

Redfern's growing artists' colony

THE PERFORMANCE Space used to be out on a limb in Redfern, with only Artspace across the park. In the last couple of years, however, it has been joined by EMR and Sylvester Studios, both very close by; and soon the new Legge Gallery will open in Regent Street.

The advantages of proximity are illustrated by *Drop*, an exhibition held jointly at The Performance Space and Sylvester, and including the work of young artists Sue Pedley, Ted Riggs and Juliet Fowler-Smith. All the works are of a high standard of execution, but they are not flat and self-enclosed.

On the contrary, they are so strongly oriented towards the audience that Pedley's and Riggs's works are actually accompanied by signs warning that they are dangerous.

Pedley has large wire sculptures which are circular and convex, evoking the form of the eye; red-hot electric elements serve as the pupils, staring from the wall with a burning gaze. The viewer is made uneasy by this stare, and also by the ambivalence between colour and heat; the threat of the gaze is not simply

symbolic, but literally real.

She also has a beautiful wire construction which is like an anemone waiting for its prey; it is attached to a skylight in the ceiling, as anemones and other sea-creatures lodge themselves in the cracks and niches of the rocks.

Riggs has a huge instrument (reminiscent of those of Ari Purhonen), whose extraordinary precision of execution speaks of scientific purpose; but its only discernible function seems to be to establish its own precarious equilibrium.

At one end is a little chamber full of small lead weights; the balance is so fine that you feel the removal of even one

would cause the contraption to lurch to the other side.

Juliet Fowler-Smith's installation suggests an abandoned garden or field, but perhaps also an interior: the perimeter of the space is marked with curious metal contraptions which are used to carry electric cattle fences in the country.

Although Fowler-Smith comes from the country and knows them well, she too finds the form of these posts enigmatic and has developed drawings based on them. The ones she has set around the room are surmounted by little trails of smoke, recalling an effect sometimes seen in the work of Kounellis.

The smoke suggests something past, an action concluded; the faint outline of a house on the far wall echoes a sense of loss. Three earthenware pipes seem to carry sounds from underground, in a spatial transposition of the idea of past time.

The best way to appreciate the installation is swinging freely on the seat suspended by a single rope in the middle of the room; the directionless, soothing motion is an analogy for the drifting of memory.

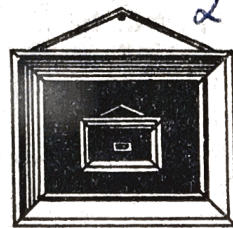
These installations compare favourably

with the rather predictable format of two current group shows. Both raise the questions of the rationale of such collections, and of the relationship between the works exhibited and the texts that are written to accompany them.

Proposals was sent to Artspace from the George Paton Gallery at the University of Melbourne, where it was shown a year ago. An undoubtedly well-intentioned introductory essay suggests that the creation of art is stimulated by a belief in the possibility of a better world. Whether the works included can be considered as representing such an aspiration, however, remains doubtful.

The problem of relevance is illustrated from the other side in the Australian Centre for Photography's *Oedipus Variations*, in which a diverse collection of images is accompanied by an essay which seems to have less to do with them than with the catalogue-writer's dark night of the soul.

I have the feeling that both of these group shows belong to a genre that flourished in the later 1980s, which has now run its course. But only time will tell



GALLERIES
CHRISTOPHER ALLEN