

AUSTRALIAN

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Collector's guide to
Lloyd Rees

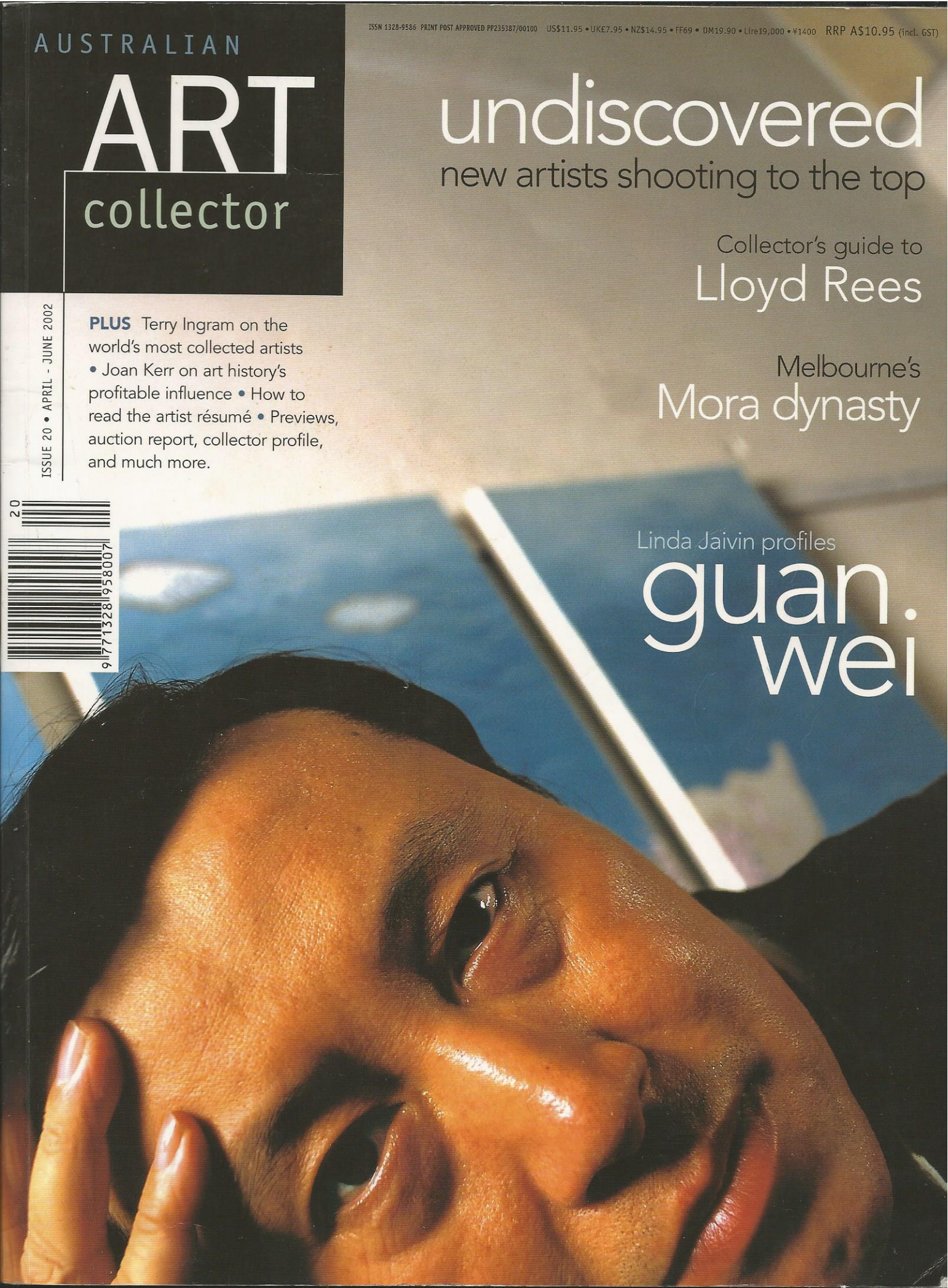
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PLUS Terry Ingram on the world's most collected artists
• Joan Kerr on art history's profitable influence • How to read the artist résumé • Previews, auction report, collector profile, and much more.



