

GALLERY'S CULTURE SHOCK

Mitch Johnson

Tim Burns exhibited this communication installation last month at the NSW Art Gallery, titled 'A Change of Plan'. It was part of a \$50,000 exhibition called "**Recent Australian Art**". Inside **Ursula** and **Barry** were televised (naked) to a live audience in the gallery from the room above. The piece requires two video cameras and two monitors, allowing the objects to see and also talk back with their viewers.

Tim developed the thing from an idea he had for the *Object and Idea* show in Melbourne. There people would sit in a chair with headphones that gave a running commentary on themselves. **Liz Sheridan** suggested the room idea.

The arrest of **Barry Prothero**, the male half of the duo (after he had walked naked to the toilet through the Sunday afternoon gallery gazers) got front page in *The Australian* and henceforth **Tim Burns** became mass appeal. Ursula says it was very hot and **Barry** refused to get dressed to go to the toilet. The guards called the police, who came into the room and carried him away.

Barry got \$1000 bail and the exhibition was closed for the day. The next Monday **Barry** was put on a \$400 self-surety. Other artists exhibiting immediately organised to withdraw their works in protest allowing **Tim Burns** and his advisors to negotiate conditions under which the work would continue.

Gallery Curator **Daniel Thomas** gave written assurances that he would testify in court on **Barry's** behalf; that **Barry** would be allowed to continue his participation under limited restraints, that in future no decision about works will be left to non-professional staff and that limitations imposed on works be clearly stated and agreed to by the artist.

As precedents, these commitments represent major gains for the professional artist.

Source: *The Digger*, November 10-December 9, 1973