

Agitating the barriers around art and galleries

VISUAL ARTS

UNCERTAIN LANDSCAPES

dianne tanzer gallery, 108 Gertrude St, Fitzroy, until December 21
diannetanzergallery.net.au

YVETTE COPPERSMITH

Metro 5 Gallery, 1214 High St, Armadale, until December 23
www.metro5gallery.com.au

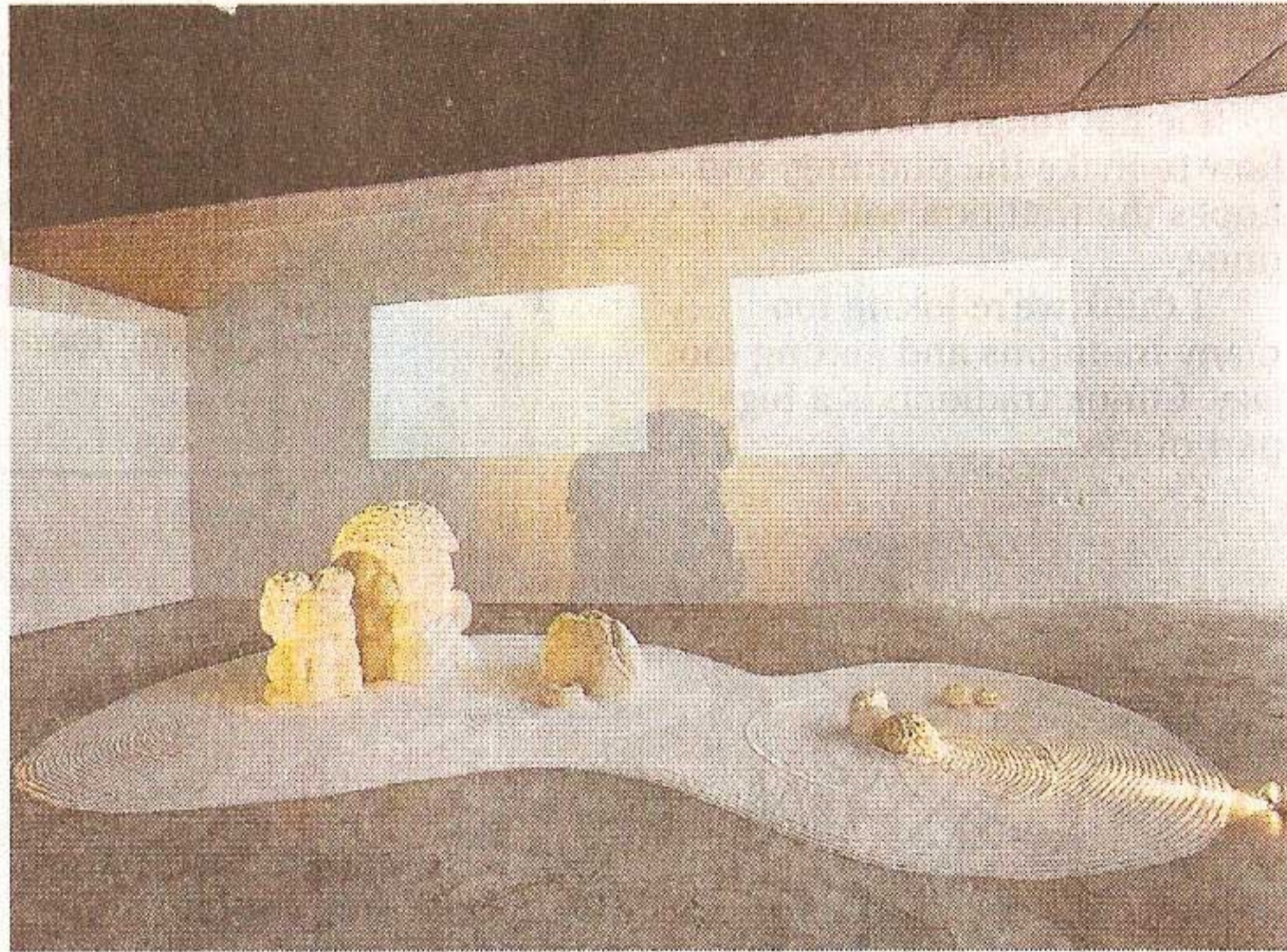
Robert Nelson Reviewer

FOR a moment I thought the economic crisis had forced Dianne Tanzer to become an accountant. The frontage on Gertrude Street has a venetian blind, as if to protect the office from the northern sun.

