even art.

Welcome to the convivial, contingent art of Anne Graham.

While Graham's practice includes a substantial body of sculptures, installations, performances and drawings, as well as several permanent outdoor commissions, the defining feature of her practice is undoubtedly the series of performative temporary projects that seek to involve the participation of the public as collaborators in the realisation of the work. Key examples include *Wulla Mulla Park Installation*, for Sydney Artspace's *Working in Public*, 1992; *Transition*, for the 1997 Melbourne Festival; *The Hide for The Bridge, Construction in Process VI*, 1998, also in Melbourne; *The Silk Plaza*, for the 2000 Echigo-Tsumari Art Triennial in Japan; and *Food and Art*, 2001, at Newcastle Region Art Gallery. Essentially evolving processes, the form and final outcome of each work are contingent not simply on the collaborative participation of the public but on the very

nature of their participation. The public is constituted as a vital ingredient in the elaboration of form and meaning.

By locating her projects in a diverse range of sites, Graham sets up situational frameworks within which she investigates particular aspects of her longstanding interest in the social fabric and the connections between art and everyday life, whether intimate or estranged. For Graham, each project's location and community constitutes a site for the excavation and activation of the social – sites abundant with transformational potential whereby art and life can be mutually sustaining.

Graham situated her earlier projects within the underbelly of urban topography: the neglected, leftover areas of public space beneath railway viaducts or bridges or in-between spaces such as underground pedestrian tunnels – spaces she describes as 'no places'. Seeking on the one hand to bring attention to the often ignored existence of these disjunctive, devalued spaces by constructing temporary dwellings – Graham's so-called 'soft' architecture – within the nooks and crannies of the urban fabric, she simultaneously deployed her dwellings as convivial open-houses where the practice of daily life would be a living process in which all could take part.

In *Wulla Mulla Park Installation*, Graham's dwelling – a multi-panelled large canvas tent – took on an almost parasitic attachment to the belly of the brutalist concrete structure of the Woolloomooloo rail viaduct. Furnishing the tent with the paraphernalia of domesticity – tables, chairs, an oven and so on, she created a habitat where people could come and eat, chat and even watch movies. For Graham the tent constituted a metaphoric space in which connections could be made between place, community and memory, the participation of the public being the essential element in forging and articulating the nature of those connections.



top: A VISITING FAMILY, *Construction in Process: The Hide*, International Artists Museum, Melbourne, 1998. Courtesy the artist and Sherman Galleries, Sydney. Photograph: Tony Bond

top: THE KITCHEN, *Construction in Process: The Hide*, International Artists Museum, Melbourne, 1998. Courtesy the artist and Sherman Galleries, Sydney. Photograph: Tony Bond

above: HYDROPONIC VEGETABLES, *Transitions*, Flinders Street Station, Melbourne Festival, 1997. Courtesy the artist and Sherman Galleries, Sydney. Photograph: Tony Bond

above: THE DIGESTIVE WINDOW, *Transitions*, Flinders Street Station, Melbourne Festival, 1997. Courtesy the artist and Sherman Galleries, Sydney. Photograph: Tony Bond

Graham's preoccupation with soft architecture continued with *Transitions* and *The Hide*, the former project seeing the artist occupying a pedestrian tunnel in Melbourne's Flinders Street Station. Cushions and curtains softened the hard subterranean space, while in display windows lining the walls Graham grew hydroponic vegetables – tomatoes, spinach, basil and chillies – with sculptural objects relating to the human digestive system also on display. She showed films and collected soup recipes from people, transforming a zone of displacement and hurried, indifferent passage into a place to stop, linger and socialise. *The Hide* saw Graham's dwelling inserted into an empty space in the substructure of Maribyrnong River's Hopetoun Bridge, where the performative rituals of sleeping, cooking, serving food, showing films and making art were expanded with life-sustaining activities such as growing vegetables, making compost and rearing chickens.

