

Innovative techniques on display

By JILL STOWELL,
Art Critic

—ART—

Rhondda Walters, Burns-Kaldy Gallery. Triple 'S' Exhibition, Newcastle Contemporary Gallery. Both exhibitions until April 12.

RHONDDA Walters was a fellow teacher at Desiderius Orban's Art School in Sydney during the final decade of his long life. The students there were encouraged to experiment in a variety of materials, for example, using newspaper collage for compositional exercises.

It is hardly surprising therefore to find Rhondda Walters working with confidence and skill in a number of innovative techniques.

The 26 pieces in this exhibition have in common subject matter apparently based on a still life

arrangement of bottles, with rounded bodies narrowing into necks. Scale is unimportant, and the same forms can suggest pots, rocks and even the human figure.

Colour is deliberately muted, so that the emphasis in each work is on the richly varied surface. As well as conventional paint, pastels and gouache, pieces may incorporate various fabrics and fibres, bark and assembled shapes in torn and cut-out paper, plain and printed, thick and tissue-thin.

Many of the works operate almost as relief sculpture. In an interesting variant of papier mache, a heavy paper background is creased and moulded to produce positive and negative images. Even the oil paintings have a curious crusty surface.

The very different traditions of expressionism are invoked next door in the Contemporary Gallery.

The work of the two student painters radiates energy and excitement. Joanne Slade has developed a coherent body of work using vigorous splashes and dribbles of bright paint. Michael Schofield works through his subjects in paint, lino cut and charcoal with a fine sense of space and pattern.

Their works, in common with those of the sculptor Sharon Somerville, centre on the human image. She is one of the artists whose work at Wondabyne has in recent months enlivened the railway journey to Sydney. Somehow she has transported a large and handsome sandstone torso back to Newcastle. It is at present adorning the footpath outside the gallery but it is to be hoped that it will become a permanent feature in some more suitable place.

Contrast in four innovative shows

By JILL STOWELL

Rhondda Walters, Burns-Kaldy Gallery, until August 9.

Jenny McNaughton and Janette Beeton, Sea View Gallery, until August 12.

Karanga Pottery, African Heritage Gallery.

WHEN Rhondda Walters exhibited in Newcastle 16 months ago I commented that her innovative approach to materials must benefit her students at the Sydney art school founded by Desiderius Orban.

This present show of 32 works continues and extends her previous interest in collage. But here, instead of using the textures and associations of found images and papers, she builds up works by sticking heavily painted canvas shapes on to a bland neutral background.

The muted colour, the isolation of the objects and their disturbing angular silhouettes convey an innate sense of disquiet, recalling, perhaps deliberately, that arid airless world of the French surrealists, over whom the coming war cast its ominous shadow.

It comes as a surprise that this prolific painter finds her inspiration in the idyllic natural world and that many of her birds and humans, either metamorphosing out of the cliffs of Broken Bay or profiled against the void, are intended to be satirically comic.

NEWCASTLE HERALD - 30/3/87