



Art in reverse rewinds from finished work To initial sketch

## Opening move

**Art in Reverse on Ovation follows visual artist Susan Baird's journey from inspiration to opening night**

In October last year, Sydney painter Susan Baird had a solo exhibition at the Saatchi and Saatchi Gallery in The Rocks in Sydney. Presented independently of the gallery system by the artist herself, with a sponsorship and marketing support from Saatchi and Saatchi, Baird juggled artistic and business roles not only painting a series of atmospheric cityscapes for exhibition but organising framing, catalogues, photography of the work, opening night invites, the hanging of the paintings and more.

So what was involved? How much of an undertaking was it for a young artist? And what of the work itself? Ovation followed Baird's progress for six months from the purchase of oils, linen and brushes through to the arrival of the opening night guests.

Screened as part of its contemporary Australian art series, Art in Reverse, the half hour documentary unwinds from the clink of opening night champagne glasses to the initial inspiration for the paintings. Along the way, Baird talks lucidly about her creative process and the creative impulse behind her work.

The 28 paintings in the exhibition all



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feature urban scenes glimpsed from Baird's inner city studio and painted directly from life: rooftops, signs on buildings, narrow side alleys, grimy windows, and the play of light on architecture. What she captures are random moments in the life of a city, loving evocations of the ever-changing urban environment. The canvases and linens are awash with geometric planes of colour and swathes of light. We follow the progress – or

rather deconstruction – of one particular painting Thurlstane Building, East Sydney, rewinding from finished artwork to initial sketch.

Baird admits that being followed by a camera crew was “quite a nerve-wracking experience – but it was a fantastic experience at the same time,” she says. “It's very exposing of your life and your work and your thought processes but in a way that's kind of good because it makes you look closely at what it is that you are doing. I think artists find it really difficult to talk about their work, I find it really difficult to talk about my processes, but when you have a film crew with you, you find you do start to unravel it [for them].”

Most confronting was beginning a new painting in front of the camera. “It was quite hard to get into the zone of painting with a bunch of people looking on,” she admits. But watching Thurlstane Building, East Sydney emerge from fluid pools of paint on her palette daubed onto the canvas with a large square brush is fascinating.

The exhibition was hugely successful. “Beyond my wildest dreams,” says Baird. “We sold virtually every Painting.” As a result she finds herself approaching her practice with a new confidence. In January, Baird moved from the East Sydney studio featured in Art in Reverse to Randwick. The different energy of the new studio and the suburb has influenced her work.

“At the moment a lot of the paintings I'm doing are from photographs that I've taken so they're memory paintings of urban landscapes and are a bit more watery,” she says.

A selection of Baird's work, painted during the Art in The Rocks weekend at the end of May, will be on show at the Sydney Visitor's Centre, from 17 June – 3 July.

Art in Reverse also features artists Akira Isogawa, Clinton Nain, Marion Borgelt, Alex Seton and Vanilla Netto, whose work will be profiled this month.

**Jo Litson** ■

■ Art in Reverse: Susan Baird, screens June 5 at 12.30pm on Ovation [ch.26, D129]