

A Sharing of Voices

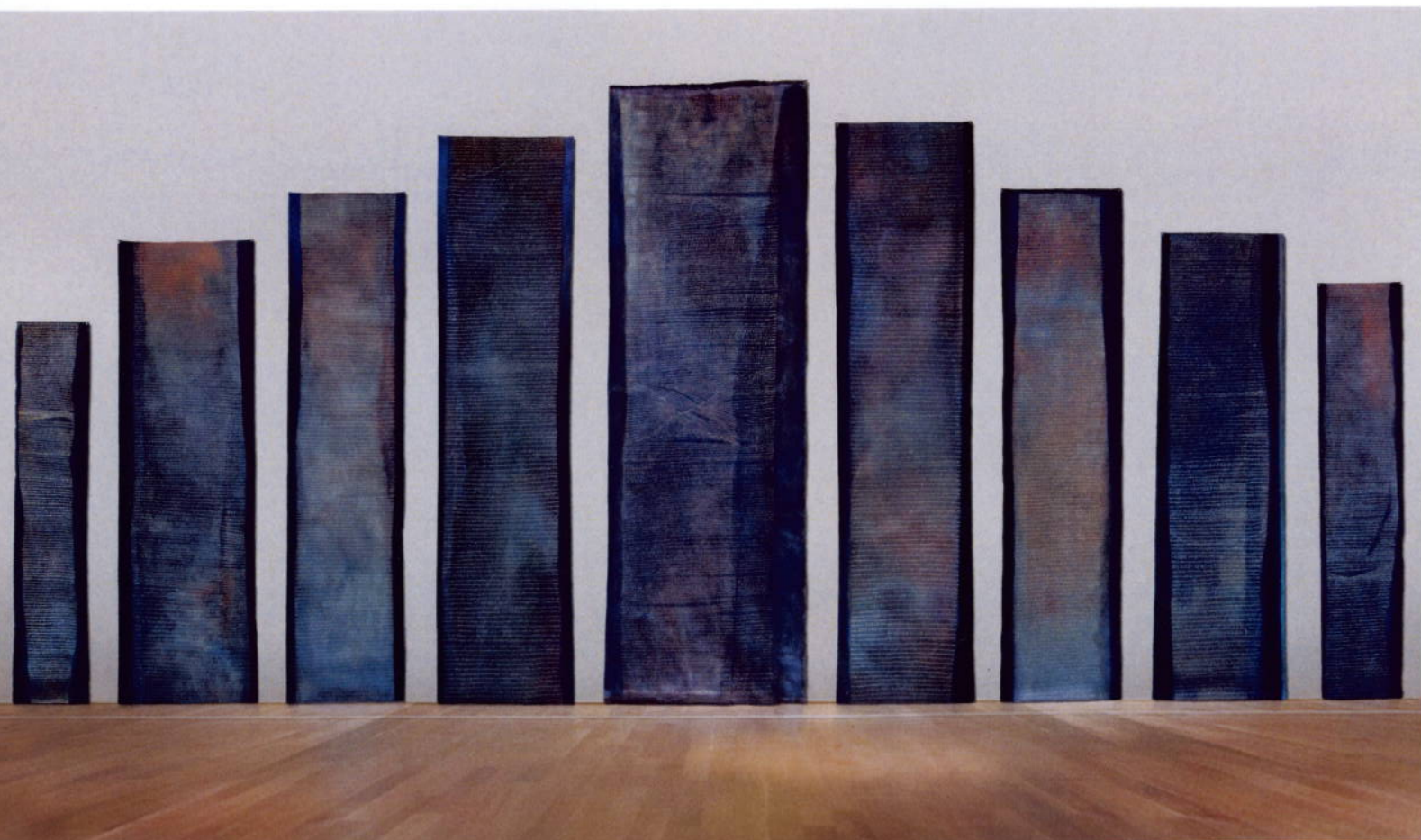
We often live at a distance from our extended families in Australia, and we correspond with colleagues, friends and families through technologies like email, the telephone, or social networking sites such as MySpace or Facebook. Our face-to-face engagement with other people is often either primarily transactional (e.g. buying bread at the supermarket, getting the car serviced), or when social (having a coffee and a chat) is organised through, and supplemented by, the use of technology. Birth, illness and deaths of others – those who we may have passed in the street – are segmented from the broader community within the walls of hospitals and nursing homes. The joy, grief or anxiety of immediate friends and family is thus largely hidden from the public's view. Yet, and almost paradoxically, images of death and suffering in the media surround us; in the process, desensitising us and experienced mostly as somehow as outside of or distanced from our everyday (though the shock experienced after the September 11 attacks in America, the Bali bombings, or more recently the bushfires in Victoria, reveal this experience is not always completely sanitized, surreal or without effect). Technology is used to bring us together, yet at the same time, in many ways distances us from each other and from our immersion in direct and immediate sensory experiences. At the very least, these exposures are often experienced in an individual and often solitary manner.

