



art with  
marina saint martin

■ Porcelain sculpture makes a life-size impact at the Gold Coast City Art Gallery through new work from award-winning artist Dr Julie Bartholomew

# A rail against time

One tends to think of fine porcelain in terms of small, delicate and usually pastel-coloured objects, suitable for display in glass-fronted china cabinets or on over-mantles.

It is therefore somewhat unexpected to find it in life-size fine porcelain sculptures such as those created by Sydney-based, award-winning artist Dr Julie Bartholomew.

Her full-size, human-figure porcelain sculpture installation is on show on the Gold Coast, proving fine porcelain can be large, impactful and carry a strong message.

Bartholomew's gleaming porcelain figures glow under projected video images. Titled *Transitional Bodies*, they are on display in The Darkroom at the Gold Coast City Art Gallery.

On loan to the Coast from Shepparton Regional Art Gallery, which purchased the work in 2006, the exhibition complements the 2008 Gold Coast Ceramic Art Award, won by Israeli artist Simcha Even Chen who will visit this year.

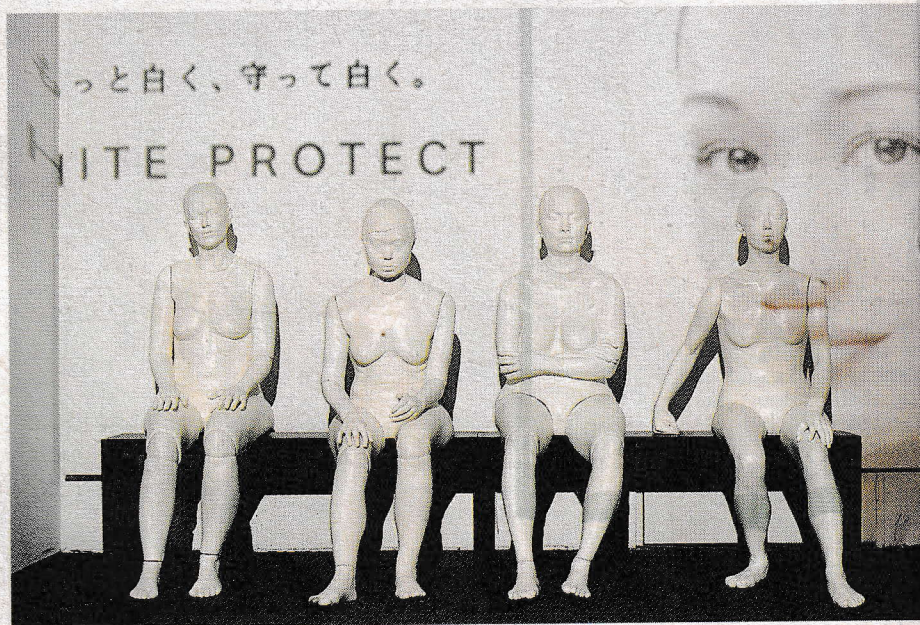
Bartholomew herself is a past winner of the same prize, having won it here two years ago at the award's 25th anniversary with her white porcelain suite of high fashion, luxury accessories, named *I am Vuitton, I am Coco, I am Manolo*.

The new work comes out of Bartholomew's time in the Australia Council Studio in Tokyo in 2005.

Bartholomew developed the work in response to her observations as she travelled on public transport in Tokyo, one of the most media-saturated cities in the world.

"I spent many hours sitting on trains moving through the Yamamoto or inner-city subway circuit," says Bartholomew.

"I began to understand that Tokyo train travel is precious 'time-out' for its citizens. Although the carriages and views



*Transitional Bodies*, now on display at the Gold Coast City Art Gallery

through the train windows are filled with advertising imagery, many passengers use this time to close their eyes and sleep, even while standing with one hand holding the support handle.

"Train travellers often keep their eyes closed for the duration of their trip having developed an instinct for waking up at their stop."

Her pristine figures sit with their firmly eyes closed, seeming to withdraw from the stimuli of consumer advertising constantly being beamed at them.

"I refer to them as transitional figures because they are metaphorically in-between train stops, but also in-between sleeping and waking, fixity and action," says Bartholomew.

The work is a serious critique of modern materialism, and even of 'commodification', rampant in society.

The sculptures have a masterful naturalism and realism, with each piece echoing the variously textured body surfaces, wrinkles and skin folds. This is not entirely surprising, as they were all modelled directly from human casts.

At the same time, their whiteness gives them remoteness and on them are projected the visuals, against which they are closing their eyes. It all makes for a strong statement.

■ Julie Bartholomew *Transitional Bodies* in The Darkroom, Gold Coast City Art Gallery, until October 19.