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Indigenous  
Australian Sculpture



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## AUSTRALIA

## Melbourne

Karen Ward at  
Gallery 101

**K**aren Ward's most recent exhibition entitled *Nexus II* is like a room of architectural facades from ancient buildings. There are low-relief wood panels that resemble temple doorways, windows, or the framework of old shelving compartments. In the sculptural works strips of wood are used on a wooden backing to create squares and rectangles. These are assembled like modular units to construct larger squares, rectangles, and architectural forms. The pieces are colored in deep-brown tones and the painted surfaces are rubbed back to give depth and patina. In these panels, era, location, and function remain a mystery but they appear to refer to a range of architectural and cultural possibilities that includes medieval, early Christian, and Japanese architecture. Religious and temple architecture is also alluded to.

There are Christian cross motifs in a number of the pieces, as in *Threshold*, which looks like a window facade and has white paraffin wax inlaid into crosses. The works explore our sense of memory and identity, how we relate to architecture and its forms and spaces. They include references to inside and outside, structure and covering, and processes and ritual.

*Entrance* is like an ancient doorway. This work, made of five wooden panels hung together, has multiple squares and rectangles in its design. There is a considered order and form, with combinations of horizontal and vertical lines. The work has a dark, almost burnt and waxy surface patina, meticulously worked with fine lines and subtle markings from a rasp or file, adding depth and age to the surface. Two crosses at the bottom and others throughout allude to religion. The gallery wall, an entrance into the unknown, creates the interior void in the doorway.

*Duplex* (2006) is like a piece of Op art, and is made of multiples of wooden squares and rectangles piled in receding size on top of each other. It appears to be like a plan view looking onto temples. The top

half of the panel is white and the bottom half black. Shadows are cast from the layers creating gray lines, echoing the forms used to create the work.

Framed two-dimensional collages in the exhibition are less

restrained and more spontaneous. They use similar square and rectangle motifs but are minimal in style and less related to architecture. *Urban Landscape* is a collage of layered paper, acrylic and oil paints, pastel, and plywood. It resembles an old wall in an industrial landscape. With horizontal and vertical strips, squares, and rectangles of grays and browns, a central yellow square appears to "float" providing an emotive contrast and a modernist context.

Ward directs our attention to imagined and actual structures, which offer a variety of perspectives. The relationship to architecture in the wooden constructions is more cerebral and systematic than in the works on paper, which are looser and more emotive. Of the 19 works in the exhibition the most striking were the assemblages that look like details of buildings. The repetitive motif of square and rectangle in modular units makes the viewer consider carefully the notion of buildings and spaces.

Sandy Caldwell

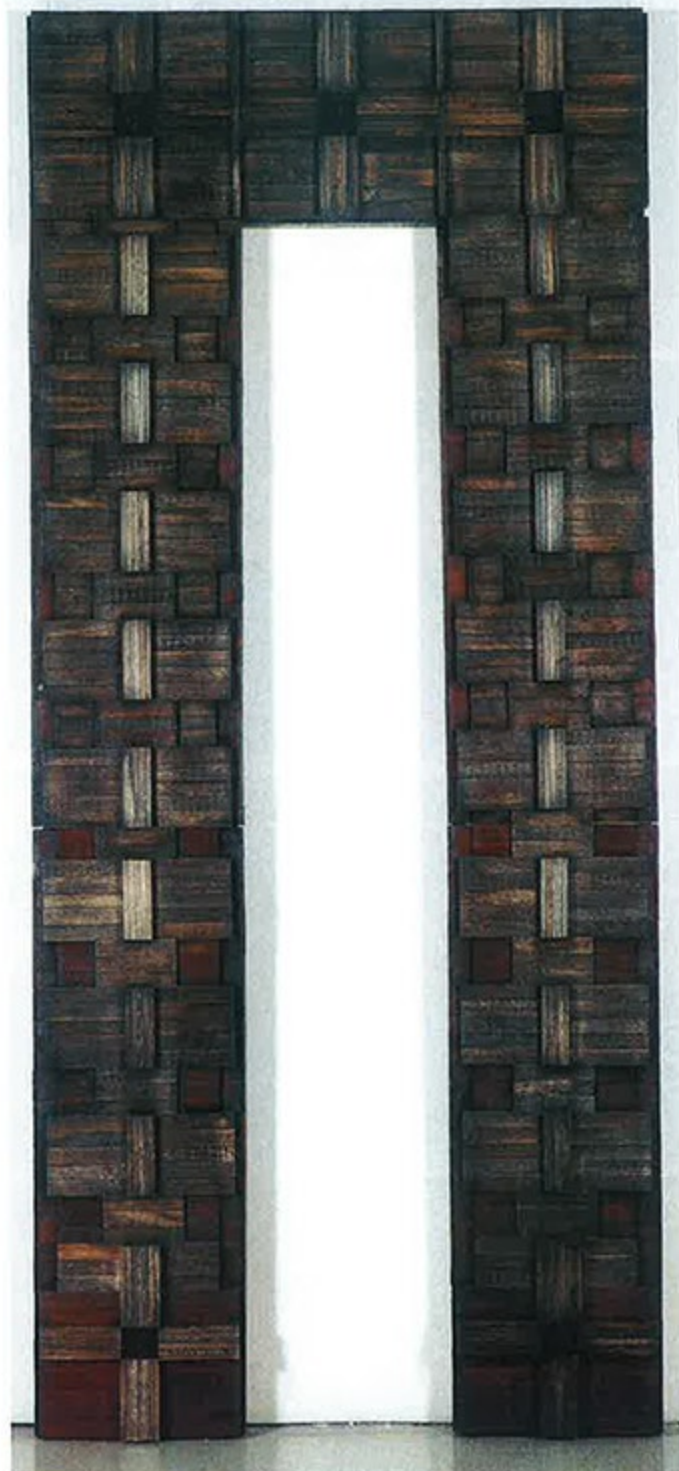
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## Sydney

