

The Vernacular Terrain

by heidi maier

From digital photography to experimental video installations, filmmaking and graphic design pieces, the International Digital Art Project 2007 brings together works by artists from Australia, China and Japan.

This year's exhibition, *The Vernacular Terrain*, will tour to all three countries, presenting a selection of works by more than 45 artists, all of them exploring themes of environmental, cultural, and political place.

Founder and director of IDAP, Stephen Danzig, said that this year's exhibition asks each artist to respond to their environment as an open statement. Is it possible to speak of local dialects of the terrain? Are the artists presenting specific viewpoints of the landscape within a contextual landscape? What are the influences of hyper-techno landscapes found in virtual worlds, gaming, cellular technologies, web culture and so on?

Regarded by its creators as "a living document" of digital art, the IDAP began in 1999 as a web-based initiative aimed at exhibiting, disseminating and researching cross-cultural identity in the works of artists using new creative technologies.

In the past seven years the project has expanded to include a national and international touring exhibition. Aimed at showcasing works by artists from around the



Ben Hibon, still from *Codehunters*, 2006. Courtesy of the artist and Blinkink



David Rosetzky, still from *World's Apart #1*, 2006. Courtesy the artist and Sutton Gallery, Melbourne

world who work in new media and digital arts, it also seeks to provide them with opportunities to engage in a cross-cultural artistic dialogue.

Broad in scope, *The Vernacular Terrain* boasts new media works from well-known Australian artists David Rosetzky, James Lynch, Brendan Lee, Monika Tichacek and Madga Matwiejew.

Also featured are a series of six new cinematic works by renowned film director Peter Greenaway and his collaborator, Hungarian artist Istvan Horkay.

Further film-based works include French artist Michael Roulier's continuous self-editing video, *Sub-memory check*, and UK artist Ben Hibon's award-winning post-apocalyptic *Codehunters* (below), a short film that uses both Eastern and Western animation techniques to tell a story about Burmese, Chinese, Thai, Vietnamese and Malaysian characters.

The Angel series, a confronting suite of photographic works by acclaimed Chinese artist, Cui Xuiwen, is one of a number of works in the exhibition that offers unflinching and unambiguous social criticism. Exploring the life of a pregnant young Chinese girl, the work utilises a number of subtly repetitive images, relying on the power of repetition to highlight the inherent oppressiveness of traditionally patriarchal Chinese society.

Chinese video director and filmmaker Maleonn's *Midsummer Night's Dream* photo media series similarly interweaves historical references with more contemporary preoccupations, the imagery conveying feelings of dislocation and unease.

Alternately beguiling and disquieting, Melbourne-based artist Andrea Innocent creates works which deftly fuse elements of contemporary Japanese current affairs and culture with narratives drawn from Japanese folklore and history.

A former student of fashion design and multimedia, both of which she says have ultimately influenced her practice as a digital print artist, Innocent's works are imbued with symbolism and rich detail.

Rat Daughter (right) is based on a real-life incident in which a Japanese schoolgirl tried to murder her mother by slowly poisoning her with a chemical that is commonly used as rat poison in Japan.

Although the schoolgirl is the focal point of Innocent's illustration it is the details – among them a small, sad cat in a specimen jar and the patterned fabric of her kimono – that lend the work its quiet power.

"What intrigued me the most about this story was the girl's seemingly distant relationship with her mother. She showed little or no remorse in what she had done and took a disciplined scientific approach to what was in fact the slow murder of her own mother," Innocent says.

An aficionado of Japanese culture, animation, art and design, Innocent spent three years living and working in Japan and says that the experience heavily influenced her intricate and provocative images.

"I have not always drawn in this style and it was not until my completion of my multimedia studies and subsequent travel to Japan that I found digital imagery to be the best vehicle for the ideas that had begun to bubble and rise to the surface of my mind there. More than anything I want to create a curiosity in my viewer. I want them to ask what something is, why something is, or just stop long enough to break the monotony of their day," Innocent says

"Japan, for me, is an incredibly stimulating place. I still cannot describe what happened to me there but I definitely underwent some form of transformation in my outlook and my ability to finally express myself in an efficient medium that also touched and intrigued others."



Andrea Innocent, *rat daughter*.



Andrea Innocent, *i'd rather be a swallow than a snail*

The Vernacular Terrain is on display at the Queensland University of Technology Art Museum, Gardens Point campus **until 30 September**, and at QUT Creative Industries Precinct, Kelvin Grove **until 15 September**. It then tours to the Beijing Film Academy and the Songzhuang Art Museum in Beijing.