

INHIBODRESS - JUST FOR THE RECORD¹

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I believe it would have been some time in August/September, 1970, that **Mike Parr** convened a meeting to discuss the possibility of establishing an artists' co-operative gallery.

I attended the first meeting, and a subsequent meeting, with a degree of scepticism mixed with disinterest. What was being proposed was not so much an alternative to the existing gallery-dealer system, but a means by which a number of artists, who were not represented by a gallery, might have the opportunity to show their work. My scepticism rested in my knowledge of the ease with which an artists' co-operative could fail, and my disinterest with the fact that I had begun to show with **Gallery A**; the need for another gallery, therefore, being a fairly low priority.

Nevertheless I was interested in the possibility of an alternative existing system, while at the same time recognizing that **Gallery A** may not satisfy future, particular, exhibition requirements. This was enough for me to maintain whatever degree of interest I had in the project.

A space on the second floor of a building in Woolloomooloo was secured for a rent of \$30.00 per week. The space, measuring approximately 60' x 30', was formerly the premises of a blouse factory, the company being called Hibodress Blouses. 'In' was added to 'Hibodress', for no particular reason other than the member's mutual decision to have a name for the gallery which was non-specific. So the gallery became Inhibodress, a non-sense word, reminiscent of Dada.

A press release written by **Barbara Hall**, and dated 22.10.70 was forwarded to the local media and art critics;

INHIBODRESS, A NEW SYDNEY GALLERY

A new art gallery opens in Sydney on November 7 - a gallery with a few radical differences.

- (1) it is being initiated, financed and maintained solely by artists.
- (2) it is a non profit proposition in contrast to all private Sydney galleries.
- (3) it is being founded without any interest in identity, or in representing any school of art.
- (4) it will be a low-rent venue for frequent theatre, music and poetry experiments.

How ... At present the founding group comprises eleven artists, but additions are possible within limits. Each contributes a weekly sum for rental and upkeep, and each is responsible for all aspects of his exhibition - promotion, management etc.

Why ... Some of the artists have broken with regular galleries and consider Inhibodress a complete substitute.

¹ For an opposing point of view allowing a different perspective on Inhibodress see Ian Milliss' 'Obituary Inhibodress Gallery, 1970-1972, C.A.S. Broadsheet, Sept. 1972

For some it will provide an opportunity for experimental projects not easily assimilable in the regular gallery set-up.

For others it will provide a first showing for artists who have not been able to break into the regular galleries.

Who...The original idea rests with Mike Parr, a poet, painter and conceptualist, but the 'power rests with the masses' and all decisions are settled by majority vote.

The subscribing artists are: **John Armstrong**² (2) **Bill Brown, Terry English, Neils Elmoos, James Elwing, Michael Gifford, Tim Johnson, Peter Kennedy, Orest Keywan, Mike Parr** and **Rolla Primrose**.

The press release created dissention amongst some of the members. It was the first disagreement within the group to be voiced *out-front*. It was probably also the last disagreement to be so openly voiced. The cause of the disagreement was due to member's sensitivity to the statement: "For others, it will provide a first showing for artists who have not been able to break into regular galleries".

A circular was sent to all members calling for a meeting on Saturday, October 31, 1970, to discuss, amongst other things, a policy towards publicity. The circular enumerated the points, concerning publicity, to be discussed.

- (1) ... should the gallery make a policy of getting as much publicity as possible?
- (2) ... should the onus rest on individuals for organising the publicity for their own shows?
- (3) ... can individual members, at their own discretion, organize publicity for the gallery as a whole?

The circular was jointly signed by **Mike Parr** and myself. This was the first occasion on which I became actually involved with Inhibodress administration!

A consensus was arrived at. As there were eleven members there were eleven different reasons for membership. Barbara Hall was to continue as Inhibodress publicist.

