

Playing to the GALLERY



Once one of Sydney's least attractive inner suburbs, Chippendale is enjoying an art and architecture-led renaissance. From slum to cutting-edge gallery precinct, Suzanne Wangmann charts the area's makeover.

PHOTOGRAPHY **SCOTT HAWKINS**

IT'S EARLY EVENING on a Saturday in spring and the Beams Arts Festival is in full swing. For one night only, the narrow streets and lanes are strung with lights and art works. Two men paint wall murals in one street, while digital art plays on screens in another. There's a walk-through sculpture made of disposable coffee cups, and a long table, dressed with candles, around which festival-goers are gathering to take a breather.

However, what makes the biggest impression of all is the crowd. There are thousands of people squashed into the suburb's tiny lanes – artists, students, locals, tourists, art lovers from all over the city. Anyone who remembers the Chippendale of 20 years ago, or more, would find it hard to imagine that this network of lanes, once home to Sydney's poorest, has become a thriving hub with a heartbeat to match.

Close to the University of Sydney and the University of Technology Sydney, Chippendale is conveniently perched on the southern edge of the CBD and is well-served by public transport. A large brewery operated >



Symbiosis (2012) by Caroline Rothwell at Central Park (above left);
Something For Jess cafe, Abercrombie & O'Connor Streets (above right)



At White Rabbit Gallery, *Album Of Immortal Blossoms In An Everlasting Spring* By Giuseppe Castiglione, Su Meng-Hung, 2002 (above left); One Central Park (above right)



here from 1835 to 2005 (Tooth's Kent Brewery until 1983, then Carlton & United). As one of Sydney's first industrial precincts, Chippendale had the slums and vice to go with it – the notorious murderers Sarah and John Makin were arrested in Chippen Street in 1892. Polluted and disease-ridden, Chippendale was never an attractive prospect for families, but it did have soul.

"I came here seven years ago," says Beams' creative director Nicky Ginsberg, who emigrated from the United Kingdom in the early 1990s. "Chippendale reminds me of pockets of London and Paris. I saw the incredible potential for it as a gallery destination and just knew someone had to start." So Ginsberg bought the old Sydney City Mission building, opened The Mission restaurant and bar on the ground floor and the NG Gallery on the upper levels.

"I started the not-for-profit Chippendale Creative Precinct (CCP) three years ago," she says. "Then I was able to apply for grants to promote Chippendale as a cultural hub."

Sydney City Council came to the party with more than \$110,000 in annual grants for events, including the Beams Festival, and administrative expenses, including the chippendalecreative.com website. However, another financial supporter has entirely changed the landscape of Chippendale. Frasers Property Australia, together with Japanese property developer Sekisui House, purchased the 5.8ha brewery site in 2007 and has since redeveloped the face of the

suburb in collaboration with such architecture firms as Foster & Partners (London), Jean Nouvel (Paris) and Australia's Johnson Pilton Walker.

THE MOST STRIKING BUILDING to emerge so far is One Central Park, designed by Nouvel and French botanist Patrick Blanc. Boasting the highest vertical garden in the world along with a huge, west-facing cantilevered terrace, or heliostat, that emerges from the 28th floor, this is event architecture of the highest order. During the day, the heliostat's sun-reflecting shields keep the atrium beneath it well lit, then after dark, it moonlights as a light installation created by artist Yann Kersalé. Apartments in One Central Park range from \$460,000 to \$2.9m – not quite the cheap Chippendale of old. Development of the site will continue through to 2018, including the rejuvenation of Kensington Street, which will combine old architecture with new and provide a laneway of cafes, galleries and shops.

Frasers has been one of the CCP's greatest supporters, says Ginsberg. Its chairman, Dr Stanley Quek, has a personal interest in visual arts and donated \$100,000 to another of CCP's initiatives, the Chippendale New World Art Prize.

"There are landscape and portraiture prizes," says Ginsberg, "but you don't get many about urban [environments] or which embrace

and encourage new technologies. The New World Art Prize isn't just open to artists, but also to creative industries because they're working on the cutting edge of technology." Last year's [2013] winner, Bryden Williams, was awarded a three-month art residency in Beijing for his multimedia, moving-image work, *Techno Fire*.

Public art has a major role to play, thanks to an \$8m program already seeing a number of art works installed. Witness the massive *Halo* kinetic sculpture by Jennifer Turpin and Michaelie Crawford, in Central Park. A tilted yellow ring, 12m across, turns with the breeze 13m above the ground. Its wobbly rotation, thanks to the tilt, makes for a calming, if not mesmerising, work. Nearby, Caroline Rothwell's 12m PVC work, *Symbiosis*, grows out of the old brewery building's southern wall. Taking the form of an inflated red tree, it is fed air through the pipes of the brewery's old plumbing system, referencing the history of the site, and appears as an opportunistic plant clutching at the formwork for nourishment and survival.