Graham's soft architecture projects sought to insert art into the everyday realm of the urban fabric, her habitats constituting in-between spaces where connections between art and life could be generated through sociality. In more recent projects, Graham has shifted emphasis from constructing habitats in which to house sociality to the operation of sociality as a portable, performative process. Food – its preparation, cooking and eating – has assumed heightened agency as 'the currency of sociability', simultaneously material, method and metaphor for the incorporation of everyday life into the realm of art.¹

In *The Silk Plaza*, Graham collaborated with women from a small rural town in Japan over several days, collecting food and cooking both traditional and invented recipes for an art-triennial audience and the general public. This extended, cross-cultural culinary event constituted a convivial, performative process of improvisation, exchange and

reciprocity, forging vital connections between place, cultures and communities, as well as recuperating and regenerating social memory. This emphasis on collaboration, exchange and improvisation was further developed in *Food and Art*, where Graham asked nine people to cook a dish for a dinner, each recipe to form the inspiration for a sculpture to be created by Graham within twenty-four hours. In her catalogue essay for the subsequent exhibition of these sculptures, Susan Best described Graham's temporary projects as opening 'the safe enclosure of domesticity to the risk of "chance encounters"', noting at the same time the surrealist quality of her sculptural objects.²

But one might also see Graham's proclivity for the contingency inherent in improvisation and collaboration as a formula of practice – an essential *modus operandi* if one's practice is to be meaningfully engaged with and shaped by the reality of the everyday world. For as much as life – its quotidian materials, activities and rituals – informs Graham's art, she also believes in art's potential to transform life. This utopian impulse is, however, neither prescriptive nor naively idealistic; one sees her sympathising with Karl Marx when, refusing to provide a detailed portrait of a future society, he said: 'I write no recipes for the cookshops of the future.'³ In Graham's work, art and life is more about embracing complicity than surrendering or exerting instrumentality.

Sally Coucaud

Sally Coucaud is an independent curator and writer

1 Susan Best, 'Anne Graham's passing through: Between performance and the object', *Anne Graham*, exhibition catalogue, Sherman Galleries, 2001.

2 *ibid.*

3 Cited in Simon Sadler, *The Situationist City*, MIT Press, Cambridge, 1998, p. 161.



above: **THE SITE AT NIGHT**, *Working in Public*, Public Art Project, Artspace, Sydney, 1992. Courtesy the artist and Sherman Galleries, Sydney. Photograph: Tim Marshall

right: **UNDERNEATH THE OVERPASS**, *Working in Public*, Public Art Project, Artspace, Sydney, 1992. Courtesy the artist and Sherman Galleries, Sydney. Photograph: Tim Marshall



below: **THE CAFÉ**, Echigo-Tsumari Art Triennial, Japan, 2000. Courtesy the artist and Sherman Galleries, Sydney. Photograph © S. Anzai





GARDENING TOOLS FROM ANGELS AND INSECTS in *The Nine Dragons*,
10th International Environment Art Symposium, Cheong-ju City, South Korea, 2005.
Courtesy the artist and Sherman Galleries, Sydney. Photograph: Tony Bond

SELECTED SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 2006 *Anne Graham*, Sherman Galleries, Sydney
2004 *Anne Graham*, Sherman Galleries, Sydney
2003 *Anne Graham: Selected Works 1983–2003*, project manager John Walsh, Gold Coast City Art Gallery, Bond University Gallery, Gold Coast, QLD
2002 *Memory and Things*, Sherman Galleries Hargrave, Sydney
Memory and Things, School of Fine Art Gallery, University of Newcastle, NSW
The Cultivated Garden, Hazelhurst Regional Gallery and Arts Centre, Sydney
2001 *Eating and Grooming*, Sherman Galleries Goodhope, Sydney
Art and Food, Newcastle Region Art Gallery, NSW
2000 *The Silk Plaza*, performance, Echigo-Tsumari Art Triennial, Japan
1999 *People in Glass Houses*, Royal Botanic Gardens, Historic Houses Trust, Sydney
1998 *Timepiece*, Sculpture Forum, Canberra
Tunnel Vision, Canberra School of Art Gallery, Australian National University, Canberra
1997 *The Cooling Tower*, Museum of Sydney, Historic Houses Trust, Sydney
The Macleay Women, Elizabeth Bay House, Historic Houses Trust, Sydney
Transitions, Melbourne Festival, VIC
1996 *The Chain of Chambers*, for Volt, Brisbane Festival, QLD
Off the Rails, Adelaide Festival, University of South Australia, Adelaide
1995 *Sweat*, Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery, Sydney
Sarashi, Hinode-Machi residency exhibition, Hinode Gallery, Tokyo, Japan
Steriliser, Experimental Art Foundation, Adelaide
1994 *Sweat*, street performance, Manhattan, NY
1993 *Through the Glass*, Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery, Sydney
Lap, Artspace, The Gunnery, Sydney
Toll, Penrith Regional Gallery and The Lewers Bequest, Sydney
1992 *Noemata*, Performance Space, Sydney
1991 *Anne Graham*, Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery, Sydney
1988 *Sew What*, Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery, Sydney

