

# Gallery

## Blank Public Monuments and the Bronze Underground

**A** couple of recently installed public sculptures would lead the visitor to Sydney to assume the art was languishing here. As public sculpture is all the sculpture most Sydneysiders see, few of us would quarrel with that assumption.

In fact, there is an awful lot of welding and moulding and casting and assembling going on, and some of it has to be good. Public windows on to this activity are limited, as they are on all the underground of Sydney art.

In this world of old warehouses and empty floors in buildings soon-to-be-demolished, art students and recent graduates are moving from the Bohemian dream towards the reality of the market place. It is happening all the time, and it has always been so. Study grants or the shared, flip attitudes of communal life hold back the harsh light for some – for a time. Some find early success, and their way is set. Some go into commercial art. Some labour on in obscurity, after their little community has dispersed.

Those who give up are replaced by the next year's hopefuls. Each crop thinks it is a new breed. Generation after generation, the ghostly procession stumbles towards the light. Some dissolve in it; some solidify, and some never find it. Some, according to the law of averages, must be good.



*Part of the bronze underground: sculptors casting in bronze at John Gardner's workshop. Inset: Di Webber's bronze head of John Laws.*

This will never change, but it is always good to see another window. A large one will open on Sydney sculpture later in the year, when a new Sculpture Gallery gets under way in the Glebe. A smaller, but increasingly important showplace for sculpture, and for artists generally who are at the critical first exhibition stage, has been provided over the past 16 months by East End Art in Bourke Street, Darlinghurst, opposite the East Sydney Tech.

Most of Sydney's art critics drop in there to see what's going on, but only give them the occasional mention. This is not outrageously unfair. Space is limited in the newspapers and East End Art hasn't always got something good enough to steal a little space from the established galleries.

It did steal a bit last year with an exhibition of bronzes by experienced sculptors, such as Di Webber and John Gardner, and by a number of young Post Certificate Sculptors, who still use the facilities of John Gardner's workshop at East Sydney Technical College. A similar exhibition is now in progress, and will run until May 26.

The Bronze Workshop at East Sydney was started about two and a half years ago by Gardner, a New Yorker who had spent several years teaching in Manhattan. Before that, Australian artists who wanted to work in bronze had the choice of using a Melbourne foundry or going overseas.

Says Gardner, "A lot of people in Australia choose only to work with bronze in a conventional way. It is a rather expensive process

and there's a tremendous amount of labour involved. But these sculptures (in the exhibition) – and they vary in style from the traditional to the abstract – use a unique combination of glass and bronze. I don't believe this has ever been used before in Australia. And the 'lost wax' process used is an old one, but it's the only way possible to cast detailed sculpture without a piece mould."

Gardner is currently offering a course at his own studios in Lee Street (near Central Station) for advanced sculptors and beginners "with some background experience." It will include sculpting directly in wax and basic procedures for handling and fabricating wax; mould making, gating and investing, cleaning and chasing, welding and finishing. If those terms mean anything to you, and if you like what you see at East End Art, you can contact Gardner on 211-4834.

From May 27 to June 13, the East End will be showing mixed-media works on paper and canvas by Deanna Doyle. Unfortunately, although I've heard her name crop up, I have not been able to see any of Doyle's work in time for publication. The best I can do is quote from the studio blurb: *By using a window motif, which acts as a type of frame or contact point, Doyle's work allows us to look into the landscape, as it were, by means of a general overview of the rocks, strata and landform.*