Galleries do not use such rational window furniture because venetian blinds have the wrong connotations and would upset viewing the artwork within. But at Dianne Tanzer, the blind is made by an artist in an exhibition about barriers, membranes and protections that keep people and other pollutants out of our hallowed spaces.

Using nothing but paper and string, Natasha Frisch has installed this corporate and domestic form to unsettle all our gallery expectations. It is both neutral and demonstrative, an adjustable shutter that successfully eliminates glare but also potentially wrecks the open ambience of a gallery.

Other works in *Uncertain Landscapes* include a mortified Great Barrier Reef, constructed



Ken Yonetani's *Sweet Barrier Reef* (installation; sugar and gum). Yvette Coppersmith's *Lisa, Dianne & Romy* 2008 (right).

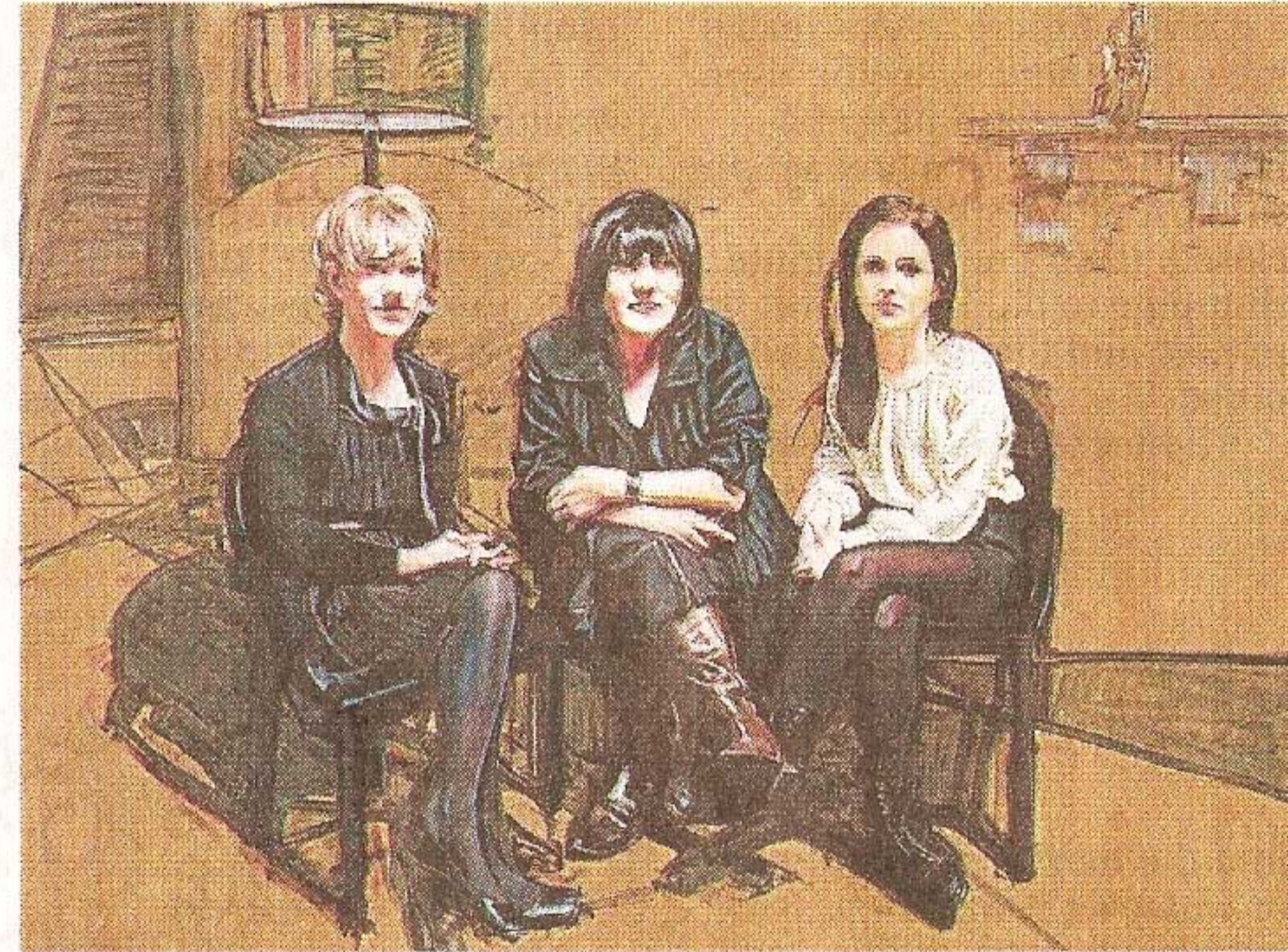
by Ken Yonetani, and photographs of a burnt-out house by Samantha Small. The large old house belonged to Maisie Allen, whom police had difficulty identifying after the fire that killed her. No one seemed to know who she was, including the neighbours.

