

AUSTRALIAN ART EXPORT

As more Australian artists make inroads into the US market, JEREMY ECCLES reports on the export push being promoted by the government.



Anna Glynn Warrantdyte,
Garden of Eden, 2002,
oil on canvas, 183 x 152cm.
Courtesy the artist.

"IT'S RHIZOMIC," DECLARED SOMEONE THE OTHER night on an ABC TV documentary about the art market in the US. I never actually found out why the scene reminded him of "a prostrate rootlike stem emitting roots", as my OED tells me a rhizome ought to. But from his ebullient enthusiasm, figures suggesting there was more money being made by day-traders in the visual arts than on the stock market, and a wonderful couple, the Rubells, who hands-on-heart declared they'd been purified by their 5000-piece collection, I was firmly led to believe that America was the place to be if you had contemporary art to sell.

Which makes it all the more cheerful to discover that our government not only knows about this but has been working impressively over the last few years to position Australian art in that very market. Mind you, it took the artists themselves to tell *Australian Art Review* about this effort. First there was the well-established John Firth-Smith, who revealed that a

proudly reported that she had been included with 22 other artists or galleries in a book produced by the Austrade office in Los Angeles to kick-start the export of a new generation of contemporary artists' work to the US.

The Department of Foreign Affairs & Trade covers both ventures. But they come from different sides of the department, with the embassy's director of cultural affairs, Ron Ramsey, telling me that his job is "to try to change the American mindset stuck on Paul Hogan or Steve Irwin cliches to a richness and diversity of culture. They've got a fair awareness of indigenous art, but no depth of understanding of the rest".

Ramsey's name won't be unknown to art aficionados. He has worked in public galleries in Sydney, Melbourne and Canberra and as assistant director for public and travelling programs at the National Gallery of Australia. In Washington, he replaced someone with performing arts priorities, and is making the most of his expertise to bring in art institutions like the

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