John Olsen and friend, and, below, Michael Jackson's great fear.
Photo: Mark Rossi

Artists get their heads around animal instincts

A ROAR AND SNORE sleepover with the animals this week for the Taronga Zoo artists-in-residence was perhaps more accurately a "draw and pour" (alcohol, of course).

A who's who of 20 artists, including **John Olsen, Wendy Sharpe, Jenny Sages** and **Rew Hanks**, were invited to spend the night "glamping" in luxury zoo tents which look out to the city's best views and the late 1800s Curlew camp colony used by artists including Arthur Streeton and Tom Roberts.

A dinner for the artists was also attended by some of Sydney's leading gallery owners, including **Campbell Robertson-Swann** of Defiance Gallery in Paddington and Newtown, **Robert** and **Randi Linnegar** of King Street Gallery in Kings Cross, the Woollahra art man **Richard Martin** and Paddington's perennially red-shod **Stuart Purves**, of Australian Galleries (representing **Tim Storrier** who is working in Antarctica.)

The artists were treated to a night safari through the animal enclosures (for an up-close view of mating habits, among other things) and to morning feeding, where animal keepers regaled them with tales from other celebrity zoo tours, notably one for **Michael Jackson**, who was so paranoid about catching something from the giraffes' saliva he wouldn't touch them (perhaps he should have worn a white glove). Jackson had no such phobia about munching on unwashed carrots meant for the giraffes.

This week's assemblage proved a tame lot, though Sharpe did get kicked out of the seal enclosure for outstaying her welcome. Concerns that the taxidermist and artist **Rod McRae** might be a danger to the animals proved unfounded (though he did put in a request for any unwanted carcasses.) All works created during the residency will be auctioned.

Olsen had to skip the sleepover. He spent most of this week in St Vincent's Hospital for attention to what his son, **Tim**, called "male plumbing problems". The 82-year-old will have heart surgery before a trip to Hong Kong.