You could say all the blinds were shut on her life: she was almost completely insular and only her involuntary cremation reunited her with the air beyond the windows. This reclusiveness has moved from eccentricity, in Maisie's day, to convention in our times, where communication with a neighbour — if it occurs at all — is

more likely to happen by email than by sticking your head over the fence.

Likewise, environmental issues are never really allowed in: you're psychologically protected from the evidence of global warming that Yonetani assembles, and none of it alters the way people — even those who complain about emissions — consume electricity, gas and petrol. When it comes to altering behaviour, the blinds are absolutely shut.

As they're made of paper, Frisch's blinds are delicately translucent and subtle; paradoxically, they invoke traditions of stripes in art,



interpreted by artists like Vera Moeller. You can see some wonderfully layered studies of stripes in the work of Robyn Burgess at Helen Gory Galerie. Burgess' paintings have the organic energies that a venetian blind lacks, even when sucked in and out at an open window. The pulse of the works can be compared with the intricately crafted stripes and grids by Vivienne Binns at Sutton Gallery, which similarly breathe with layered colours.

The barriers around art and galleries are so strong that one writer has likened the interface with art to the encounter with animals at the zoo. Interpreting

the paintings of Yvette Coppersmith at Metro 5 Gallery, Amelie Scalercio describes artworks as somehow existing behind enclosures, with the stewardship of demure and careful keepers, the gallerists.

Coppersmith has painted portraits of well-known gallery identities, all very handsome people who have been moved from brokers to models. As Scalercio says: "We are gazing at someone who traditionally controls our viewing experience." Coppersmith's paintings do indeed give you a sense of the lions in their den.

The gallerist at any level is a reminder that art is mediated:

it's a thing among people, chosen by and talked over and encountered through people, and utterly socialised by charming networks around prestige barriers. The gallerists appear in Coppersmith's works as beautiful, cautious mediators, integral to the experience.

Here Scalercio sees a zoo-like inversion taking place: the gallerist is now the "keeper-as-artwork" and the painter is "artist-as-keeper", meaning Coppersmith is custodian of the gallerist's image.

Painting on masonite without a white ground layer, Coppersmith uses the natural colour of the board as a default. Often it forms the entire background, though sometimes aspects of the interior are brushed in. All the paintings therefore have the air of a drawing or sketch, despite respectable accomplishment in the painted modelling. As always with realist painting, it works better when less obviously dependent on photography.

Among the art identities painted by Coppersmith, Dianne Tanzer is included, flanked by assistants. Gratefully, like the other studious souls in the series, they retain a reserved and thoughtful artistic air and have not yet been forced into accounting.

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