

Art | Living, breathing visual experience | Jill Stowell | Newcastle Herald | Newcastle, NSW

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Life



📍 AT THE LOCK-UP: Works by Andrew Styan, shown here, and other artists explore metaphor based on breath to suggest larger issues.

OF all the elements, air is the most essential for life and the most difficult to represent in visual terms.

Andrew Styan and his chosen colleagues at the Lock-Up until January 29 explore metaphor based on breath to suggest larger issues. We now know that all humanity shares the same air, that it takes six months before we in Australia are inhaling the same air once exhaled in Rio de Janeiro, that pollution travels.

Air connects every living being and its currents and winds have animated many of the great religions. The Greek word for breath also means life and the soul.

Andrew Styan has a rare gift for making complex issues visible.

Remember that threatening spinning meteor at Newcastle Art Gallery a year ago revealed as a lump of coal with all its environmental baggage. The exhibition at the Lock-Up contains similarly cogent visual experiences. We can blow into a tube and a computer turns it into an image on a screen, different with each breath. Strange shapes form into coastlines and archipelagos, the merest sigh a sprinkle of islands in what appears to be fragments of molten metal.

Fellow exhibitor Sophia Emmet captures the breath of many individuals in globules of blown glass linked by a connective tissue of translucent tubing.

Ineka Dane's blue balloons indicate how breath could be stored, even sold and exported. Ian Burns' balloons have hidden costs.

“Styan has a rare gift for making complex issues

visible”

The most spectacular installation, however, is the giant transparent globe in the main gallery. The silver and gold lobes it contains catch the light as they move up and down, inflating and deflating, but Andrew Styan requires the visitor to look behind the object and discover a recording device and that pressing a red button for instance will ostensibly close down, if briefly, the operations of the stock exchange.

The link between breath and economy remains obscure to me.

This is artmaking to engender thought, to address community issues, but like so much art, it speaks most directly to us when it involves the individual.

Are so many of the world’s major problems impossible to envisage except as individual experience?

Andrew Styan is passionate about making a difference, about raising consciousness of our global challenges. Do we take a deeper breath as we return to sunny Hunter Street?

TEXTILE EVOLUTION

THE Newcastle Creative Embroiderers and Textile Artists are a passionate group. They are exhibiting as usual over the holiday period at Timeless Textiles until Sunday.

This is an opportunity to see how far textile practices have evolved from traditional stitchery into art forms incorporating many techniques from the fine art disciplines such as printmaking or three-dimensional forms, such as bugs, beetles and an example of the doll making featured in several of the most interesting of the 2016 exhibitions.

Some artists translate their mainline art practice into textiles.

Bronwyn Grieve's machine-embroidered water bird comes directly from wildlife illustration.

Traditional skills still survive in a multicoloured coat and Judi Nikoleski's layered panel.

Is it appropriate to suggest specialist workshops in colour theory and composition?

SCULPTURED STORY

ONE of the summer exhibitions at Newcastle Art Gallery until February 5 takes fibre and textile into a fully sculptural context.

Curator Anne Kempton has shown several of the 25 selected artists at her gallery Timeless Textiles, still the sole commercial specialist gallery in Australia.

The work comes from several European countries as well as the United States and Australia to explore the theme of the vessel.

Space and logistical constraints must have kept the works small. Only Brett Alexander's orgasmic explosion achieves the kind of scale possible in these lightweight materials.

For other exhibitors, the container theme invokes secrets and memory, often using recycled materials. Tim Johnson from the United Kingdom and Spain makes drinking straws and fishing line into a traditional basket form. Baskets, with their archaic origins, appear in many guises, including the red coral bowl of Newcastle's Meredith Woolnough or, from the USA, Lanny Bergner's stainless steel mesh.

Michele Fandel Bonner (USA) knits a dog from plastic wrapping. Eszter Bornemisza (Hungary) fabricates a dress from newspaper. Anita Larkin (AUS) re-contextualises a baseball glove.

It is rare for Newcastle Art Gallery to show international artists. Perhaps textiles could be regularly featured.

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