

► **Doubly painful:**
for many rural
audiences *Rabbit-
Proof Fence* hits a
true, if painful, note

Emotional rescue



There was a buzz of excitement as the crowd gathered for sausage rolls, sandwiches and orange juice in the cinema foyer. Some had travelled hundreds of kilometres, and were glad to be catching up with friends and family. Others were not quite sure what to expect as they had never been to the movies before. But as they filed into the cinema, the sight of a neatly folded handkerchief on each of the 320-odd seats was a sobering reminder of where the next few hours would take them.

For most of the audience at the recent premiere of *Rabbit-Proof Fence* in Kalgoorlie-Boulder, WA, the film was not only about the heroic journey of the Aboriginal youngsters, Molly, Gracie and Daisy. It was also their own story of family separation, loss and suffering. During many of the scenes which have had city audiences weeping – like when the girls are forcibly wrenched from their mothers – you could have heard a pin drop. The stoicism and courage portrayed in the film was mirrored in its audience.

The local Aboriginal health service, which organised the viewing as a step towards healing and reconciliation, had people on hand afterward to help with debriefing. But, as the crowd slowly filed out, there was a heavy silence. It was like being at a funeral, where no one knows quite what to say. Slowly, though, the shock began to melt and conversations started. Some of the stolen generation told their own stories for the first time, and the book's author, Doris Pilkington Garimara, gave a speech.

Greg Stubbs, head of the Bega Garnbirringu (meaning "sickness gets better") health service,

had to step away from the crowd, to ring his wife. He needed to talk of leaving his family at 11, and to shed a few tears. The film was doubly painful because his work brings daily reminder of the legacy of the stolen generation. Apart from the usual healthcare, his service provides meals, showers and clean clothes to the homeless.

The film also had a powerful impact on its non-Aboriginal audience. "I felt a sense of great sorrow and gained a new resolve to do what I could in the ways that I could to continue the work of reconciliation," says Gerald Beaumont, an Anglican assistant bishop.

David Dunn, a doctor with Bega Garnbirringu, says it helped him understand emotionally what he had previously understood intellectually. "The reverberations will be felt for a long time," he says. "It would be great if everyone in Australia could see it and feel it and get a better understanding of what's happened."

Director Phillip Noyce says the film, which seemed to disappear quickly from metropolitan screens, is gaining wide country and regional audiences, which account for one-third of its \$6.7m takings. "The country towns have been strong because in these areas, as opposed to most capitals, people have firsthand experience of living with indigenous Australians, so there is a more immediate context for viewing the story."

The film's impact on the broader Kalgoorlie-Boulder community, where racial tensions often run high, remains to be seen. But the first public screening was packed, mainly by non-Aboriginal people. And there were boxes of tissues waiting for them.

MELISSA SWEET

► Frame and fortune

Just what is Rod Menzies up to? That's what saleroom habitués are asking themselves as the chairman of cleaning giant Menzies International prepares to bankroll yet another foray into the fine-art market.

Using his latest acquisition, Sydney's oldest auction house Lawsons, as his vehicle, Menzies has empowered expatriate American art consultant Barbara Flynn to mount Australia's first auction of primary works by living artists.

Next month, the newly formed Lawson-Menzies Flynn will offer artworks sourced from all over the globe – but mainly from Flynn's home town of New York – by artists she says are all "on the way up but still affordable".

Until now, buying and selling at auction has been exclusively a secondary-market affair; it's unheard of for artists to deliver fresh works straight to the saleroom. Primary-market dealers typically look upon auctions with disdain, and not a little fear;

► Emerging art: Gregory Crewdson's *Untitled (Rug Lady Formation)*, 1999



GREGORY CREWDSON/LAWSON-MENZIES FLYNN

one low price can harm not just an artist's market but their reputation as a sound investment.

Thus Flynn's strategy has been to get to artists via their dealers, a wise move considering the latter would no doubt blackball an independent agent trying to secure works before they'd even appeared on a gallery wall.

But why would leading US galleries such as Gagosian Gallery, Paula Cooper Gallery, Deitch Projects, Lehmann Maupin Gallery and David Zwirner agree in the first place? For Flynn, 20 years' experience in New York's art scene (including five years as a director of the influential Gagosian itself) have come in handy.

"First, these are younger, emerging artists who will gain from the exposure," says Flynn. "And second, I know people and people know me - there's a trust there."

"I admit it's never been done before, and you couldn't attempt something like this in [the New Yorker's] own backyard, but the fact that it was in Australia was also helpful, first because of the distance but also because there's a great fascination with Sydney and Australia."

Another significant sweetener was Menzies' offer to cover all freight costs. In the past, Menzies has been known to offer

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Keith Fletcher

1902-2002

The *Last Post* echoed at two important funerals last Friday. There was a state service for Alec Campbell, who would have agreed that others did grander things at Gallipoli, but who outlived the rest to become a symbol of enduring spirit. And there was a funeral in Springvale, Melbourne, for Keith Fletcher, an ex-prisoner-of-war, who came home from World War II so emaciated that many doubted he would live more than a few years. Last week Fletcher died, aged 100. His mind still hummed but his body was worn out.

A wheat farmer broken by the Depression, Fletcher enlisted in the 4th Anti-Tank Regiment at 38, nearly twice the age of most recruits. He helped destroy eight tanks during Japan's invasion of Singapore but was captured after scrounging in the Malay jungle for seven weeks. Fletcher saw many mates succumb on the Thai-Burma Railway. In February, he told *The Bulletin*: "I know the thought often went through my mind: 'I'll take as

much as these bastards can give me'." Fletcher returned home, got married, had two daughters, and worked in a leather factory until retiring at 70.

