



Sydney Morning Herald
 Thursday 23/9/2010
 Page: 21
 Section: Essential
 Region: Sydney
 Circulation: 211,066
 Type: Not available
 Size: 598.96 sq.cms.
 Published: MTWTFSS-

Bin: 0000
 Brief: OBJECT
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Art attack

When it comes to creativity, Sydney has its finger on the pulse. This month, the art scene explodes with displays exploring everything from glass to the significance of pencils, writes **Judy Barouch**.

From this week, Sydney kicks into cultural high gear with a plethora of exhibitions, ranging from low-key art events to Art & About, the city's huge public arts festival.

Opening next week is one of the smaller yet most dazzling exhibitions: the Ranamok Glass Prize. A display of 44 sublime pieces of contemporary art glass, it includes vessels, sculptures, wall hangings, a desk lamp and even a pair of 39-centimetre-tall wedding rings.

"Much of the work features really bold colours, like the hot pink of Evelyn Dunstan's *The Firebush* and the vibrant red, green, yellow and blue of this year's winning piece, *Too Much is Never Enough*, by Sue Hawker," says Elizabeth MacDougall, who administers the prize with the events manager, Jo Little.

The \$15,000 prize, sponsored by 30 corporations, is acquisitive and joins the Ranamok Winners' Collection to periodically tour cities and regional centres.

MacDougall's father, Andy Plummer, was a co-founder of the prize 16 years ago. "Dad always had a passion for glass and saw this as a way to promote glass as an important visual art," she says. "Glass is beautiful and multifaceted but it is difficult to work with and requires great skill to exploit its versatility."

Plummer adds that artisans are now pushing the medium in unexpected ways. Although the competition is open only to Australians and New Zealanders, one of the judges, the curator from the Corning Museum of Glass in New York, Tina Oldknow, says that when an artist wins the Ranamok Glass Prize "they are immediately recognised internationally as being at the forefront of glass art".

And from the awe-inspiring to the wonderfully quirky: architects Felicity Gartelmann and Claire McCaughan of Sam Crawford Architects have devised *Much Lead*, a suspended installation celebrating the humble pencil for Object Gallery's 10-week Spring Series program.

A canopy of colour, it has been created from more than 3500 pencils, ranging from beautiful

drafting types to old, chewed-up lead ones donated by artists, designers, tradies and students. Holes were made at the end of each pencil with a tiny drill.

"The work explores the idea of the pencil as a simple yet essential tool," Gartelmann says. "We set up a blog with a tag where donors entered their name and told a story about what they use their pencil for. It seems that pencils have a nostalgic effect on many people."

Artworks rendered in pencil feature in *Shaping Inspiration* at Newtown's Lennox Street Studios. This open-house fair day is a chance for visitors to check out the 37 studios and chat with the artists.

Many diverse items will be for sale, ranging from paintings by renowned artist Tim Johnson – whose work is held in the Art Gallery of NSW – to Michael Fairweather's stylised computer paintings and Ro Cook's screen-printed tablecloths, chair covers and cushions.

"It is encouraging for both the established and the emerging artists that Edmund Capon,

the director of the Art Gallery of NSW, is opening the exhibition," one of the studio's founders, Steve Perrin, says. Another, similar venue for viewing and buying affordable art is

'It is encouraging for both the established and the emerging artists.' Steve Perrin

the annual Workshop Arts Centre Market Day in Willoughby. For the past 20 years, before opening time, queues of people including many interior decorators snake around the block waiting to snare paintings, prints, sculptures and ceramics.

"Artists donate works as a fund-raiser for our non-profit centre and sometimes these sell for a fraction of the price that they would cost in the galleries where these artists regularly exhibit," the administrator, Ann Fisher, says.

At this time of year, young creatives' work is also being showcased. A printmaker, designer and University of Technology Sydney lecturer, Naomi Solomon, is the curator of the sixth *Art by Design* exhibition at the Books Kinokuniya Gallery. The indie show includes handcrafted felt accessories, crochet brooches, jewellery and prints. "No creative limitations were provided and it's oh-too-cool-for-school," Solomon says.



BITS AND PIECES

Ranamok September 30-October 23, Angel Place Office Tower foyer, 123 Pitt Street. Monday-Friday 9am-5pm, Saturday-Sunday 10am-4pm. Inquiries: 0400 019 734.

Much Lead October 2-10, Object Gallery, 417 Bourke St, Surry Hills. Tuesday to Friday 11am-5pm, Saturday and Sunday 10am-5pm. Inquiries: 9361 4511.

Lennox Street Studios Fair November 5-7, 111 Lennox St, Newtown. Daily 10am-5pm. Inquiries: 0417 411 446.

Workshop Arts Centre Market Day Saturday, 33 Laurel Street, Willoughby. 10am-3pm. Inquiries: 9958 6540.

Art By Design October 17 to November 13, Books Kinokuniya Art Gallery, 500 George Street. Mondays, Tuesdays, Wednesdays, Fridays, Saturdays 10am-7pm, Thursdays 10am-9pm, Sundays 10am-6pm. Inquiries: 0402 146 507.

New works ... (clockwise from top left) *Much Lead* at Object Gallery; Jo Little and Elizabeth MacDougall with Ranamok glass works; creations by Anna Warren; labelled pencil donations contributed to *Much Lead*. Photo: Domino Postiglione