The first show, a group show of nine artists, received only salutary mention by Sydney critics. With several 'post-object' artists as members of the co-operative the expectations (already apparent) of two critics, **Donald Brook**, and **Terry Smith** were not fulfilled.

The final event for the year was an **AZ Music** concert organized by **David Ahern**, who had just joined the group. The concert was dismissed by Sydney's music critics, but was favourably reviewed by **Donald Brook**.

It was not until the new year, 1971, that the direction for which Inhibodress became known began to develop. Following in rapid succession the exhibitions defined a 'position'. There was **Mike Parr's** 'Word Situations No.1', my exhibition 'But the Fierce Blackman', **Tim Johnson's** 'Installation as Conceptual Scheme', an exhibition organized by **Tim Johnson** called 'Activities' which included the work of local artists (**Neil Evans, Terry English, Tim Johnson, myself, Mike Parr, Alec Tzannes,**

² Although his name appears in the press release John Armstrong was never associated with Inhibodress. He attended the first meeting of the co-operative but never returned. Bill Brown participated in the inaugural exhibition but withdrew soon after.

Optronic Kinetic and artists overseas collected by **Tim Johnson** whilst travelling in England and Europe at the latter part of 1970 and the beginning of 1971, **Mel Bochner, Victor Burgin, Ian Breakwell, John Hilliard, Barry Flanagan, Lygia Clark, Helio Oiticica, David Medalla** and **Lawrence Weiner** were some of the artists). The next exhibition, which I organized, was four artists associated with Melbourne's **Pinacotheca** gallery. The artists were: **Simon Close, Roger Cutforth, Dale Hickey** and **Robert Rooney**.

These five exhibitions ranged from mid-February to mid-June, 1971. Referring to the art reviews of the time it appears that there were only three other shows from that time, mid-June to the end of 1971, which received the kind of critical attention necessary to support **Inhibodress**' position as the 'radical' or 'experimental' gallery of the Sydney art scene. Those shows were; **Mike Parr's** 'Word Situations No.2, **Terry English's** 'Processes, Activities and Participation in Time' and a presentation of video tapes by **Mike Parr** and myself, although the latter attracted attention more for their innovative rather than their aesthetic qualities. To my knowledge it was the first video-tape show in this country and it was with being 'first' which **Inhibodress** was beginning to become rather self-consciously associated with.

Although, as it seemed to me, **Inhibodress** represented something of a cause to both **Donald Brook** and **Terry Smith**, enthusiastic responses to the above shows were not their prerogative alone. **Bruce Adams, James Gleeson, Noel Hutchison, Sandra McGrath, David Rankin** and **Daniel Thomas** were usually sympathetic if not always enthusiastic. The only opposition derived from **Elwyn Lynn. Laurie Thomas** wrote about it on several occasions.

Introductions to reviews during this period were positively laudatory; 'This gallery is the exciting place this week', 'Without doubt, a visit to **Inhibodress**' which has now assumed the avant-garde mantle dropped by **Central Street** is an exciting and stimulating experience', 'By far the most challenging and thought provoking of this week's exhibitions...'

'**Inhibodress** Information', a collection of loose sheets, 'edited' by **Tim Johnson, Mike Parr** and myself, grew out of this excitement. Three issues reached subscribers before it folded; it never really seemed to get off the ground.

'Conceptual' or 'post-object' art, had by this time become substantially associated with **Inhibodress**. As **Mike Parr** and I had assumed the major part of the administration of **Inhibodress**, if not all of it; our names, too, were strongly associated with the gallery by this time.

The emergent *raison d'être* had brought with it an image. Many of the artists originally associated with the gallery had, by this time, their own one-man (sic) shows, or at least were about to. Their financial commitment to **Inhibodress** in the form of rent contributions was fulfilled with the completion of their show. Members gradually left at the point of achieving this objective, not wishing to share an unwanted image, or being generally disillusioned with the way things had gone.

