

SNO 100
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It's always a pleasure to be at another opening of a show at SNO. And especially so to be at its 100th exhibition. And what makes this so important is that SNO is about the artists, and for artists with shared commitment.

SNO operates against the grain of narrative art; art that depends on stories. SNO has consistently shown work that largely escapes the attention of Sydney's museum and commercial galleries, and critics too apparently. Because it's just too interesting, intelligent, fine. SNO shows art that asks questions, and has no answers. Whilst clearly supporting emerging artists, SNO is blind to age and geography. It is unique in having an absolute and credible focus and, being extremely open, curating old and new, local, national and international in a single frame.

Billy once described SNO as a mini-institution where it's OK to do what you want, with a kind of Punk attitude. This has to be understood as a critical position in relation to what else was going on. Meanwhile, the galleries focused as they are on profile and sales within a narrow but largely under-informed social spectrum, and the museums that are largely an extension of the commercial world, abrogated their responsibilities to challenge and educate.

And SNO is so much more than an ARI. It is a large idea occupying a physically small space. It's an alternative to galleries and museums for its singularity of purpose and commitment, although it still is a gallery. SNO is much more significant than it might at first appear: That it is in a flat above a hardware store in Marrickville, a strength in my view, may cause those who don't look too closely into thinking that SNO is on the margins, or an example of 'localism', or 'regionalism', when it is precisely the opposite. By becoming part of an international network, connecting local and international artists in a very substantial way, SNO has been able to establish meaningful personal and art relationships at an international level and to promote the production of new work far more substantially than the most highly funded museums in Sydney. The importance of this, exemplified by cooperative projects with CCNOA in Brussels, PS projects Amsterdam, IS projects Leiden, Ballhaus Ost Berlin, Minus Space Brooklyn, Hebel 121 Basel, Paris Concret and others can't be overestimated.

The history is probably well known to everyone here, but I'll reiterate it briefly, because it's interesting:

Billy Gruner, through his PhD, had been exploring 'neo-' or what he called "post formalism", if I remember correctly. By which he meant a new focus on formalism as opposed to what was emphasised in the standard history of Australian art - landscape and figuration. His first foray into an exhibition space, with Kyle Jenkins and Ben Curnow, was MOP in 2003. Let's say, that was a learning experience. It was good fortune that Billy met Andrew Leslie, because that meeting brought into high relief what Billy had been thinking about when combined with Andrew's experience since the late 1990s with the Australian Centre for Concrete Art - AC4CA - in Fremantle. Although operating outside a gallery format to make large-scale site-specific painting, AC4CA already had many of the

characteristics of SNO - non objective/concrete art, international participants, ambitious, collaborative and providing alternative narratives within Australian art. Many of the early exhibitions ant SNO included artists from the AC4CA group: Trevor Richards, Alex Spremberg, Andrew Leslie, Jurek Wybraniec, Helen Smith, Jan van der Ploeg, Daniel Gottin and Joerg Hubmann

So, SNO started in March 2005 at Faversham Street Marrickville, which was to become Factory 49, and included some from the MOP days and some from AC4CA - Kyle Jenkins , Andrew Leslie, Billy Gruner, Vicente Butron, John Nixon, Tony Triff, and Pam Aitken. A year later SNO opening here in this wonderful set of rooms which challenges the idea of a "gallery", resembles a house, and consequently allows for a flexibility and unexpectedness to support a program of exhibitions of things, sound and performance, lectures and seminars. The combination focus and ambition for art, of people from both sides of the country, and beyond, have provided a very substantial basis for work that is inventive, diverse and sometimes startling. The intention was and remains to provide an alternative critical position within contemporary Australian art, supported by a curated public exhibition and education program and to expose the work of contemporary Australian and international non objective artists to Australian audiences. SNO 100 demonstrates how successful that intention has been. It represents, in microcosm, the participation of over 400 artists.

Now we can look to the future, and acknowledge the past and this who have made both possible:

Thanks to

- o the artists who have supported SNO over the last 10 years

- o Arts NSW

- o The Australia Council

- o Marrickville Council

- o SNO members past and present particularly

Susie Idiens and Sophia Egarchos for their tireless work in managing the gallery over the last 5 years

Belle Blau for her excellent graphic design

Ian Andrews for coordination of sound program

Ruark Lewis as senior curator

and Billy Gruner and Andrew Leslie