Ruth Frances Graham

The fragrances of nature – beeswax, resin and fresh hay – linger in the air around Ruth Frances Graham's sculptural world. The strange cultural hybrids that are her artwork are made from the living world she finds around her. She seeks and finds a material bond with her environment from where she lets the imagination fly through mythical mindscapes.

The results are large, sleek, symbolic creatures with strong tribal characteristics – a streak of South America, a hint of New Guinea, a dash of India, an aura of the outback and a wild predominance of Graham whimsy.

In April this year Ruth Frances Graham is to have her first exhibition of this incarnation of her artistry, for she is what one may call an artist reborn, culturally, after a long time in the wilderness.

Originally from Liverpool in England, Graham, 37, grew up in Perth, Western Australia, where she gained a Diploma in Art and Design at the Claremont School of Art, and studied towards a degree in Visual Arts and Crafts at Edith Cowan University.

In Perth her early phase of painting robust and colourful grotesqueries met with measured success and she gained recognition as a collage artist. Blending painting with collage, she developed a style reminiscent of the surreal cheek of Chagall and Dalí. One of her early sculptural works, a branch stranded with fine extensions bearing hanging objects, was purchased by the Art Gallery of Western Australia.

However, Graham went through a dark phase in her art, – painting a series of nightmarish images that were perhaps a reflection of the intensely difficult times she was facing in 1994. Her escape was to the desert, and life among the Aboriginal people of Central and Western Australia for five years.

Working outside Kalgoorlie, she learnt basket-weaving from Nelda Searles and in 1996 it was this skill she took to share with Aboriginal women.

In early 2001 she decided the time had come to move south and to recreate herself as an artist. With her 9-year-old daughter

Phoebe, she settled into a studio cottage amid the leafy lushness of the Adelaide Hills and made connections with Tineriba Tribal Gallery in Hahndorf. It is with their assistance that she is having her solo exhibition in April this year at Kintalai Gallery in Adelaide. But as Graham explains, her Kintalai Gallery show is, at this stage, a one-off only, as she is still unrepresented by a commercial gallery on a permanent basis.

She describes her work as hybrid – a melange of her passions for deities of all sorts and of the magic she believes exists in the desert.

Her large works, she says, are created almost in a trance. She finds herself "wrestling" with her materials – bundling hay and wrapping it in strand after strand of wool and twine. Her favourite work is her large *Poseidon with Balls*, a decidedly virile-looking animal god with clawed feet on large balls. Her *Manikin for New Christ Consciousness*, pink on pink, is a three-headed beast, both devouring and spewing creatures from its gaping mouths. It has high heels on its hind legs, huge hands on the front, and its body bindings include pearls, necklaces, glitter and tulle.

The grotesqueries vanish when Graham slips into desert mode with her collections of delicate and exquisitely tactile baskets – shallow ones of long reeds or grasses, bound with wools and eagle feathers. There are small, subtle baskets edged with down or adorned with peacock feathers.

The predominant ethic is to keep the materials as close to nature as possible and to allow the materials to guide the creation, or at least, says Graham, to follow their flow. "My idea is that everything has a value. I get inspiration from my drawings for my sculptures and back again. And, I am always looking for some sort of spirituality in my work," she says.

-Samela Harris

Born 1964

Price range \$500 – \$6,000

Contact Tineriba – the Tribal Gallery (08) 8388 7218
or the artist: preambo2001@yahoo.com

A streak of South America, a hint of New Guinea, a dash of India, an aura of the outback and a wild predominance of Graham whimsy.



Ruth Frances Graham, *A manikin for new Christ-consciousness*, 2002, mixed media (including fibre and twine), 200cm x100cm x180cm. IMAGE COURTESY THE ARTIST.

Ruth Frances Graham

3 - 29 April 2002

venue

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Untitled, by Ruth Graham, 2001.