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 2005 *Black Epiphanies: An exhibition of small black things*, Virginia Wilson Art in association with William Wright, Sydney
The Nine Dragons, 10th International Environment Art Symposium, Cheong-ju City, South Korea.
See: http://www.browncows.com/browncowspages/projectpages/dawnlight/dl_artists.html
2004 *Site: [unseen]*, Sherman Galleries at Danks Street, Depot Gallery, Sydney
2003–04 *Life Stocking*, Museum of Art, BYU University, Utah
Tenth Anniversary Japan Cultural Centre Sydney, Celebrating Cross-Cultural Transformations, Archive project, Powerhouse Museum, Sydney
2001 *The Cultivated Garden*, Hazelhurst Regional Gallery and Arts Centre, Sydney
Space: Moons, Penrith Regional Gallery and The Lewers Bequest, Sydney
7th NICA: International Contemporary Art Festival, Tokyo International Forum, Chiyoda-ku, Tokyo, Japan
2000 *Soft House 2: Construction in Process*, International Artists Museum, Poland
1999 *Ten Faces of Australian Contemporary Art*, Czech–Australian Cultural Alliance, Prague

- 1998 *Construction in Process: The Hide*, International Artists Museum, Melbourne
Wardrobe, Perth Institute of Contemporary Art, WA; Institute of Modern Art, Brisbane; Performance Space, Sydney; Mad Love Gallery, Adelaide
Thin Skin, Performance Space, Sydney
1996 *Parking*, Casula Powerhouse Arts Centre and Liverpool Regional Museum, Sydney
The Tamworth Fibre Biennale: Doing Time, Tamworth Regional Gallery, NSW
A Sense of Place, Bede Gallery for Northern Arts, Newcastle, UK
The Beggars Banquet, A Progressive Dinner, Performance Space, Sydney
1995 *Seven Histories of Australia*, Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, Melbourne
Doing Time, Casula Powerhouse Arts Centre and Liverpool Regional Museum, Sydney
Compound Time, Canberra National Sculpture Forum, Canberra
The Nuns Pool, Viewers and Audiences, Wollongong Regional Gallery, NSW
1994 *Working with the Wall*, Ivan Dougherty Gallery, College of Fine Arts, University of New South Wales, Sydney
1993 *Hypothetically Public*, Penrith Regional Gallery and The Lewers Bequest, Sydney
Black, Regional Galleries Touring Exhibition
Fifth Australian Sculpture Triennial, Melbourne
1992 *Working in Public*, Public Art Project, Artspace, Sydney
Transgressions, National Gallery of Australia, Canberra
1991 *Dissonance: Aspects of Feminism and Art*, The Wharf, Sydney
1987 *The Third Australian Sculpture Triennial*, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
1986 *Biennale of Sydney, Pier 2*, Sydney

PUBLIC COMMISSIONS

- 2006 *Walking on the Moon*, Mount Stromlo Observatory, Australian National University (awaiting construction)
2003 *The North Wing Project*, collaboration with Alexander Tzannes and Associates, Newcastle City Council, NSW
The Three Bowls, Tweed River Regional Art Gallery for Casuarina Development Corporation, NSW
Snake Path, Echigo-Tsumari Art Triennial, Japan
The Seven Bowls, Nanatsugama, Nigata Prefecture, Japan
The Fishermen's Table, Nanatsugama, Nigata Prefecture, Japan
2002 *Wish Transmitter*, Art Avenue, Tachikawa, Tokyo, Japan
Tachikawa Calendar, Art Avenue, Tachikawa, Tokyo, Japan
Hide and Seek, Art Avenue, Tachikawa, Tokyo, Japan
Iwadeyama Station, Iwadeyama, Japan
2000 *Passage*, Martin Place, City of Sydney Sculpture Walk, Sydney Open Museum

