

Challenge without

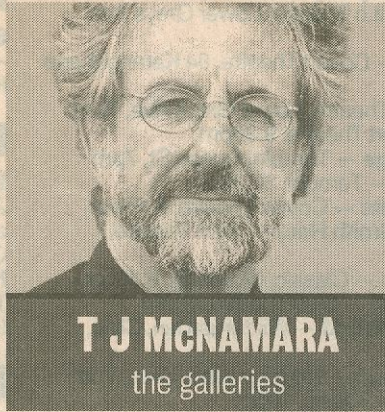
Don't go. No need. Read this description, then think. Art is all in the mind. Words will do. Images are not needed; just send an email. Telling can be art.

Telling a Work of Art is an exhibition at the Jensen Gallery by Karin Sander, the prominent German artist and teacher who is artist in residence at Elam at the University of Auckland. This week is all extreme art. We have a show of art with no images at all; one of art as confrontational, repetitive video, and a third about the art of the impossible.

Sander's exhibition, at the Jensen Gallery until May 26, is a long line of A4 sheets of paper around the walls of both rooms, with more to come. This is art without images but, paradoxically, every one of these messages is about images. Sander requested a number of well-known artists from Auckland to Iceland to send her descriptions of pictures that might console her in her isolation at the end of the world. Those who responded sent descriptions of found paintings, their own paintings, invented paintings, performance art, as well as knitting and knotting.

Ironically, some of the respondents from Europe preface their suggestions by saying she must be surrounded by remarkable landscape beauty.

This idea of sending pictures in words by



email has produced a variety of responses. Some of the artists take the task seriously, even pompously. A couple of New Zealand artists are the most pretentious, intent on showing off their knowledge and sensitivity, although the prize for solemnity must go to Joseph Marioni, who takes the opportunity for five pages of philosophical meditation on the relationship between art and written descriptions.

The artists include Yoko Ono — who insists she is not an artist anyway.

The whole exercise is of a piece with Sander's work which involves making subtle

alterations to given situations in the manner of Aotearoa's Billy Apple.

The whole process is distanced from the everyday world and functions only within the international community of radical artists. It is complicated for the ordinary viewer not only by the way a great deal of the correspondence is in German, but also by the necessity to belong to the elite who believe such an activity is important.

Yet the replies are certainly fascinating in their variety. It all makes an entertaining game if you overlook the basic paradox — and the equation of a recipe for apple tart with a description of a painting of the Last Judgement. With no pictures on offer it might be better to wait for the book.

Work that does hack its way into the ordinary world is the video work of **Nicolas Jasmin**, alias **N.I.C.J.O.B.**, at Artspace in Karangahape Rd until May 21. Such video work is now shown as a matter of course in the big public galleries of Europe.

The show is confrontational in the way it has wooden walkways laid so the viewer cannot see the projected images obliquely but must walk to a point directly in front of them.

The walkways also hide the projectors set low so the viewer casts no shadow on the image. What you see on the walls are "found footage", clips from old films edited and

images

looped so they show the same thing over and over. There is a man who endeavours again and again to climb over a wall but never succeeds. We see just flashes of a companion who is also trying to escape. Then there is a bell-tower accompanied by incessant street noise. Next is a man apparently suspended from a ceiling who spins endlessly. Another bell-tower shows a brief clip of Klaus Kinski doing an agonised face, then dropping out of sight. The background to this is a huge bell. There is the noise of bells but we never see this bell struck.

The clear but disturbing symbolism of these scenes is striking — the endless effort that gets nowhere, the activity that "puts us in a spin", the way we can easily drop out of sight. Life is a struggle, then it is over. Every viewer will find some association with these loops and the effect is Expressionist and unsettling. This is a remarkably powerful show in the best modern manner but there is no comfort in it.

Finally, there is our own young master of paradox, **Mladen Bizumic**, whose work at the Sue Crockford Gallery until May 24 is built on the concept that a typical, forested bit of the Pacific, namely Little Barrier Island, should be taken piece by piece and set down in the Lagoon of Venice. A romantic island is to be transported to the centre of European culture.



ISLAND ROMANCE: *The Night Shift*, including *Day For Night*, is clever, lively and in keeping with the flights of fancy in Mladen Bizumic's previous work.

The show is called *The Night Shift*.

This highly Romantic suggestion is documented with fine photographs of the bush on Little Barrier and with conceptual drawings that not only purport to analyse the difficulties and costing of the project, but also document the romantic attachment to islands from Rousseau through Goethe to Friedrich, modern music and Kafka.

The drawings are striking in their play on the conventions of draughting and their patterns of decisive lines. There is also a video loop that shows Little Barrier in a diagrammatic way to the accompaniment of slow music.

The whole project takes a lot of reading, is clever, lively and in keeping with the flights of fancy in Bizumic's previous work.