

Portraits in bronze test artist's metal



HEADS and shoulders above the rest . . . Diana Webber with bronze busts of a Japanese woman, John Laws and Trent Nathan

BRONZE busts of distinguished or distinguished looking people do not appear these days except as eclectica or heirlooms.

But a century or two ago, three-dimensional portraits

were commonly commissioned by generals, poets, patriarchs and grammar school heads.

In this century, bronze portrait artists are rare; in this country, they are virtually unknown.

But Diana Webber hopes to change that and bring moulded bronze art back into fashion.

Lloyd Rees, John Laws, Leo Schofield and Trent Nathan have all taken the plunge and allowed Diana to make their likenesses.

The four will be spending the next four weeks in close company, at least from the shoulder up, at Diana's exhibition which opens this week at the East End Gallery in inner

Sydney's Darlinghurst.

Diana learned the art from John Gardiner, an American with a distinguished career in bronze art. He is now an instructor at East Sydney Technical College.

After only a few years in the medium, Diana is holding her first significant exhibition with 16 bronze works, including the four latest busts.

Apart from the expense, the main problem with making solid bronze busts is that there are only a handful of suitable foundries in this country.

Mainly because she has to share the foundry with other metal artists, Diana took two or three months to make each bust.

A clay statue is made first, then after a complicated "lost wax process" the molten bronze is poured into a cast and set. The set piece then has to be chiselled and hammered into its final shape.

Heads and features are difficult but despite her inexperience, Diana is already accomplished and John Gardiner believes she would do very well overseas.

Bronze statues about 15cm high will be on sale at the exhibition for \$250 to \$350. The larger pieces are, of course, more expensive but compare very favorably with a portrait in oils.

Diana hopes to hold another exhibition within a year.