

Many of you would know that in the latest edition of the magazine *Australian Art Collector*, Jane O'Neill has been granted the title of *Agenda Setter no. 33*. Now, regardless of what we may or may not think of that journal, I think it's unfortunate that innovators like her get such lowly status. There are no fireworks about Jane's approach, no diva performances, no bristling arrogance, no sadly familiar boorish behaviour which often permeates the Australian art world.

But Jane can demonstrate a charming audacity, such as the project we are here to celebrate, the wonderful and lamented Austral Avenue. We are all familiar with ARIs as they have been part of our landscape since 1971 when Mike Parr and co-launched Inhibodress in Sydney. But we are not so familiar with this gallery/house concept, particularly where the art is defiantly experimental rather than an excuse for salon purchasing. (A tangential comment—before Austral were none of these establishments, but during its existence, we also witnessed Dude Space and Ocular Lab.)

Sadly, I only went to Austral Avenue three times, by bicycle and train from Caulfield (oh, the dedication!), down baking concrete side streets, past cars and weatherboard, under shedding trees to the toy- and log-strewn entry of Jane and the Arthurs' domain. As Arthur the Younger came bounding out to welcome, you knew this was something different. My chronology is a bit scrambled, but I think my first show was Daniel Argyle's austere crates, followed by Cathy Blanchflower's sumptuous windows and then the Sydney Non-Objective's sublime display. Yes, such choices reveal certain of my aesthetics but Jane talks in her introduction of how the action of *living with art* causes a slower contemplation which in turn gives rise to new and nuanced discoveries and interpretations. Many of us nowadays are guilty of seeing without looking, we *know* our tastes, and will walk out in seconds if a show doesn't grab in that first glance. All the more pity for us.

On arriving at Austral, having committed to the journey, having committed to walking through the front door, and now having committed to the expectations of a boisterous toddler, it would have been a foolish and impatient person who then would walk out again without that second look. For Jane's exhibitions were often slow burners. In her introduction, Jane quotes one of my heroes TJ Clark on this phenomena, of 'the astonishing things that happen when you give yourself over to it'.

Quite coincidentally, I have been involved in two recent books charting the histories of certain art projects and so, I'm delighted to announce that this... is number 3. That said, it is a great little number, beautifully designed and illustrated, with Jane's essays pulsing through like an easy web that envelops the reader in that same slow contemplation which we experienced at the actual gallery. I am sure you have all purchased a copy but I commend all who haven't to do so now. Hell, let's be frank, such projects are never cheap to pull off, nor are they ever fully covered by the scarcity of funding available.

With that, I would like to formally launch *Austral Avenue: An Experiment in Living with Art* by Jane O'Neil. May she now also be formally granted the title of True Trendsetter and Quiet Achiever no. 1.