

I've been asked to write an open letter entitled *A Letter from New York* in the *Escape from New York* show at SNO in Sydney, Australia.

I've never been to Australia. Up until I about a week ago, my knowledge of your country/continent consisted of the following: names of places like Sydney, Melbourne, New South Wales; of movies like *Mad Max*, *Road Runner*, *The Last Wave*, *Picnic at Hanging Rock*, and *The Cars That Ate Paris* (in our country known as *The Cars That Eat People*); and of musicians like the Bee Gees (as a Brooklynite, it is pretty ironic that they gave us the song most identified with Brooklyn, "Night Fever"), Olivia Newton John, and Men At Work (or was that Men Without Hats?). I even thought that Sydney was your capital.

Since then I've been doing a little bit of brushing up, and have learned a tiny bit more. My impression of Australia is that is still unspoiled, unexplored, uncrowded and uncorrupted, unlike the rest of the inhabited continents. That visiting parts of your country is like time travel (a concept which interests me immensely). That the people are incredibly friendly. That the countryside is pristine (and quite rugged). And finally the art there is quite good.

I was pleased to learn about the 2002 exhibition called *Good Vibrations: The Legacy of Op in Australia* at the Heide Museum of Art in Bulleen. Up until this year's *Optic Nerve* show in Columbus, Ohio, I know of no comparable museum show whose focus was perceptual painting going back some 30 or 40 years. In New York City, with our thousands of galleries, perceptual painting has been virtually invisible during that period. So now I'm really curious; what is it about Australia that not only nourishes an interest in this genre of painting, but nourishes it to the point where it is still a viable force decades after its heyday? What is the difference in the atmosphere that snuffs it out in one environment, which is supposedly a fertile one for the arts (New York) while it is an accepted and thriving entity in another environment whose reputation is undisputedly not one of an international art capital? Is it the physical setting? The colonial influence? The influence of the art of the indigenous population? If any of you have any thoughts on this, I would love to know.

Gilbert Hsiao