

# How to be "in" like Flynn

David Meagher

Former New York art dealer and gallery owner, Barbara Flynn, is out to transform a staid old Sydney auction house into a showcase for international and local artists who are at launch point. Catch them now — while you can still afford them

**I**T WAS a setback in her travel plans that opened up a whole new business venture for art dealer Barbara Flynn. Flynn was due to fly to New York in October last year, but suspended her plans in the aftermath of September

11. By the time she got around to the trip in February, she had a whole new reason for getting on the plane.

Between September and February, Flynn began talking to Rod Menzies of auction house Deutscher-Menzies. Menzies had bought the staid auction house Lawsons last year and was desperate to revamp the firm as Lawson-Menzies. The idea that Flynn and Menzies discussed was something new for the Australian auction business: a department selling cutting-edge contemporary art from around the world.

The upshot is a new joint venture, Lawson-Menzies Flynn, which will hold its first sale on June 26. If that seems a little quick off the mark, Flynn points out that "most departments in auction houses do two sales per year, so you really only ever have a couple of months to put things together".

And if anyone can pull it off, it's Barbara Flynn. An impeccably connected former New York art dealer, she ran two galleries of her own for 14 years, before moving to the prestigious Gagosian Gallery in 1994. Relocated to Sydney with her Australian husband in 1998, she has been advising private Sydney collectors ever since.



still very affordable, but maybe not for much longer," says Flynn.

Artists featured in the inaugural sale include Kunié Sugiura from Japan, whose work featured on the cover of the magazine *Art in America* in April; Ricci Albenda whose trompe l'oeil installation recently reconfigured a gallery at New York's Museum of Modern Art; and Al Taylor, who died last year and whose last exhibition at the Gagosian Gallery caused a minor sensation. It is from that show that Flynn has secured two Taylor works.

The idea of getting in at the beginning of careers will, no doubt, be attractive to Australian collectors. Given the current exchange rate, Flynn has tried to keep prices under \$25,000. There is, however, a smattering of works above that price. "I guessed at that cut-off price at first but, based on my experience, it's a good price as it's not too painful for investors to make a leap if they are unsure about an artist," she says.

The sale will be as true a reflection of current contemporary art practices — and as little like traditional auction sales — as possible, she says. To that end, she is focusing on new work by artists who have not previously appeared at auction. "The selection is based on what people are doing at the moment and what's new," Flynn says.

In addition to rising international stars, work by Australian artists and photographers such as Simryn Gill and Ingvar Kenne will be included in the sale. While exposing local

artists to the auction market for the first time is a risk because it has the potential to damage their gallery prices, Flynn thinks it is a risk worth taking.

"It might actually bring new people to their work, and dealers may find themselves with new clients," she says. Moreover, New York dealers are keeping a weather eye on what Australian artists are doing.

At first blush the new venture might appear to fit more easily into Rod Menzies' other business, the up-market Deutscher-Menzies. Not so, he says.

"D-M is a one-product line business, and it is unabashedly élitist. Lawson-Menzies is a multi-product line business, dealing in all types of collectables. We're looking to broaden its range of products and the excitement of that range."

Flynn certainly isn't bothered about not being considered for the elite end of the market.

"Shaking up Lawson-Menzies, and bringing it into the new century, feels very pioneering; and I think there's a certain freedom that comes with that."

**Top:** Barbara Flynn says bringing Lawson-Menzies into the new century "feels very pioneering". **Below, left to right:** *Malerie Marder's Untitled*, 2000. Chromogenic development print; *Dalam*, 2001, by Simryn Gill. Chromogenic development print; *Neil Jenney as a Baseball Player, B Positive*, 2001, by Kunié Sugiura. Gelatin silver print; *Actress (Green 03)*, 2001, by Slater Bradley. Chromogenic development print.

Flynn is now drawing on all of those contacts to make her latest venture succeed.

"Internationally there is a lot of interest in Australia due to the Olympics, and the artists and gallery owners know me, so they can trust me," Flynn says. "They want a sort of guide to break into

this market. And the younger the artist, the less they have to lose and the more they have to gain."

The twice-yearly sales will concentrate on emergent stars: artists selling in the UK and US whose work, Rod Menzies says, collectors will be buying for the mid-to-long term. "Their work is

