



VISUAL ARTS

Ric Spencer



Simply a matter of taste

Taste is a personal thing, but when you start to prescribe taste to others, you can get into trouble. So what is it like to be a prescriber of taste, an arbiter of what's good for society?

In *Creating Taste: The Collection of Joe and Rose Skinner*, we get a look at a couple who have had an enormous impact on the culture of a city, setting new aesthetic standards by advocating a more hands-on role for the collector in the plying of cultural sensibilities.

It's interesting to look at the Skinner collection at a time when private collections are being aired with growing frequency around the world. Just recently the Daros-Latinamerica collection was shown at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Sydney. Why this resurgence of private taste on to the public realm; what does it mean to the greater public that you or someone else has a certain taste in art? Is the public missing something; do we require the collector to transcend their role and become the cultural goon squad?

The Skinners' collection currently showing at the Lawrence Wilson Art Gallery is testimony to the obsessive act of culture-building and in this sense it's a privilege to view. Everything favoured by the auction houses of Australia today is here on display and that in itself advocates the power of setting cultural agendas. There is also a strong and infused collection of local artists' work on display.

I wasn't alive when most of these works were being shown for the first time at the Skinner Galleries, so to wander through this collection is a distanced pleasure for me, a somewhat melancholic act for the

most part.

At its time, the showing of Arthur Boyd's *Susannah and the Elders* in Perth probably caused a storm, Sidney Nolan's *Leda and the Swan* probably did as well, but for the most part the collection seems in good taste, if not safe.

In the context of this show, the works are about art, the sensation of painting, of technique, not of the artist's celebrity.

It's nice to see the works of the artists of that era viewed as poignant to the history of art making, beyond the incredible layers of mythology that surround a lot of their characters and this must be read as testimony to the aesthetic eye of Rose Skinner.

A lot of the artists' works are shown in chronological order and this gives the viewer a chance to see their progression.

For example, Fred Williams' work moves from fairly static formations of the mid-1960s to later vibrant and lush works of the mid-70s. Looking across the gallery it's easy to see the influence Williams had on Howard Taylor's work.

His untitled wood sculpture is an ode to Williams' treed landscapes. Despite this it, along with the beautiful *Flight*, stands the test of time.

An artist's work that surprised me, seeing it differently in the flesh, was Sam Fullbrook's fluid paintings. Both *Emu* and the *Aeroplane*, and *The Sergeant* are eloquent and minimal in their gestural strokes, surmising much in their washed application of paint.

The standout in the show is Boyd's *the Potter's wife, horse and trap (Rosebud)*. Striking the eye as you enter the gallery, this large work is painted as if the paint was clay.

The translation of location into paint is fantastic and the work is wet with emotion, atmosphere and devastation. Boyd was such a responsive artist and this painting based on family history is wrought with the testimony of the painter's vision.

Creating Taste is at Lawrence Wilson Art Gallery, UWA, until December 19 and then from January 16 to March 30.

● At Emerge Art Space, Pierre Capponi's work draws on this very era of painting and his own response to this history is impacting and somewhat charming in its innocence. Indeed his work during the past few years has made me smile; like toys in a child's playroom, only made from the last remnants of material scrounged during some great depression. The awkwardness of the arrangements makes for sculpture laced with irony but totally ambivalent to its own kitsch Australiana.

This show, *Momentum*, at times sits precariously close to being on the wrong side of that Australiana trend so much a part of contemporary Australian art but it is saved time and again by its own disdain. With titles like *Giddy Up*, *Innaloo Drive In* and *Cowaramup* you can get the idea of the local flavour. I enjoyed his bird series, mainly because of the effortless fashion in which they are put together, but it's the more kinetic works like *Not a Good Idea*, which engage in a pseudo-theatrical quality, that puts Capponi's work into a less definable space.

Momentum closes at Emerge Art Space, Northbridge, on Sunday.



Pierre Capponi: Pressed tin, plywood, photos and central Australian dirt.

Looking back: Arthur Boyd's *Susannah and the Elders*, c 1972, oil on hardboard from the Skinners' collection probably caused a storm in Perth when it was shown



Charming: Pierre Capponi's Pressed tin and steel shoes.



Disdain: Capponi's Pressed tin, rivets, steel rod, spray paint, craftwood, acrylic.