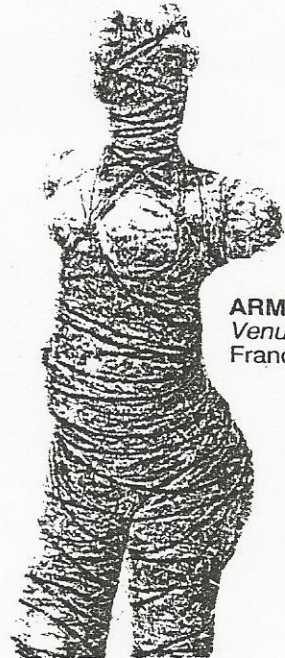
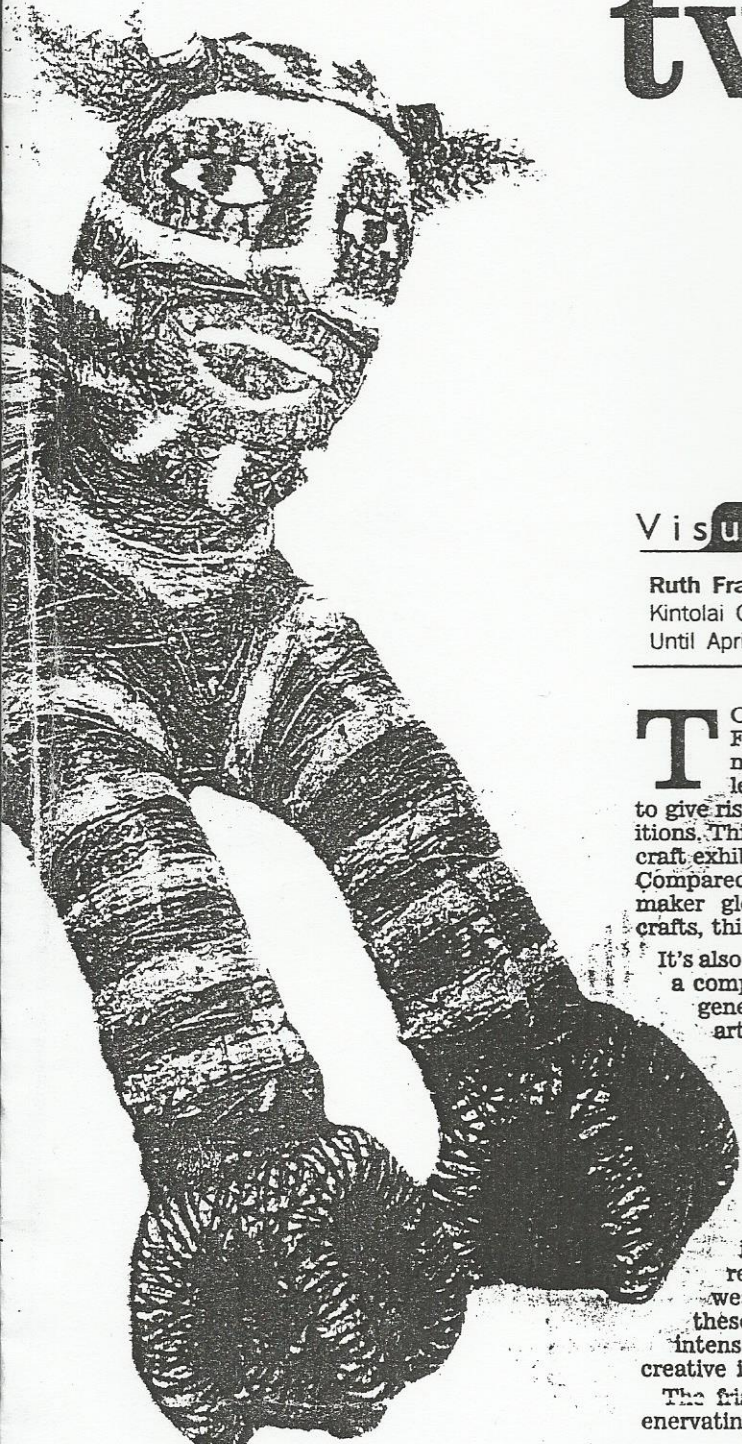


welling through twine



ARMLESS:
Venus by Ruth
Frances Graham

Visual Arts

Ruth Frances Graham

Kintolai Gallery

Until April 27

TOTEMIC and surreal, Ruth Frances Graham's powerful multimedia sculptures crouch, lean and seemingly stalk about to give rise to a bizarre garden of apparitions. This is one of the best sculptural/craft exhibitions I have seen in a decade. Compared with the usual run of designer-maker global look-alike contemporary crafts, this show is a breath of fresh air.

It's also a coup for the Kintolai Gallery, a compact but accessible space that generally focuses on indigenous artists.

Although Graham has an English background, she has spent considerable time in her adopted home of Australia interacting with indigenous communities, notably those in the central and west regions. Indeed, she has been instrumental in catalysing the regions' notable spinifex basket-weaving movement. It is from these indigenous traditions and an intense personal vision that Graham's creative imagery emerges.

The frisson between cultures can be enervating and Graham's woven works

successfully tap a potent source. They impact on the viewer from the moment of encounter.

Conceived on a heroic scale, Graham's menagerie of chimerical creatures has the power to stir the psyche. You can't walk into the gallery and not be confronted or exhilarated in some way.

There are a handful of baskets that are ethereal and alluring but I consider these the point of egress of the sculptural work. Graham's figures especially engage.

Deceptively simple in their construction, their core consists of densely packed straw that has an outer skin created by vigorously woven or tightly wound twine, coloured wool or rope.

Found objects such as shells or feathers are occasionally entwined to create intriguing, textured surfaces.

A huge work, *Poseidon and His Balls*, stands ready to leap; *A Mannequin for New Christ Consciousness* is a menacing, three-headed monster.

Redman, a larger-than-life - armless male figure complete with genitalia, leans expectantly but resolutely. *Eagle Woman* strikes a similar, courageous, pose.

Other works such as *Shaman's Loom* are wall pieces that combine rope, bones, plastic objects and stones, and conjure cabbalistic essence.

Graham's works emerge from various sources - inner-self, cross-cultural explorations and essential crafting traditions, offering a primitivism seldom seen.

Noris Ioannou

ARTS MONDAY

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GO FETCH: *Poseidon and his Balls* by Ruth Frances Graham