

# Kevin Connor

## SCENES FROM AN EXHIBITION

Michael Fitzgerald

DESPITE TWICE-WINNING THE ARCHIBALD PRIZE and being fondly associated with portraiture in Australia, Kevin Connor prefers to see himself in less definitive terms: 'I simply like drawing people.' In the summer months leading to the nation's most celebrated portrait prize, *Art & Australia* invited Connor to observe the inner workings of Sydney's Art Gallery of New South Wales, the Archibald's host venue since 1921. As a gallery trustee from 1981 to 1987, Connor knows these spaces with uncommon intimacy and, just as 'David to Cézanne' was coming down and 'The First Emperor: China's Entombed Warriors' was going up, the artist got to work with his signature A4 sketchbook and pen, his benign bearded presence soon disappearing into the scenery. Connor thinks of drawing as 'not much more than seeing things', and for much of the time he just watched from the wings. Not surprisingly his eyes were drawn to the otherwise faceless packers, installers, security crew and other unsung enablers of these exhibitions – people such as Head Storeman Steve Peters and Installation Officer Brett Cuthbertson who, come Sydney's autumn, are the unhurried handlers of a moving tide of portraits. What emerges from Connor's resulting charcoal drawings – the first in a planned two-part artist project celebrating the Archibald – is a rare glimpse of a gallery with all the lively intelligence and unvarnished truth of his best portraits.

Archibald, Wynne & Sulman Prizes 2011, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney, 16 April – 26 June 2011.