Rothwell has worked in Chippendale since 2008. "It's changed so much in that time," she says. "Previously, it was more artists and art workers, now it's getting many more galleries, film companies and architecture firms, which puts pressure on the artists for cheap rent and grungy spaces. But there are great cafes and Frasers has been really supportive of local artists. They had a couple of derelict buildings in the area, which they've let artists use for free studio space."

Arguably the best-known of Chippendale's many galleries is White Rabbit Gallery, a private collection comprising more than 400 contemporary Chinese works, including pieces by art world superstars such as Ai Weiwei and Yang Fudong. Established in 2009 by Judith Neilson and her husband, Kerr, the four-storey gallery presents a freshly curated show every six months (March and August) showcasing a constantly expanding collection devoted to work produced since 2000.

"We established the gallery with the express aim of sharing the White Rabbit collection with as many people as possible," says Judith Neilson. "We were looking for a place in central Sydney easily accessible by public transport, and I love the diversity of Chippendale. Our last exhibition had about 35,000 visitors." The gallery's latest exhibition, opening March 6, will feature "some of our edgiest, most innovative and exciting works by featured artists Madeln, Zhou Xiaohu, Wang Qingsong and Shyu Ruey-Shiann, many of them completed in the past year".

For Clover Moore, the Lord Mayor of Sydney since 2004, Chippendale's redevelopment is a cause for celebration.

"Thirteen galleries have opened in the area and I think that would astonish all the mechanics, tradesmen and factory workers of the Chippendale of the past. It really is becoming a creative hub of Sydney and it's fantastic," says an enthusiastic Moore. ➤



Clockwise from above: NG Art Gallery; White Rabbit, *A History Of China's Modernisation*, Jin Feng, 2011; birdcages at White Rabbit Tea House



GALLERY GUIDE

DNA PROJECTS

3 Blackfriars Street.
dnaprojects.com.au

Contemporary works from Africa, Latin America and Oceania. Until March 7, *Abstract* – new works on paper by Teo Treloar. From March 14, the multi-venue *Safari 2014* (safari.org.au) shows emerging and unrepresented Australian artists.

NG ART GALLERY

1/3 Little Queen Street.
ngart.com.au

Sydney artists in all media. Also, NG Art Pop-Up Gallery, Shop 1, Central Park on Broadway, Open Tue-Sat, 12-4pm. March 4-22, *Little Secrets*, photographic montages by Patricia Casey capturing reverie. From March 25, *At The End Of The Day* by Bernard Ollis, ex-director of the National Art School, Sydney.

HARRINGTON STREET GALLERY

17 Meagher Street.
harringtonstreetgallery.com

An artists' co-op exhibiting works of new and established artists. February 25-March 25, oil paintings and drawings by Jerry Doherty, Susan Faigen and Carolyn O'Brien.

THE COMMERCIAL

148 Abercrombie Street.
thecommercialgallery.com

Contemporary art gallery featuring the group show *Oui We* until March 8, followed by an exhibition of paintings by Tim Schultz, March 14-April 5.

MCLEMOI GALLERY

45 Chippen Street.
mclemoi.com

Australian and international contemporary artists. Until March 7, Rhonda Dee, *Plundering The Verge*. From March 14, Ji Wenyu (China) and Jen DeNike (US).

X88 GALLERY

88 Abercrombie Street.
pixelperfect.com.au

A venue for photographic exhibitions, X88 Gallery is a collaboration between Fuji Film Australia and Pixel Perfect Pro Lab.

PINE STREET CREATIVE ARTS CENTRE

64 Pine Street.
pinestreet.com.au

City of Sydney's community artist space. March 5-17, *Loved Ones*, drawings by Cary Lee. March 20-31, *365 People*, photos by Tom Jones, from his street portrait blog.

WHITE RABBIT GALLERY

30 Balfour Street.
whiterabbitcollection.org

A world-class collection of 21st-century Chinese art. From March 6, *Reformation* features recent works by Madeln, Zhou Xiaohu, Wang Qingsong, Shyu Ruey-Shiann and others.

KALEIDOSCOPE GALLERY

30 O'Connor Street.
kaleidoscope-gallery.com

Run by artists, Kaleidoscope Gallery exhibits work by emerging and often experimental artists in various media.

GALERIE POMPOM & MOP PROJECTS

2/39 Abercrombie Street.
galeriepompom.com & mop.org.au

Pompom commercial gallery of contemporary art: March 4-30, performance video art by Heath Franco. MOP Projects artist-run contemporary gallery: March 4-30, *The Collector II: The Umbra*, sculptural installations by Tricky Walsh and Mish Meijers.

✈ For airfares and holiday packages to Sydney call Qantas Holidays on 1300 735 542 or visit qantas.com/holidaysaustralianway