"AN AUSTRALIAN ACCENT" at P. S. 1, 46-01 21st Street in Long Island City, is an exhibition with quite exceptional expressive power. The three artists involved, Mike Parr, Imants Tillers and Ken Unsworth, are image makers (and, sometimes, image scavengers) of a driving, obsessional and visionary sort. Their pictures come freighted with dreams, often of a complex and disquieting kind, and the idioms employed allow of a rapid and comprehensive attack upon a vast range of problems - emotional, conceptual, esthetic and perceptual.

The images have also a bardic element, in that fundamentally these artists are tellers of tales and repositories of ancient wisdom. In particular, the Australian aborigine is much on their minds, as is indeed the case with every intelligent Australian. (Imants Tillers, the son of Latvians who went to Australia as displaced persons after World War II, has said that he "would like to be accepted as a white aborigine."

Though in no sense a group or a school, the three artists have it in common that they can work on a big scale without loss of concentration. They can deal with private hurts, and they can also deal with the uprootings and transplantings and cross-fertilizations that have been the lot of millions of people in our century. They are cosmopolitan, in that they have seen much of the world and read, looked at and listened to the best from all over. Ken Unsworth's recent work reminds us, for instance, that for Australians, Japan is a country around the corner. But they also have the easy vigor, the readiness to lay it on the line and the unforced histrionic sense that strike most visitors as archetypally Australian.

That histrionic sense gave both Ken Unsworth and Mike Parr an exceptional stature as performance artists in earlier years. The intensity, the daring and the sense of risk that characterized their performances survive intact in their paintings. In the case of Tillers, whose paintings involve a great deal of intelligent borrowing and reworking of themes from other people's work, a mixture of admiration and irony, nostalgia and emulation is everywhere in action. His big painting "Pataphysical Man," in the first room, is, in fact, a kind of encyclopedia of possible ways of making art, draped loosely across a variant of a well-known painting by Giorgio de Chirico.
What we see at P. S. 1 is, in fact, an educated art that still takes chances. That it should be shown in this country at all is owed to John Kaldor, a Hungarian, who went to Australia at the age of 13, did well in the textile business and decided that what Australian art needed was personal contact with members of the European and American avant-garde. It was he, above all, who made it possible for Christo to wrap part of the coast near Sydney in 1969, and in later years he brought Sol LeWitt, Gilbert and George, Richard Long and others to Australia. Daniel Thomas, now senior curator at the National Gallery of Australia in Canberra, was as benign and watchful a presence for the P. S. 1 show as for Mr. Kaldor's other projects, but fundamentally the show was chosen, organized and financed by John Kaldor himself, down to its every last detail. We could use him in this country. The show can be seen through June 10.