COLLECTIONS

- National Gallery of Australia, Canberra
Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney
Brisbane City Gallery, QLD
Broken Hill Regional Gallery, NSW
Newcastle Region Art Gallery, NSW
University of Western Sydney, NSW
John Curtin Gallery, Curtin University, WA
The Belgiorno-Nettis Collection
Corporate and private collections worldwide

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Sally Coucaud, '2003 Echigo-Tsumari Triennial', *Art & Australia*, vol. 41, no. 4, winter 2004, pp. 535–7
Donna Brett, 'Anne Graham: The alchemy of becoming', catalogue essay, Sherman Galleries, Sydney, 2004
Bruce Barber, 'Marking the limit: Re-framing a micro-economy for the arts', *Parachute*, 106, Pub Integria, Canada, 2002
Susan Best, 'Anne Graham's *Passing Through*: Between performance and the object', catalogue essay, *Eating and Grooming*, Sherman Galleries, Sydney, 2001
Susan Best, 'Elemental constructions: Women artists and sculpture in the expanded field', in Adam Geczy & Benjamin Genocchio (eds), *What is Installation? An Anthology of Writings on Australian Installation*, Power Publications, The University of Sydney, 2001, pp. 193–95
Anne Graham, 'Soft architecture', in Elizabeth Mossop & Paul Walton (eds), *City Spaces: Art and Design*, Fine Art Publishing, Sydney, 2001, pp. 78–87
Elizabeth Farrelly, 'A walk on the short-sighted side', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 4 June 2001
Martin Thomas, 'The cooling tower', *Uncertain Ground: Essays Between Art and Nature*, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney, 2000
Juliana Engberg, 'Breadline', *Artlink*, vol. 19, no. 4, 2000
Louise Dauth, *Site*, Parliament House Construction Photography Project, Parliament House, Canberra, 2000
Susan Best, 'Elemental constructions: Women artists and sculpture in the expanded field', *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Art*, vol. 1, no. 2, September 2000
Sally Coucaud, 'New look Martin Place', *City of Sydney Quarterly*, Public Affairs Unit, City of Sydney, 2000
Susan Best, 'Public art in the Olympic City', *Architecture Australia*, September–October 2000, p. 82
Dinah Dysart, 'In house intervention', *Art & Australia*, vol. 36, no. 3, 1999, pp. 350–59
Susan Best, 'Art in other spaces', *Watch This Space: A Conference on Public Art*, in Deborah Malor & Heather Johnson (eds), *Australian Journal of Art*, Sydney, 1999, p. 73
Richard Thomas (ed.), *The Bridge, Construction in Process VI*, International Artists Museum, Melbourne, 1998
Paul McGillick, 'The Bridge, Construction in Process VI', *Monument*, vol. 2, no. 5, 1998
Charles Green, 'The Bridge, Construction in Process VI', *Art and Text*, August–October 1998
Sally Coucaud, 'Sculpture Walk', *Architectural Review Australia*, vol. 6, no. 5, 1998
Peter Emmett, 'Harbourings: Remaking Sydney's industrial landscape', *Australian Perspective: Between Art and Nature*, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney, 1997
Gay Bilson, 'The beggars banquet', *Object*, winter 1996
Benjamin Genocchio, 'Situations: The work of Anne Graham', catalogue essay, Telstra Adelaide Festival, 1996
Norrie Neumark, 'A stitch in time', *Photofile*, no. 46, 1995
Susan Best, 'Walla Mulla Park', *Working in Public*, exhibition catalogue, Artspace, 1994
Catriona Moore, *On Women and Sexual Identity*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1994
Susan Best, 'Space and sexuality', *Transitions*, vol. 42, autumn 1994

cover: **AFTER THE FEAST**, 2006
metal sieve, shells and leaves, 45 cm (approx.)
Courtesy the artist and Sherman Galleries, Sydney
Photograph: Tony Bond

SHERMAN GALLERIES

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