

WOMEN AND THE LAW

bur-ran-gur ang (court out)

ANNETTE PEDERSEN curated an inter-disciplinary exhibition of artworks.

bur-ran-gur ang (court out) Women and the Law was opened on 24 February 1995 by Dr Jocelyne Scutt at the Lawrence Wilson Art Gallery at the University of Western Australia. The exhibition and accompanying publication of essays was organised to celebrate the 20th anniversary of International Women's Day, on 8 March 1995, as a part of Professor Joan Kerr's Australia-wide celebrations. By combining visual art with written works by women to produce a provocative and rigorous interdisciplinary exhibition, it was hoped the issues would reach a broader audience than would normally be expected of an art exhibition.

The title *bur-ran-gur ang* comes from the Nyoongah language; it is a literal translation of 'court out'. These Nyoongah words were used as a mark of respect for the first people of the Perth region of Western Australia.

The women involved in the project came from diverse backgrounds. What it means to be a woman can never be the same for an Aboriginal Australian woman and a European Australian woman. To be a woman is always to be a woman differently, depending on race, class, sexuality and age, and yet there is meaning to the statement that one is a woman, even if that meaning constantly shifts.

As it was felt it to be essential that this diversity of the 'Australian' experience be expressed, 20 women from different cultural backgrounds in Western Australia were invited to critically examine aspects of law in their work. Consequently there were academics, writers, lawyers, journalists, artists and students involved in the project. Their artworks ranged from video installation, photography, paintings and printed silk through to essays specifically on law, Aboriginal women's law, crime writing and also creative writing.

The works in the exhibition showed some of the positive and negative aspects of law in Western Australian culture as it relates to women. While the laws of many western democracies are changing to give 'equal' status to women, the patriarchal myths on which these societies are structured and justified remain largely unchanged. These myths make possible the distinctions between private and public as they have developed in western society. This issue was a recurring concern in the exhibition and is eloquently expressed in Jo Darbyshire's painting *Wildflowers*.*

Also of importance to participants in the exhibition were the spaces indigenous cultures occupy in Australia. In our so-called 'post-colonial' culture, the High Court *Mabo* decision is seen as only the first step towards the acknow-

ledgment and inclusion of the histories and needs of Aboriginal Australians in the dominant 'Eurocentric' discourses and histories of our culture.

There are many different stories within our culture waiting to be told. Despite dominant patriarchal discourses, there is potential within visual culture to subvert and change contemporary practices and ideologies. An important way to achieve this is to provide an opportunity for people to interact with different traditions and experiences. The project, *bur-ran-gur ang*, was undertaken in the hope that by celebrating International Women's Day with a combination of visual and written texts, these dominant practices and ideologies would be reconsidered. Nearly 5000 people visited the Lawrence Wilson Art Gallery to see the exhibition.

Crime and law may have structured the beginnings of white Australian culture, but it is by the subtle means of art and literature that we may be able to change the future into something else again. We have the opportunity to bring some measure of fresh understanding and input to the events that shape our lives.

Annette Pedersen teaches in the School of Architecture and Fine Arts at the University of Western Australia.

* *Wildflowers* appears on the cover of this issue.

POLICE POWERS

'Name and address?'

PHILIP GRANO and JUDE MCCULLOCH discuss the limits of a new power of the Victoria Police.

Ten years ago, at its Annual General Meeting in April 1986, the Victorian Police Association resolved to pursue a wish list of powers, at the top of which was the power to demand name and address.

Amendments to the *Crimes Act 1958* (Vic.) in 1993, which came into effect in 1994, delivered to the Victoria Police a wide power to demand the name and address of citizens. Previously, the police could only lawfully demand name and address if the person concerned was engaged in an activity that the government had seen fit to regulate, for example, driving a motor vehicle or drinking on licensed premises. However, police have traditionally had wide powers to arrest people they suspect of engaging in criminal activity; once arrested, a person must give their correct name and address before being released.

New s.456AA of the *Crimes Act* requires that a person must provide their correct name and address if the police believe:

- they have broken the law;