

Photo opportunities in St Kilda

ST KILDA, ONCE mainly known only for its foreshore, Luna Park, and its streetwalkers, is now taking on a new personality as restaurants, bars, cinemas and, increasingly galleries, line its streets. Right now, the leisurely stroller around the district can take in three impressive photography exhibitions.

At Stop 22, the gallery that used to be St Kilda railway station, Nicola Loder has installed a wall of 175 large photos, arranged in five rows, of the faces of children from St Kilda Park Primary School. From a distance, the children seem subordinated to the artist's rigid grid design, their faces subjected to varying degrees of darkening and lightening so as to form an aesthetically pleasing overall composition. But closer investigation reveals the artist's respect for her subjects, who are mostly shot from below in thoughtful or rapt poses. Many seem old beyond their years, lost in thought or emotion, inaccessible to us, or challenging us.

This installation poses questions about the representation of children, who are often sentimentalised and patronised by our consumerist culture, and exploited to serve the emotional and aesthetic desires of adults in our self-centred society. It both colludes in, and criticises, this exploitation.

Across the road, in the new George Gallery, a retrospective of the photography and film work of Stephen Cummins tackles issues of politics and aesthetics dominant in gay community debates over the past 10 years. As an activist, Cummins



Nicola Loder with part of her wall of children.

sought to do battle against homophobia and to provide proud and pleasurable representations of gay male bodies and desires.

In the stills from his 1987 film, *Le Corps Image*, we see naked bodies like screens receiving and distorting images superimposed over them, magically and sensually eluding

oppressive definition. In *Enthralled*, a photographic collaboration with Ara Koopelian originally exhibited at Artspace, Sydney, in 1989, a more familiar gay male aesthetic is in evidence, one that draws on both the steamy sensuality of the male pin-up and the teasing posturing of Mapplethorpe at play.

CHILD 1-175

Stop 22 Until 5 May

STEPHEN CUMMINS

George Gallery Until 11 May

THE ART OF COLLECTING

Linden Gallery Until 12 May

In Acland Street, Linden Gallery is housing a delightful exhibition of a series of snapshots taken and collected by a number of artists for research, study or pleasure. Each series centres on a theme or visual motif, and they have been wittily arranged to form patterns and mosaics.

John Neeson's series of skies have been placed inside the arch of a high doorway; Jane Cocks's series of bottles inside a glass cabinet; Elizabeth Boding's mandala series is arranged as a mandala; Gregory Pryor's wheel series forms the shape of a wheel; and Phil Edwards' 121 piles of rubbish form a low frieze.

The playful placing and patterning betrays the curatorial hand of Elizabeth Gower, who also supplies one of the wittiest series of shots. Entitled *Places I've Been*, her records of exotic travel and domestic routine are all floor shots that include her own feet.

The only disappointments in this exhibition are the staid and stodgy contributions from two noted local artists, Howard Arkley and Robert Rooney.

— Freda Frelberg