

FEATURES

# The art of the matter

Seeing is believing – writes **Tom Cardy** – after visiting the multi million-dollar Guggenheim exhibition.

THESE'S been a proliferation of music concert DVDs over the past few years. But even with the biggest television and the best sound system, it still can't replace the experience of being there. It's exactly the same conclusion after visiting the multi million-dollar Guggenheim exhibition at the National Gallery of Victoria in Melbourne.

When the exhibition, of works by 68 of the world's top artists from the past 60 years, was previewed it included a photograph of Jeff Koons' 2000 painting *Sandwiches* (from Easyfun-Ethereal).

Koons takes most of his inspiration from popular culture and the photo realistic painting was a bizarre mix of advertising images. On the printed page it looked like a photograph of a sandwich from a children's menu. It's fun and eye catching, but has no other impact.

Seeing it hanging on a gallery wall gets to the art of the matter. The painting is huge – 304.8cm by 426.7cm – the same size as a big advertising billboard and it immediately feels as if it's about to smother the viewer. Being the size of a billboard makes sense, as Koons' painting is like a collage of advertising images pasted half-randomly in a scrapbook.

If Koons' intention with the painting's size is to elicit the feeling of the constant assault of advertising images in everyday life, it works. I've never been a big fan of Koons – from his topiary sculptures and silver inflatable toys to his obsessions with Michael Jackson and his former wife and porn star Cicciolina. They are inventive and eye catching, but soulless. But then, I have rarely seen his work other than in photographs. He doesn't exactly move you to tears but the works on show are more unsettling than you'd expect.

It was also the same with the works of several other artists. In photos, pop artist Roy Lichtenstein's 1968 anti-war work *Pre-*



Popular culture: Jeff Koons' 2000 painting *Sandwiches*.

*paredness* isn't anywhere near as immediately memorable as the famous comic book-inspired *Whaam!* or *Drowning Girl* from 1963. But again, it's the size that is a big part of its impact. At 304.8 by 548.6cm it dwarfed the Koons and completely dominates your field of vision. It's as if you are witnessing a parade of death right down to his trademark benday dots, which mirror comic and photo printing. Even more than the paintings, several of the sculptures and installations benefit from not only being able to stand next to them but in the context of the space they've been placed.

The best – which is hilarious and scary at the same time – is Maurizio Cattelan's 2000 sculpture *We Are the Revolution*.

Basically, the piece is a polyester resin figure of a man in a felt suit hanging from a silver coat rack. To view the work you have to walk down a narrow hallway separate from the other works. Because of its narrowness, most people view it one at a time. It's slightly eerie and claustrophobic – and made more so by the fact that when you view the figure up close Cattelan has made it look so real. At any minute you expect the figure to reach out and grab you.

In an excellent short public lecture before viewing the show, co-curator Amy Barclay emphasised how the Guggenheim collection was arranged into several themes – from post-war abstraction to contemporary art, in part to see how the art and artists influence each other. But you don't need to study anything before the show to pick up on the themes and enjoy the works for their own sake.

Like most people I revert to, "I know what I like" when viewing unfamiliar works or artists. But seeing work in galleries can change your mind.

pared to his best known works. But when you see his later Untitled 1947 work with his fuzzy edges alongside Pollock's Untitled (Green Silver) from the same period, or, opposite, Willem de Kooning's 1975 work *Whose Name Was Writ in Water*, all this abstraction starts to click.

With around 85 works, the Guggenheim show isn't overwhelming. Give yourself about two hours to walk through each section – otherwise you may find yourself having to rush through some of the latter sections, including contemporary art, which deserve to be given time, especially if you want to watch even a couple of minutes of Matthew Barney's crazy and strangely hypnotic *Cremaster* videos. – Fairfax (Wellington)

*w* Guggenheim Collection: 1940s to Now New York-Venice-Bilbao-Berlin is at National Gallery of Victoria until October 7.



Claustrophobic: Maurizio Cattelan's 2000 sculpture *We Are the Revolution*.



Busy at sea: Mark Wilson's crewmates (from left) Jamie Munro, 29, of Dunedin, Tim Cleaver, 26, of New Plymouth and James Livingston, 27, of Wellington, doing chores on board the MV Lida.

# Pacing it to Panama

This is the third of an occasional series from **Mark Wilson**, the Southlander sailing the Speight's pub to London.



Mark Wilson

hours to run a cycle so there have been a few incidents of boys drying themselves with the free "Learn to Swim" T-shirts, which James kindly threw in the mix. I'm sure Water Safety New Zealand and ACC will love that we are using them in a marine environment to avoid nasty bathroom slides.

We are once again attempting to hold a quiz night this evening in the Ale House, which has been postponed twice due to rough weather. Ironically, as I write this the waves are beating against the hold, slowly moving the stereo speaker towards the edge of the shelf. You get eyes in the back of your head for that sort of thing after being on the Lida for a few weeks. Fingers crossed we get it off the ground this time.

Sports day tomorrow so we are going to "rock off" to make up the teams tonight for volleyball, darts and backyard cricket. I'm sure the banter will be flying in the bunk rooms tonight.

Physical activity has definitely been on the rise and the guys have been picking my brain for tips to buff up for the Bahamas. I think we may have left our run a bit late and chef Albert's awesome feeds won't help the slimming process.

The rower was taking a hammering until Max, the second mate, told me that the cable that looks like a rope is a 10,000 volt live wire and we should try not to touch it.

Visions of the TAB advert where all that's left is a charcoaled pair of shoes vividly shot to mind. We now have to make sure it's switched off before the daily workout.


Saw another ship this morning – was up early checking the Ale House, as it was a bit rough during the night and wanted to make sure everything was safe and sound – when it appeared portside. After checking the radar to make sure it was not a mirage I let myself get excited as it was the first thing human we have seen since Samoa and made a welcome change from sun and water.

Great to see the road tour still cranking through the country. I hope you guys at Pulse Fitness enjoyed a cold one and someone played up a bit to fill my role.

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