Kirsten Pieterse at  
Martin Browne  
Fine Art

**E**ntering Kirsten Pieterse's enigmatic and engaging exhibition entitled *Still Point* you are immediately transported to a serene street and escape; the sick coolness of her stainless-steel and white-acrylic rod sculptures suggest obsession and a purist geometry. But, as one moves closer to Pieterse's constructions, one is drawn into an architectural mania that teeters on the point of chaos and collapse.

Scottish-born, Sydney-based Pieterse, not surprisingly, studied architecture before turning exclusively to making art. Her earlier constructions were made from balsa wood and foam core, connecting more implicitly with her roots in model making. This is her first move to stainless steel and acrylic and the tensile strength of these new materials



Karen Ward, *Entrance*, 2006, five panels, plywood, Pinus Radiata, parquet hardwood, enamel paint, wax, 216 x 94 x 10 cm. Photography by Glenn Hester. Image: Courtesy of the Artist and Gallery 101.



allows the sculptures to stretch taller and push the boundaries of construction. This is easily experienced by the viewer in *Slippage*, a lacework of rods looming almost two meters tall, which towers over the other works in the exhibition, all of which sit pristinely on pedestals.

Pieterse's constructions are fastidious and fall somewhere between fantasy gothic cityscape and formal studies in geometric abstraction. Her stacked columns form a scaffold or framework that appears layered in space. You look into the object's density rather than through it. Her sculptures carry a feeling of weight and yet their crystalline structures have the fragility of snowflakes, seemingly prone to collapse. They are about a natural dynamic.

What creates an exciting engagement for the viewer is that Pieterse's objects feel like they are caught in motion, *slipping*. It is the sort of jolt of delight one feels when a house

of cards falls. Pieterse harnesses that energy and holds it slightly at bay, frozen.

Usually asymmetrical, there seems to be no central point or axis to her structures which question gravity. *Slippage* tilts slightly to the left while the collapse of the rods falls to the right in an engaging twist of logic. Similarly, the stainless-steel *Rebuilt* has a strong verticality but is the most collapsed piece in the show. A gashing void divides the work in a brutal action. It is not the action of splitting open but rather has the sensibility that something has fallen through the center of the structure with "twin towers" destruction. Balancing this incision are resistant soaring rods that are splayed across the void. It is a very dramatic work.

Pieterse plays with the acrylic's ability to hold light. The elegant lines of these sculptures are so densely woven at times that it is impossible for light to penetrate the structure, and yet

their white opacity has the illusion of light. In a similar fashion Pieterse tops the gallery's pedestals with a sheet of white acrylic so that it takes on a liquid form, its meniscus hugs the pedestal's edge reflecting the sculpture placed upon it. The shadows continue the linear conversation from the three-dimensional object into the two-dimensional shadow drawing.

Exploring this further, Pieterse compliments her cohesive body of sculptures with a suite of line drawings. Largely pencil and ink, they have a topographic quality mapping the landscape with waterways carving vacant space through a dense field. It is the counter perspective to looking through the sculptures mapping an urban landscape.

Pieterse's exhibition is exquisitely fabricated. She has a wonderful sense of spatial engagement, appearing stacked when viewed from the side and defying gravity from the front. They are still contemplations,

beautifully balanced and yet wildly dynamic.

Gina Fairley

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## Heri Dono at Sherman Galleries

Heri Dono needs little introduction; his name is synonymous with contemporary Indonesian art. His recent exhibition, entitled *Angels! Bang Bang*, delivers the anticipated 'next showing' of twittering, flapping angels and painted cartoon-like commentaries—all the familiar characters are there. While it may not offer ground-shattering diversions in the work, it is a cohesive and engaging exhibition that doesn't fail in its ability to bewitch audiences.

The works in the show cover the period 2006–2007. The exhibition comprises five new paintings and four multi-component installations. Walking into the gallery one is greeted by a fleet of armless, caped crusaders in *Angels Fallen from the Sky* (2007), a five-figure installation that instantly evokes the oft-cited reference to the retro-superhero Flash Gordon. One can't help but feel that they are obstructing their militant path, poised for vertical projection with a kind of beam-me-up-Scottie determination and, all the while, seemingly advancing in a menacing formation and emitting a drone-like chatter. One is instantly aware that one is entering Dono's world. It is a bizarre and cheeky assault on 21st century myth-making and social and political criticism.

What is most invigorating about this exhibition is its spatial engagement and the bodily experience it offers viewers moving through the installation, perhaps brought to a point of tension with *Angels Face to the Future* (2007). Here a flock of five swoops in a diagonal across the gallery, its squadron leader coming face-to-face with the viewer. Their weighty crafted bodies are propelled by red-rocket appendages; their faces white with surreal definition somewhere between geisha adornment and a mask. Their



**Above left:** Kirsteen Pieterse, *Slippage*, 2007, acrylic rod, 190 x 85 x 20 cm. **Above right:** Kirsteen Pieterse, *Rebuilt*, 2007, stainless steel, 138 x 75 x 27 cm. Images: Courtesy of the Artist and Martin Browne Fine Art.