Thus those things that remind us that we are embedded in communities, that we are enmeshed in important relations with others – whose birth and death, joy and suffering, and human frailty remind us that we are all on some levels alike – is experienced and enacted in different ways than it has been in the past. In this sort of environment, our understandings and practises of community are changing. We find ourselves trying to make sense of, to navigate through, and to give meaning to these experiences. Many of our practices encourage individual experiences, choices, and self-realisation, but often fail to fully acknowledge or embrace the importance of the social, of our being-together. *Breath & Stones* engages with these issues.

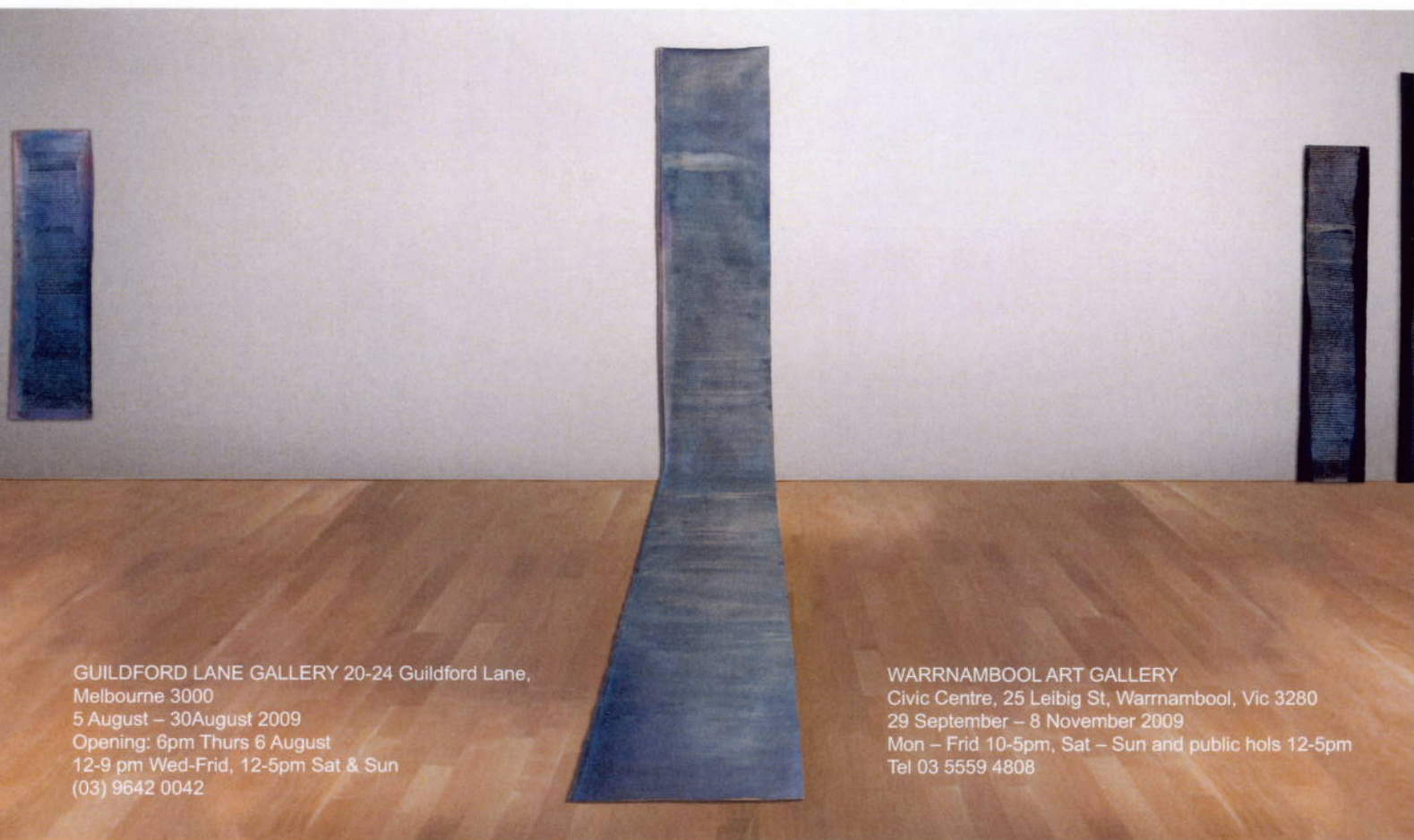
Art, literature, and communication are very social. These forms of speaking, these different voices, offer us ways of making sense of experiences and of communicating with one another. Yet it is a communication incompletely shared, involving a constant negotiation by those who encounter it of distance and togetherness simultaneously. In this exhibition, the artist – inspired by Ethiopian Healing or Protective Scrolls – has inscribed words of comfort and sorrow, recording (reinscribing) stories of loss and grief found in the mass media. These are stories that affect us all in different ways. Each person will bring to the encounter something of themselves and will therefore take away different meanings and interpretations. However, there will also be moments when the distances are bridged and an acknowledgement of being together and of shared experiences is made through this incomplete sharing of voices.