About 80 people attended his funeral in Melbourne. His daughter remembered picking wildflowers and lighting fires with her father. His friend Max McLennan delighted in Fletcher's discovery of foreign foods in his 90s. Bill Dunn, himself an ex-prisoner-of-war, said that of the 126 members of the 4th Anti-Tank Regiment to work on Hellfire Pass, only 10 remained. "Keith and the older

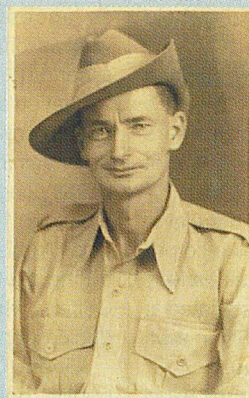
fellas kept the younger fellas going," he said. "They were towers of strength."

Like Campbell, Fletcher shied from glory. He was flippant about his war experiences, and genuinely surprised by media interest in his 100th birthday. "I'm not all that excited about it," he said. "It's been hard going."

PATRICK CARLYON

• World War I veteran Jack Lockett, who was Australia's oldest man, died in Bendigo on the weekend, aged 111.

KEITH FLETCHER



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clients guarantees that if works didn't meet reserve he would personally buy them, but Flynn says no such arrangement is in place this time.

Not surprisingly, Flynn has had less success convincing Australian gallerists, although she has signed several artists from leading dealers Stephen Mori and Anna Schwartz.

Menzies has reached deep into his pockets over the past four years to turn the country's auction market upside down, founding auction house Deutscher-Menzies out of Melbourne to break the stranglehold of Sotheby's and Christie's.

The new venture is obviously designed to tempt the younger buyers that Christie's and Sydney rival Shapiro Auctioneers have attracted with their regular sales of Australian contemporary art.

Flynn, who since moving to Australia in 1998, has consulted to individuals and corporations, says reserves will peak at a relatively paltry \$25,000, with most works estimated at below \$10,000. At these prices, Flynn says it isn't a great risk for the galleries.

With dealers expected to take their usual 40%, however, and the auction house taking its 17.5% plus GST, this leaves us with a final question. What is a player like Menzies, legendary for his smarts, doing bringing obscure, low-margin, hard-to-sell, international art to an immature, peripheral market such as Australia?

The answer will be forthcoming on June 26, in Sydney, in the swish surrounds of the West Lobby of the Renzo Piano office block on Macquarie Street.

MICHAEL HUTAK

► Space invaders

What do the millionaire residents of beachfront homes in Malibu see when they gaze at the Pacific Ocean? Not the idyllic scene you may imagine, but a hellish vision of ordinary folk, citizens and taxpayers, marching in hordes across their precious sands.

Except the sand is not theirs. The beach is public property, and opening up a coastline stretching 43 kilometres, but mostly inaccessible, is now becoming urgent.

The people's beachhead is concentrated on a 5km stretch along the busy Pacific Coast Highway north of Santa Monica, where luxury homes stand shoulder to shoulder. Nine alleys down to the beach are closed, gated, fenced, blocked, occupied in one

case by a tennis court, or otherwise forbidden to visitors.

Malibu has thus made hideaways for such Hollywood luminaries as Barbra Streisand, Dustin Hoffman, Tom Hanks, Robert Redford, Goldie Hawn, Steven Spielberg, Julie Andrews, Ryan O'Neal, billionaire producer David Geffen, a former chairman of MGM, and other rich folk, who regard prices up to \$US15m (\$27m) as acceptable for what is often only a second home.

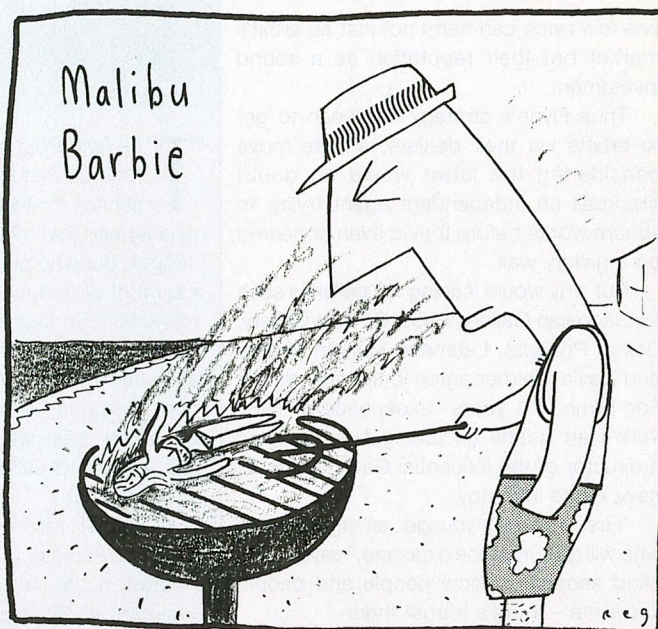
Geffen's spokesperson unwittingly summed up their elitism by imagining the hordes and their boom boxes congregating outside his fence, thus breaking "18 years of blessed silence". And who did his best to destroy our tranquillity during that period? Step forward David Geffen, who made his first millions producing pop records.

Under California law all beaches are public, however, the Malibu millionaires

were permitted to build in return for establishing rights-of-way. Now, the time limit for that agreed access is expiring, and the California Coastal Commission must make enforcements.

Commission surveyors, mustered by a citizens' group, Access for All, recently examined one beach entrance at - Geffen's house. He is co-operating, so far.

CHRISTOPHER REED



Drawn and quartered

by David Messer

