

Colourful characters



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PORTRAITS are always a compelling subject. But they aren't necessarily a recognisable image of a particular face.

A small group of conventional studies from the collection of the Newcastle Art Gallery is evidence of the fascinating diversity such portraits embody. They are a counterpoint to the internationally important exhibition of works from 2000 to 2011 by Dani Marti, on view until November 13.

As visitors will realise from getting to know *George*, a vast wall of woven yellow from the gallery's collection, Dani Marti seeks to capture more of a sitter's essence than a painted face.

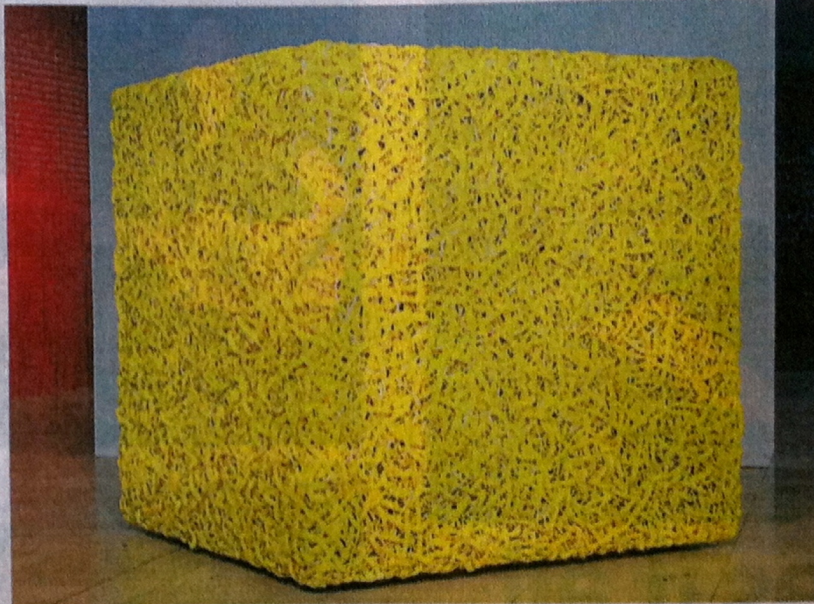
The dramatically lit gallery is currently hung with similar giant weavings constructed from commercially available highly textured ropes, cords and braids, augmented by feathers, plastic junk, chains, even a labyrinthine red bead curtain. The surfaces are richly and infinitely tactile; there is even a giant work made entirely from metallic pot scourers.



As much as a feast for the eye, the sense

of touch is a crucial element, which gallery visitors will have to intuit, in compositions of soft feathers, of abrasive dark plastic tape, in regular warp and weft.

The subjects of the works include the artist's family and Agnes Martin, the American minimalist painter, but they also include casual acquaintances



REPRESENTATIVE: Works by Dani Marti at Newcastle Art Gallery.

overtly gay community, mainly from Glasgow where the artist regularly spends time, though he also has a home in the Hunter Valley.

Video capture of Dani Marti's obsession with moments of intimacy, often with strangers, is in crucial juxtaposition to the sumptuously abstract tactile surfaces of his weavings.

While it may be confronting, this audacious balancing act is the basis for international recognition of Dani Marti, born in Spain in 1963 and currently living, working and exhibiting in many parts of the world.

□ **FOR** its second exhibition, until October 16, the Timeless Textiles Gallery is showing elaborately conceived garments by Gina Mastio, recently returned to Australia from 10 years in France.

The fabrics she employs for dresses, wraps, jackets and scarves are created

draped and bubbled silk, felted with wool. The results have clear references to paperbarks and forest floor, in keeping with the organic dyes and natural fibres used.

To see the garments worn on an appropriate body would give the full effect of sculptural movement.

The gallery has now set up a full program of exhibitions, with a regular opening on the third Thursday of every month. Workshops organised in conjunction with the gallery are already proving popular.

□ **DEATH** is still a taboo subject, despite its place in all our lives. It was a challenging subject for Robyn Stanton Werkhoven to nominate for a group exhibition at Newcastle Art Space until October 9.

Thinking back over human history, it is not death as an abstract concept that artists have chosen to depict, but rather poignant memorials to individuals,

Tutankhamun's glowing death mask to Baroque martyrdoms and the grids of individual stones in Berlin ranged for victims of the Holocaust.

The current exhibition, *Preparation for the Final Journey*, finds many artists using the boat as symbol of transition between being and non-being. Pam Sinnott's use of collected driftwood makes poetic reference to cycles of living, dying and regeneration in one of the show's highlights.

Judy Henry's bower of living creepers, planted nine months ago in preparation for the exhibition, has a similar reference to renewal. So does Sue Stewart's magpie.

Peter Tilley's sculptural assemblages of bird bones and funerary ornaments have always spoken poetically of mortality. Here he shows a human life embodied by a tombstone.

More personal subject matter is touchingly revealed in the artmaking of Debra Liel-Brown and in the flight of white ancestral handkerchiefs assembled by Donna Cavanaugh.

Michael Garth wants to be sent off in a rocket. Anna Scobie's winged cocktail shaker suggests a final celebration.

Robyn Stanton Werkhoven has created an appropriately scaled timber coffin, lavishly painted and already containing her funeral costume, a life-enhancing project, only partly facetious, for the flight into the vast otherness.

This has proved a brave and stimulating project, well worth doing. It has to be a matter of cultural significance that overtly Christian imagery and concepts appear no longer relevant.

□ **AT** the Greenway Gallery until tomorrow, Jeanne Harrison and Helene Leane use a recent trip to New York as stimulus for skyscraper monoprints and textural paintings.

Helen Leane, along with James Whittington and Rebecca Rath, is also showing monoprints at Cessnock Regional Gallery until October 30.