As members left at a faster rate than they could be replaced it was not difficult to see that **Inhibodress** was living on borrowed time. By the end of 1971 there was only one artist **Tim Gibb**, other than **Mike Parr** and myself, remaining with the gallery. Financial support for the gallery was an increasing problem.

To some extent we had already recognized the problem prior to the making of the video tapes around the middle of 1971. We made an unsuccessful application to the **Australian Council for the Arts** at about that time. The application was referred to the Australian Film Institute where it languished. Our desperation was reflected in the press release for the video tape show 'in view of the buck-passing among government agencies when it comes to supporting art, avant-garde art in particular - **Parr and Kennedy** believe the future of arts patronage lies with responsible private enterprise. They are grateful to Akai (Australia) for the loan of the video screening equipment. Without this help the screenings would have been financially impossible'.

The intention was explicitly political, to get people in institutions of one kind or another to start thinking about such things. In the February 1971, issue of **Studio International** there appeared an article on 'five typical young artists in Sydney by Donald Brook'³ (3) The five artists were **John Armstrong, Tim Johnson, Ian Milliss, Mike Parr** and **myself**.

Instructions for a sound piece of mine, reprinted in the article, attracted the attention of the editor of a London magazine, 'Pages'. In April I was asked to submit some pieces for inclusion in the next issue. The magazine was concerned with work which occurred at the intersection of avant-garde art and music. It had a European as well as an English readership. As a result of this contact my name found its way on to several of the art mailing lists circulating in Europe in 1971. In May, 1971, I received an invitation to participate in an exhibition organized by a German artist **Hans Werner Kalkmann**. **Tim Johnson** and **Mike Parr** also took part in this exhibition.

The possibility of realizing the potential for Inhibodress to act as an Australian reference or focal point to the international avant-garde mainstream now seemed attainable through these contacts, although my awareness had already been stimulated a month previously in discussions I had with a visiting Canadian artist, **Duane Lunden**. He had been directly involved in the activities of the **Nova Scotia College of Art and Design** in their efforts to overcome their relative isolation from all that was going on.

To be able to make art in Sydney while at the same time participating in the mainstream was, to me at that time, a very important step to take. Insofar as this could be the case the intention was different to **Tim Johnson's** 'Activities' exhibition in that shows of overseas artists could be mounted without having to leave Sydney.

I became very involved in contacting sympathetic artists and other people in the international art world whose work was known to me, telling them of **Inhibodress**. The following extract, a letter addressed to New York art critic and writer, **Lucy Lippard**, dated April 13, 1971, serves as an example: 'Implicit in our intentions is a need to show overseas artists. Inhibodress intends to reconcile the local avantgarde with the most progressive international art. To implement this policy **Inhibodress** wishes to organise an exchange of information and work with any North American, European and British artists who might be interested in exhibiting "non-bulk" art'. There was a highly efficient network. Sometime later I received a letter from American

³ Some of the aspirations held by Donald Brook for Inhibodress' future are elucidated by him in this article. See **Studio International**, February, 1971, pp. 76-80

artist **John Goodyear**, **Lucy Lippard** suggested I write to you about my "Earth Curve" shows. I've written to the Australian Arts Council but nothing much came of it...' Work of other artists began to arrive on the doorstep almost daily. So too did invitations to participate in exhibitions, particularly in Europe.

1972 arrived. Without artists contributing to the rent it was conceivable that the gallery could close before the exhibitions which were planned for 1972 could be mounted. We applied once again to the **Australian Council for the Arts**. This time we were successful. **Inhibodress** (**Peter Kennedy** and **Mike Parr**) received \$1500.00, a proportion of which went towards the rent. The first show of the 'Trans-Art' series was 'Trans-Art 2, 'Australian Curve' and 'Standing Right, Sydney' by **John Goodyear**. This show replaced an abortive attempt to mount 'Trans-Art 1, 'Idea Demonstration' a two-man show by **Mike Parr** and myself. However, the difficulties were overcome and that show opened on May 23, 1972. The term 'Trans-Art' was explained in the press release. 'Trans-Art V comprises works by Parr and Kennedy which have been made with video-tapes, 16mm film, sound tapes, photographs, slides, and a sound installation using drums. Trans-Art is a term coined by **Mike Parr** and **Peter Kennedy** to describe diverse forms of new art which have one factor in common - they are highly transportable and therefore readily, and internationally accessible to a wide audience. This exhibition functions much like a library or information centre, and the works operate as demonstrations of ideas. The artists will be on hand to play works as they are requested,'

