



Modern-day angst seen from two sides

art circuit

By NIKKI MILLER

SOME of the contradictory spaces of life in the 20th century are explored in work currently showing at two galleries.

At the Port Gallery in a small room above Hewitt's Art Bookshop in Fremantle, Ruth Graham is exhibiting a series of work called Shipwrecked.

A beached mermaid, half-fish, half-woman, is used as a metaphor for the conflict between mind and soul. This is not an archetypal mermaid: she has short, spiky hair and a grotesque armless torso.

It is an elegant image of modern angst. Sequins, glitter and shells are collaged on to this beach scene, adding drama and a quality of tackiness which befits the image.

Some of Graham's other images are not as powerful. Admirably, Graham has an experimental approach to image-making, but the results are rather hit and miss.

This is especially true of her collage work. At times collage seems to have been used as an easy way of including detail without having to draw.

However, A Self Portrait With Several Other People's Eyes is an example of a most effective and purposeful use of collage.

We wonder which of the three eyes is Graham's and then the absurdity of the question is revealed.

Looking and being looked at is an enormously significant part of the construction of our identity. Looking is a perfect example of an activity which is highly personal and thoroughly social. Maybe the third eye is



Suenos y Fantasias (Flights of Fantasy) by Flur-Elise Mason at The Photography Gallery.

the eye looking inwards, Graham's private way of seeing herself.

Ultimately, we have no way of knowing who the eyes belong to.

My favourites of Graham's work are her satirical dolls. With names like The Self Righteous Matriarch and A Youthful Peacock, these dolls are more voodoo than innocent.

Unlike Barbie, Cindy or Ken, these dolls have the correct number of orifices and pubic hair. Hand-painted, these fabric and plastic constructions have been pared down to the simplest of shapes. I suspect Graham would be a superb cartoonist.

Posters plastered around Fre-

mantle inspired me to make the trip to Northbridge to see more of Matthew Dwyer's photography.

Dwyer's exhibition at The Photography Gallery is about people using mobile phones.

The image on the poster is a classic icon of the late 20th century; a man wearing a white shirt and tie sits at a table in a cafe. On top of his opened newspaper lies a plate of bacon, eggs, tomatoes and toast; his fork is raised in the air; his mouth open, his mobile phone is pressed to his ear as he looks out into that strange middle distance that phone users tend to look into.

Dwyer has caught this man in the middle of a communication and consumption frenzy.

Dwyer's crisp photo presents this man as a victim of the fast pace of life. In the background three people move about the cafe, heightening the tension and emphasising this man's aloneness. His balding head makes the image all the more pathetic and I can't help feeling that he is now more of a victim for having been photographed.

This is the poster, but the version of this photograph in Dwyer's exhibition, Portable Cosmos, is speckled. All of the photos are speckled as if water has been flicked upon the edges of the prints. This is unfortunate for these images depend upon detail and upon clarity for their significance. It is too easy to miss the detail, the bacon and eggs, in these speckled prints.

I would love to see this show again without the speckles.

What Dwyer has captured so effectively is the odd space that phone users, particular mobile phone users, occupy.

They are not entirely present in their physical location, they stare abstractly into the mid-distance, draw absentmindedly in the beach with their toes, their back to the ocean, or using the bar-phone they gaze only half-attentively at their nails.

This lack of concern for their immediate surroundings is what is so infuriating about being with someone using a mobile phone, while speaking to someone who is on a mobile phone is equally frustrating as you sense they are only half-listening.

Dwyer's show is part of the Artrage festival.

At The Photography Gallery is another Artrage show; Suenos y Fantasias (Flights of Fantasy) by Flur-Elise Mason, Ronaldo Ortiz and Percy O. This is a strange group exhibition, not because the images are weird but because it is a group exhibition.

These are three very different approaches to image-making.

Report near on Aboriginal institute

CONSULTANTS for the proposed National Institute of Aboriginal Culture are expected to make their report to a steering committee overseeing the project by the end of next month.

Arts Minister Peter Foss said last month that KPMG Marwick had been hired to make a feasibility report.

Its recommendations will go to a steering committee representing the arts, Aboriginal

Mr Foss is keen to develop the institute, which he says should reflect all aspects of Aboriginal culture and heritage.

His case for a national institute based in WA is strong: WA is a leader in fields such as Aboriginal art, dance, theatre music and book publishing.

"I feel that because of the strength of Aboriginal culture in this State, WA is the most appropriate home for a national institute of Aboriginal culture,"

The feasibility study will examine potential sites, including the Swan Barracks in Francis Street, Perth.

This was the site that former Labor leader Carmen Lawrence favoured in the lead-up to the 1993 State election when Labor was contemplating a similar Aboriginal cultural centre.

At the time the barracks was tipped as the site for a new multi-disciplinary arts centre, though there was a strong push

building to be converted into an Earth Museum backed by mining industry money.

The study will also examine the institute's management and marketing, capital costs, sponsorship potential and operating conditions.

The institute's brief will be to reflect the "integration of cultural forms encompassing dance, music, theatre, literature, story-telling and oral history,