The title of this exhibition, *Breath & Stones*, offers one way of imagining distance, togetherness and incomplete sharing: Breath evokes notions of the ephemeral, of momentary existence, and of permeability; while stone conjures the material and embedded, and a sense of permanence. A juxtaposition of these two conjures possibilities of fleeting and momentary experiences of community, of compassion, of individual life and of togetherness enveloping and possibly warming the permanence, solidity and, at times, coldness of our environment. It speaks to the fragility of these moments of togetherness and also to the question of possible irreconcilability. Art and language – different voices, shared, given material expression – offer a way of potentially bridging these differences and distances and providing alternate ways of making sense of the world.

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Emergence & Magnificence (Requiem) 2005, 2008
9 pieces: Range from 140cm to 210cm x 24cm to 67cm
Installation size variable, minimum 5 metres wall space
Acrylic and ink on un-stretched canvas



GUILDFORD LANE GALLERY 20-24 Guildford Lane,
Melbourne 3000
5 August – 30 August 2009
Opening: 6pm Thurs 6 August
12-9 pm Wed-Frid, 12-5pm Sat & Sun
(03) 9642 0042

WARRNAMBOOL ART GALLERY
Civic Centre, 25 Leibig St, Warrnambool, Vic 3280
29 September – 8 November 2009
Mon – Frid 10-5pm, Sat – Sun and public hols 12-5pm
Tel 03 5559 4808

Breath & Elegy (scroll) 2004, Acrylic and ink on un-stretched canvas 450cm x 44cm

Annette Iggulden is represented by LEGGE GALLERY, Sydney
www.leggegalleries.com

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