

A place of contemplation

IN May 1983, Paul Zika curated an exhibition for the Tasmanian School of Art Gallery. That exhibition, *A Place of Contemplation*, mirrored a number of his long-held and linked preoccupations, namely; what it is that fine artists (painters, sculptors and architects) do by their artifice when they occupy real space; what it is that constitutes the interplay between real and illusionary space; what happens when space is enveloped (the notion here being of space surrounded by planar forms); why particular enveloped spaces seem so singularly fitting as *places of contemplation*; why particular objects in real space (both natural and artificial ones) become *objects of contemplation*; and what kinds of thoughts and actions are provoked by the *act of contemplation*.

They are preoccupations which are well-articulated in his interesting solo exhibition *Place of Contemplation. Related Works*, at Chameleon Gallery, Campbell St, until next Saturday.

The exhibition focusses on the interplay between two places — one natural and monolithic (Mt Wellington), the other artificial and small-scale (a "place of contemplation" which the artist is constructing in bushland on Mt Nelson).

There are two maquettes for this and three major related mixed media works.

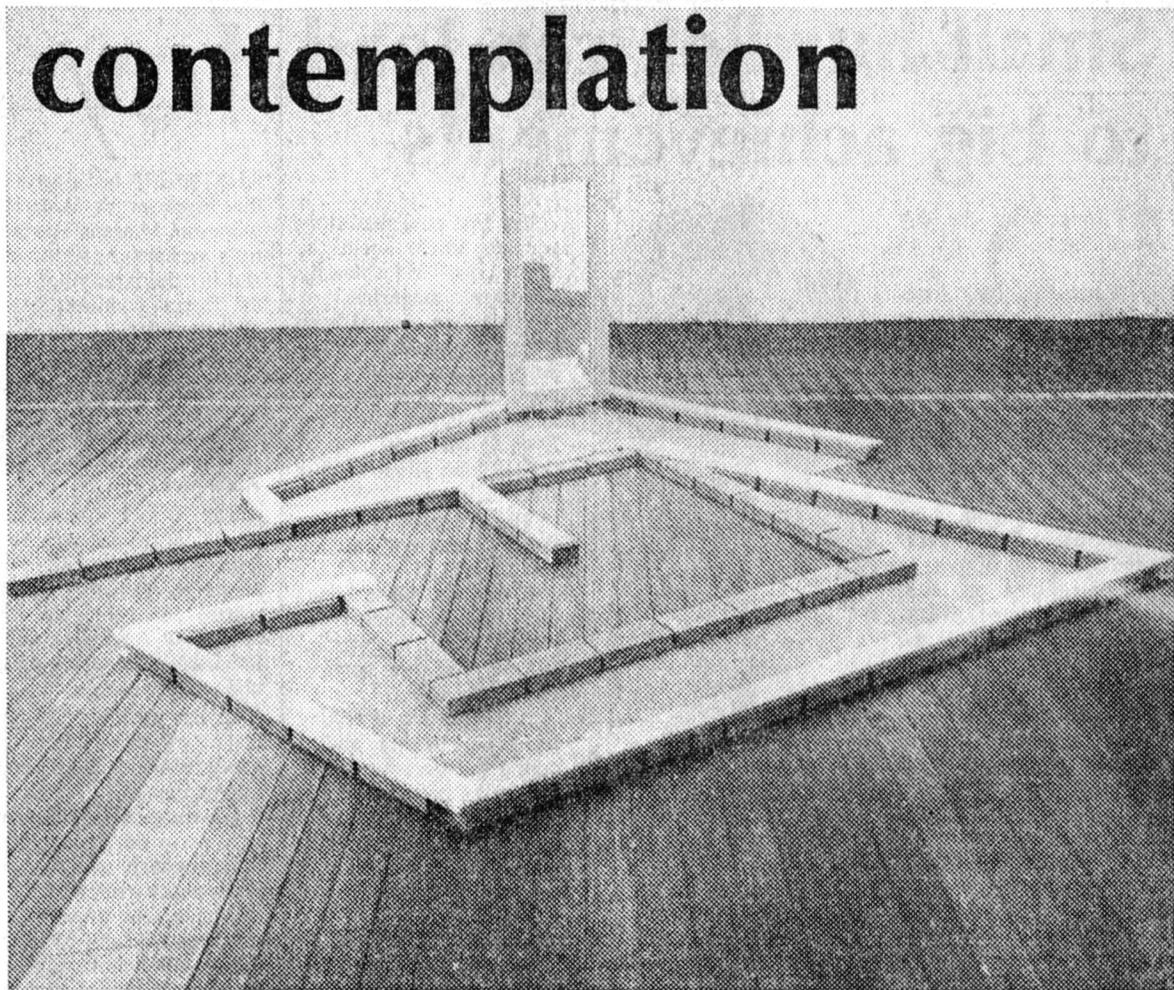
"The Mountain" consists of a series of photographs looking at and away from Mt Wellington. It is based on and linked to a gridded map, and determined by a 180-degree protraction which uses as the axis that quintessential image of the mountain over the city, seen coming in from the airport (the mountain from that moment on determines scale, the mood of the city, diurnal, seasonal, and geological — all worthy of contemplation).

The Mt Nelson work "Place of Contemplation" is positioned on one of the grid lines and takes the form of a crypt-like space in which a single viewer can observe the mountain by way of a mirror (by reflection).

"The Mountain" provides the basis for the absent work's placement.

The second major work, "The Cloister" (nicely contained under the mezzanine floor at Chameleon) addresses European medieval church architecture. Zika lays off diary notes, postcard mementos, and ground plan photocopies of particular sites he visited (which reveal him totally absorbed in the experience), against front page photocopies of the same days' *Guardian* and *Age* which give a devastating account of violence, greed, and political trickery.

"Black Australia/White Australia" contains two panels which utilize a "constructed" *Age* frontpage in which the banner headline "Aborigines win Ayers Rock" has been changed to "Aboriginies win Mt Wellington" (complete with changed illustration). The quasi-whimsical nature of



• "Brown, Pink, Silver and Yellow Horizontal/Vertical" (1984): Bricks, enamel paint on wood, mirror.

this piece conceals, in fact, a complex political position, made more pointed by the date — November 12 (the day after, lest we forget).

These works give an interesting insight into the artist's development of the Mt Nelson "Place of Contemplation". They show that his oeuvre has a political dimension which has not been overt before and suggest that the work is not meant to be read purely on a metaphysical or an aesthetic level.

However, the reading is not intended by the artist to be prescriptive; the mountain is too powerful an icon to be constrained. Instead, Zika suggests that the monolith is an object (if we care to reflect) by which we can test our relationship to things, to our view of the world, if you like.

— JONATHAN HOLMES