IAN HOWARD: KHYBER PASSING

Senior Sydney artist Ian Howard, born in 1947, has used war and military history as a subject for his work since he began practising as an artist (during the Vietnam War) in 1968. Howard is probably best known for his 1975 wax rubbing of the Enola Gay (held by the Art Gallery of New South Wales), the B-29 bomber that dropped the first atomic bomb over Hiroshima in 1945. For more than three decades, Howard has researched military institutions, sites and monuments—including the Berlin Wall and People’s Liberation Army bases in China. He has worked with the Australian, British and US defence forces, including the Pentagon, where he gained access to facilities and equipment to produce artwork such as the 1975 rubbings of the iconic Vietnam War fighter plane, the F-4 Phantom.

This installation, titled Khyber Passing, explores ideas about an individual’s relationship to contemporary geo-political circumstances and calls into question our attitudes towards western ‘progress’. Ian Howard comments:

‘The title Khyber Passing refers to the passing of time; the artist’s life. It refers to geo-political developments and the passing of eras that change our ability to access the world’s landscapes ... to passing in the sense of competition, overtaking and supremacy ... to the West versus the East, one culture or religion opposing or winning over another ...’

The Fiat Topolino (‘little mouse’) was one of the first light cars of the inter-war years. The key to its popularity and success was that the Topolino was perceived to be ‘a big car in miniature’. Howard proposes the cars as anthropomorphic and, ironically, as symbolic of aspects of political power and change. The artist invites museum visitors to touch the cars, open the doors and sit in the seats.