

PROJECT 8

An Australian Accent

1984-85

An Australian Accent

15 April – 10 June 1984

P.S.1, New York

30 June – 26 August 1984

Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington DC

22 September – 11 November 1984

Art Gallery of Western Australia, Perth

1 December 1984 – 31 January 1985

Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney

BIOGRAPHIES

Widely known as a performance artist, Mike Parr has produced videos, photographs, drawings and installations throughout his career. Much of Parr's work is an attempt to address identity and self-representation while pushing the boundaries of his own physical limits. Parr is known as one of the most outstanding artists of his generation.

Imants Tillers is regarded as one of the most important Australian artists of his generation. A child of immigrant Latvian parents who met in a displaced persons' camp, many of his large-scale paintings address the complexities of migration and displacement within contemporary concepts of place.

Ken Unsworth's art is founded in the magic and mystery of hidden forces. His work spans four decades in many different mediums: site-specific land-based art, performance, motorised relief works, work with river stones, large bitumen drawings, maquettes and room-sized installations.

FACTS

- *An Australian Accent* was the first time all three artists exhibited in the US.
- Parr presented 14 large stretched and contorted self portraits in charcoal.
- Tillers created 10 large works comprised of hundreds of small canvas boards. The exhibition was the first appearance of Tillers' *Stacks* of painted canvas boards read as sculpture.
- Unsworth showed a mix of styles from European expressionism to Japanese mythological 'Gaki' painting, as well as 11 large works drawn in bitumen and studies for performance.
- The show provided great exposure and led to further international opportunities for the participating artists. Unsworth claimed *An Australian Accent* also "precipitated a major change in Australian art."

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PROJECT OVERVIEW

In 1984 the art industry was at the beginning of a new internationalism. John Kaldor took the opportunity provided by the wave of interest in Australian film and literature to curate an exhibition of Australian art in New York as Project 8, titled *An Australian Accent*. Three of the most celebrated Australian artists of their generation – Mike Parr, Imants Tillers and Ken Unsworth – presented 52 drawings and paintings for the project, generating laudatory and extensive reviews. New York Times critic John Russell praised the exhibition's "exceptional expressive power". After opening in the New York contemporary art centre P.S.1 Gallery, the exhibition travelled to Washington's Corcoran Gallery of Art and then returned to tour museums in Australia.

Now a celebrated contemporary art space and a Museum of Modern Art affiliate since 2000, P.S.1 was founded by director Alanna Heiss, who knew John Kaldor as a collector. Heiss agreed to Kaldor's proposal for an exhibition and, with the support of curators Daniel Thomas and Jonathan Fineberg, Kaldor selected the three artists, none of whom had previously shown in an American museum or gallery.

Parr presented 14 large stretched and contorted self-portraits in charcoal, predominantly black-and-white and some partially coloured with pastel. Tillers created 10 large works comprised of hundreds of small canvas boards, each painted and overpainted with layered references. Unsworth presented 11 large works drawn in bitumen and paint and four series of smaller drawings, including studies for his performance works.

All of the artists travelled to New York to install the works and attend the opening, timed to coincide with the re-opening of a newly extended Museum of Modern Art that brought visitors from across America. The director of the Corcoran Gallery of Art, Michael Botwinick, was in New York at the time and contacted Kaldor to request the show for Washington. Three rooms of the Corcoran's permanent collection were taken down to make room for *An Australian Accent* to be shown at the same time as a group exhibition of German artists, *Expressions*. On returning to Australia, the show travelled to the Art Gallery of Western Australia in Perth and the Art Gallery of New South Wales in Sydney.

Kaldor Public Art Project 8: Exhibition view, *Australian Accent*, P.S 1, New York, 15 April - 10 June 1984

Photo: Andrew Moore



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