

Intentions none too clear, 17 years on

Art

By SONIA BARRON

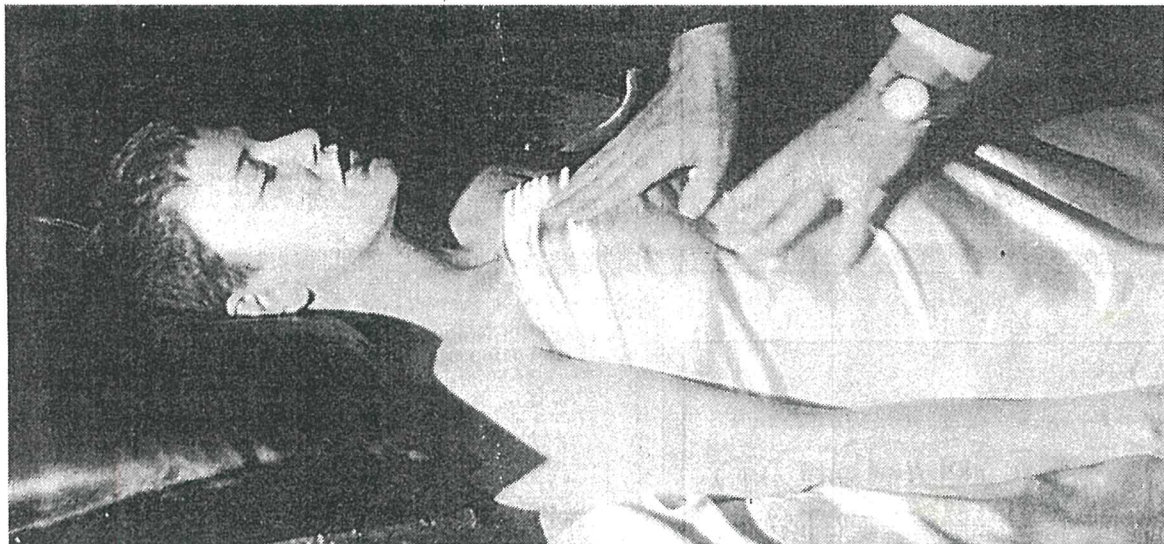
The Seduction of Art, Barbara Campbell, National Gallery of Australia, Saturday July 25.

THE SEDUCTION OF ART is a performance created by Barbara Campbell some 17 years ago that she has performed several times in the ensuing years.

With the assistance of Neil Roberts, she presented a new version last Saturday in the gallery devoted to American abstract expressionist art in the National Gallery.

On an ambulance stretcher, its pillow cover black and under-sheet red, Campbell lay on her back, naked beneath a white sheet with her arms outside the sheet at her sides. Roberts in a conservative dark suit knelt at one side of the stretcher, facing the audience, one hand placed on Campbell's middle and another on her thigh. He proceeded to gently rub these areas.

By means of a discrete microphone Campbell related her first encounter with modern art, at the age of 13 on an excursion to the Brisbane City Hall where *Blue Poles* was on display. She did this in a factual manner, describing her



Barbara Campbell in performance: a number of scenarios present themselves.

progress to the gallery where the painting was hung in painstaking detail.

Throughout this verbal build-up to the encounter with the painting, to which she reacts in a matter-of-fact manner, her voice never falters despite the increasing rapidity and widening area of Roberts's massage. The ending is abrupt; her arms fall towards the floor and Roberts falls across her.

A number of scenarios present themselves. There is the logical proposition of a medico attempting to revive an accident victim who has been "afflicted" by art. He fails, and succumbs himself.

Or if you like, the increasing crescendo of the rubbing action, which was very distracting and hard not to dissociate with an attempt at sexual arousal, and to which Campbell seemed oblivious

as she droned on, could equally signify a non-event on several other levels.

The idea of being an "art victim" — remember the badges — is undoubtedly the intended one, but do correct me if you know better. Barbara Campbell's departure for New York City to take up an Australia Council studio residency is imminent, and Neil Roberts will be accompanying her.