The last two shows were 'Trans-Art 3, Communications' and 'Trans-Art 4, Catchword Potash Mine'. '

'Communications' was an exhibition of work of sixty-five artists with whom I'd been in contact. **Eleanor Antin**, **Alice Aycock**, **Oyvind Fahlstrom**, **The Guerrilla Art Action Group**, **Dan Graham** and **Adrian Piper** would, perhaps, be some of the more familiar names amongst those who took part. However, from my point of view, recognizing the imminent demise of **Inhibodress**, the exhibition was primarily political, to get institutions, as public educators, to assume some responsibility towards this 'new art'. This was clearly stated in the press release. 'Communications' exists as a statement as to the change in the nature of art and how aspects of this art conform to the concept of a 'global village'. More importantly, perhaps, 'Communications' may indicate the possibilities open to an application of resources far greater than those available for this exhibition."

'Catchword Potash Mine' was an exhibition organized by German artist **Hans-Werner Kalkmann** and made available to **Inhibodress**. The exhibition was the work of nine artists whose contribution to an ecology theme made use of xerox for the presentation of concepts.

To those accustomed to receiving **Inhibodress** notifications the reverse side of the exhibition mailer may possibly have been of more interest. 'This will be **Inhibodress**' last exhibition ... we would like to take this opportunity to thank all those friends and colleagues who have supported **Inhibodress** over the last two years.' The gallery closed about one week before the scheduled date of August 20, 1972. The Sydney County Council had cut off the power.

For me it was a tremendous relief. **Inhibodress** had become a millstone. The nature of the commitment, reinforced by the critics, was decidedly oppressive. The objectives

were beginning to go out of focus partly due to the sheer physical impossibility of maintaining the energy sufficient to achieve those same objectives. It was not possible to live a life which involved a nine-to-five job, alternate nights minding exhibitions at the gallery as well as the week-ends, organizing exhibitions, corresponding with artists, and at the same time, finding the time to make one's own art.

Ending **Inhibodress** allowed another beginning.

Although what occurred at **Inhibodress** had a certain coherence I don't believe that coherence should militate against recognition of those other, similar, experimental events which evolved at the same time.

Footnotes

1. For an opposing point of view allowing a different perspective on Inhibodress see Ian Milliss' 'Obituary Inhibodress Gallery, 1970-1972, C.A.S. Broadsheet, Sept. 1972.
2. Although his name appears in the press release John Armstrong was never associated with Inhibodress. He attended the first meeting of the co-operative but never returned. Bill Brown participated in the inaugural exhibition but withdrew soon after.
3. Some of the aspirations held by Donald Brook for Inhibodress' future are elucidated by him in this article. See **Studio International**, February, 1971, pp. 76-80.

Accompanying Image captions

interior view of Inhibodress. The exhibition is **Idea Demonstrations** mounted jointly by Peter Kennedy and Mike Parr (May 1972)

Inhibodress: Rear 85 Forbes St, Woolloomoolloo N.S.W. November 1972. The sign is obscured by a poster for an exhibition by Bert Flugelman.

But The Fierce Blackman Peter Kennedy March 1971. Sound installation using specially prepared tape loop, amplification, speakers, taxi cab radio calls, television, electric fan and performance.

Source: Art Network No 6, Winter 1982 p49-51