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1982

# Ambiguity and Tension

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## Publication Details

J. P. Cockburn, *Ambiguity and Tension*, 1982 Sydney NSW Art Gallery, 08 - 23 May.

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# Ambiguity and Tension

## Abstract

- Approximately two weeks after the opening of the 4th Biennale of Sydney (the Biennale opened on 07 April and ran until to 23 May 1982) it was noted by Jon Cockburn that a wall in the exhibition at the AGNSW was not being used (word going around the art community was that an exhibit had failed to arrive).
- On the 08 May 1982, Jon Cockburn (with the assistance of Jill Moonie, photographic documentation and Tammy Smith, Roxy [Pat McGuire], Kim Machin and Tim Harris as lookouts) entered the AGNSW and on the blank wall of 4th Biennale Exhibition erected an artwork with its own handmade title card without raising the suspicion of the gallery staff or guards.
- On the 18th May 1982 (ten days later) the work was still on display in the AGNSW 4th Biennale Exhibition.
- On the afternoon of 18th May 1982, Susan Molloy of The Sydney Morning Herald contacted Jon Cockburn requesting an interview to discuss the work. Jon Cockburn agreed to meet Susan Molloy at the AGNSW where the interview took place and he was photographed.
- On the morning of 19 May 1982, The Sydney Morning Herald shop front and newsstand banner headline read ART HOAX AT NSW GALLERY and a photograph of Jon Cockburn and the work appeared with the interview by Susan Molloy on the front page of The Sydney Morning Herald. The interview and article led with the title 'The Stick Up that Fooled Sydney', in the article Jan McFadden's (Jon Cockburn's pseudonym on the fake Biennale title card) unsolicited/unofficial artwork Ambiguity and Tension is endorsed by Edmund Capon, AGNSW Director, and the work allowed to remain until the end of the Biennale (23 May 1982).
- On the 21 May 1982, The Sydney Morning Herald 'Stay in Touch' column mentions Ambiguity and Tension in the context of the 4th Biennale of Sydney's closure the following day
- On 05 June 1982, The Sydney Morning Herald refers to the 'hoax work' in another article by Susan Molloy headed 'Biennale Director gets a new post at Gallery'.
- On the 20 May 1982, The Sydney Morning Herald editorial and political cartoonist Emeric incorporates Ambiguity and Tension into a cartoon comment on Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser's foreign policy (p.6)

## Keywords

ambiguity, tension

## Disciplines

Arts and Humanities | Law

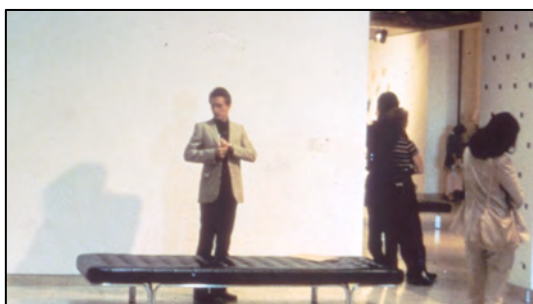
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J. P. Cockburn, Ambiguity and Tension, 1982 Sydney NSW Art Gallery, 08 - 23 May.

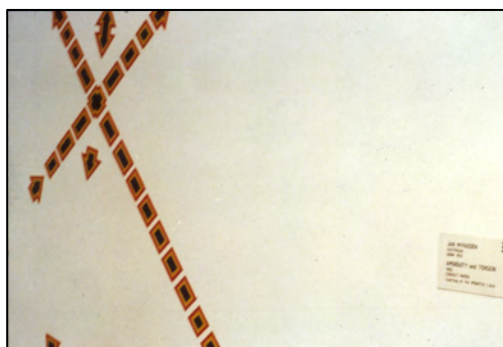
## INFORMATION SHEET ON WORK UNDERTAKEN BY JON COCKBURN IN THE 4<sup>th</sup> BIENNALE OF SYDNEY, MAY 1982

### UNOFFICIAL/UNSOLICITED ART EVENT No 1: *AMBIGUITY AND TENSION*

- Approximately two weeks after the opening of the 4<sup>th</sup> Biennale of Sydney (the Biennale opened on 07 April and ran until to 23 May 1982) it was noted by Jon Cockburn that a wall in the exhibition at the AGNSW was not being used (word going around the art community was that an exhibit had failed to arrive).
- On the 08 May 1982, Jon Cockburn (with the assistance of Jill Moonie, photographic documentation and Tammy Smith, Roxy [Pat McGuire], Kim Machin and Tim Harris as lookouts) entered the AGNSW and on the blank wall of 4<sup>th</sup> Biennale Exhibition erected an artwork with its own handmade title card without raising the suspicion of the gallery staff or guards.



Jon Cockburn (Jan McFadden) commences work on installing *Ambiguity and Tension*, 08 May 1982.



Oblique view of Jan McFadden (Jon Cockburn) *Ambiguity and Tension*, 08 May 1982



Jon Cockburn on 08 May 1982 with 'the crew' (lookouts), Tammy Smith, Roxy (Pat McGuire), Kim Machin, Tim Harris, unseen behind the camera is photographer Jill Moonie.

- On the 18<sup>th</sup> May 1982 (ten days later) the work was still on display in the AGNSW 4<sup>th</sup> Biennale Exhibition.

- Early on the 18<sup>th</sup> May 1982 the work was mentioned on Radio 2JJJ-FM's Biennale announcements.
- On the afternoon of 18<sup>th</sup> May 1982, Susan Molloy of *The Sydney Morning Herald* contacted Jon Cockburn requesting an interview to discuss the work. Jon Cockburn agreed to meet Susan Molloy at the AGNSW where the interview took place and he was photographed.
- On the morning of 19 May 1982, *The Sydney Morning Herald* shop front and newsstand banner headline read ART HOAX AT NSW GALLERY and a photograph of Jon Cockburn and the work appeared with the interview by Susan Molloy on the front page of *The Sydney Morning Herald*. The interview and article led with the title 'The Stick Up that Fooled Sydney', in the article Jan McFadden's (Jon Cockburn's pseudonym on the fake Biennale title card) unsolicited/unofficial artwork *Ambiguity and Tension* is endorsed by Edmund Capon, AGNSW Director, and the work allowed to remain until the end of the Biennale (23 May 1982).

Please see original at 'Sydney  
Morning Herald - 1982'

*The Sydney Morning Herald*, front page and banner  
headline, 19 May 1982.

- On the 20 May 1982, *The Sydney Morning Herald* editorial and political cartoonist Emeric incorporates *Ambiguity and Tension* into a cartoon comment on Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser's foreign policy (p.6).

Please see original at 'Sydney  
Morning Herald - 1982'

*The Sydney Morning Herald*, editorial cartoon by  
Emeric, 20 May 1982, p.6.

- On the 21 May 1982, *The Sydney Morning Herald* 'Stay in Touch' column mentions *Ambiguity and Tension* in the context of the 4<sup>th</sup> Biennale of Sydney's closure the following day.
- On 05 June 1982, *The Sydney Morning Herald* refers to the 'hoax work' in another article by Susan Molloy headed 'Biennale Director gets a new post at Gallery'.