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IMITATION REALISM AND AUSTRALIAN ART

volume I
Imitation Realism and Australian Art

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A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy of the Australian National University.
Unless otherwise acknowledged in the text this thesis is the original work and research of the author.

signed:  

Anthea Gunn  date

26·2·2010
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Abstract

The work of the Imitation Realists has rightly been seen as marking the start of the widespread use of assemblage and popular culture by Australian artists during the 1960s. Viewed within the context of their training and the debates of the Australian art world in the 1950s, it can be seen that the impetus for their work was to find an alternative form of ‘Australian’ art. The stated objective of this thesis is to demonstrate how the work of the Imitation Realists adapted and contributed to changes to art in Australia. This is achieved by considering the work of Mike Brown, Ross Crothall and Colin Lanceley in the context of the debates that shaped the reception and production of art in Australia, including changing ideas concerning materials, exhibition display and the national identity. Their art, exhibitions and statements are closely analysed to show how the group formed, worked together and why they later disbanded.

It is argued in this thesis that Imitation Realism arose as a response to what the artists saw as the inadequacy of local art practice. This was a result of a disconnection that they saw between contemporary art and daily life in Australia. The Imitation Realists found that both abstract and figurative painters were at a remove from modern urban life as they experienced it. They tried to form an authentic mode of art that connected with the materiality of the everyday.

Assemblage enabled the artists to break through the impasse they perceived in contemporary art. Their work was one instance of a widespread interest in the ‘primitive’ and assemblage shared by artists in Europe and the United States. As virtually no precedent existed for their art in Australia, it is contextualised internationally in this thesis. This identifies that the Imitation Realists shared the practice of using deliberately naïve techniques and styles to create work that sought to capture creativity at its most basic level. The Imitation Realists used assemblage to respond to modern life as a whole, not just to modernism within the visual arts.
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Abbreviations

ACAG  Auckland City Art Gallery
AGWA  Art Gallery of Western Australia
AGNSW Art Gallery of New South Wales
ANG  Australian National Gallery (since 1982 the National Gallery of Australia)
awo  art wild oat (newspaper of the National Art School Students’ Association, 1962)
CAAB  Commonwealth Art Advisory Board
CAS NSW Contemporary Art Society of New South Wales
CAS VIC Contemporary Art Society of Victoria
CoBrA Artists’ group named for the cities in which its founding members lived: Copenhagen, Brussels and Amsterdam.
CRTS  Commonwealth Reconstruction Training Scheme
ESTC East Sydney Technical College
GCA  Gallery of Contemporary Art
Heide  Heide Museum of Modern Art
ICA  Institute of Contemporary Art, London
IG  Independent Group
MCA Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney
MoMA Museum of Modern Art (New York)
MOMAA Museum of Modern Art of Australia
MOMADA Museum of Modern Art and Design of Australia
NAS National Art School
NGA National Gallery of Australia
NGV National Gallery of Victoria
NLA National Library of Australia
NSTC North Sydney Technical College
QAG Queensland Art Gallery
SLV State Library of Victoria
SMH Sydney Morning Herald
Introduction

In 1960 and 1961, in the then working class Sydney suburb of Annandale, a terrace house was gradually subsumed by art works, with which its young inhabitants and their friends adorned every available surface. In an attempt to find a new form for their art, the artists created works that would soon become what art critic Robert Hughes credited as ‘one of the few significant statements made in Australian art in the early sixties’.¹ He later described this ‘rambling four-story Victorian house’:

> Inside it, hardly a square foot of wall was visible: not in the corridors, or the bedrooms, or even on the stairwell or in the lavatory. The house had been turned into a palace of incrustation, a colonial *Merzbau* jammed with icons and effigies made from junk.²

John Olsen (1928 - ) was invited to the house, and his connections in the art world ensured a wider audience for the work. Elwyn Lynn, John Reed, Rudy Komon and Robert Hughes followed Olsen’s advice to visit the house, and were fascinated by what the young artists were doing. Each helped usher Imitation Realism to a broader audience, and the group known as the Imitation Realists were offered exhibitions at what were then two of the leading galleries for Australian contemporary art. The *Annandale Imitation Realists* exhibition was held at the Museum of Modern Art of Australia (MOMAA), Melbourne in February 1962, and the *Subterranean Imitation Realists (formerly of Annandale)* at the Rudy Komon Gallery, in the eastern Sydney suburb of Woollahra, in May 1962. Over two hundred works were shown, covering every available surface of the galleries. Their paintings, sculptures, assemblages and collages were made from anything that was available to the artists: household detritus, kitsch plastic toys, newspaper, scraps from the furniture factory nearby and house paint. They were installed both as individual pieces and as parts of a larger temporary installation. These exhibitions offered something new in Australian art, both in the works themselves and as exhibitions.

The group emerged from friendships formed at a coffee bar in Darlinghurst in 1958. The then art students, Mike Brown (1938-1997) and Colin Lanceley (1938 - ) were

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already friends, having started studying at the National Art School (NAS) together in 1956, and they met Ross Crothall (1938 – 1968?), a recent arrival from Auckland, at the café. In 1962 these three would exhibit as the Imitation Realists, but initially they were part of a larger group of friends who met at the coffee shop to discuss their work and debate what they were learning at the art school, which was increasingly a subject of shared frustration. Fellow students Leonora Howlett and Peggy Gale (also known as Peggy Purple) and the café owner, Magda Kohn, were part of this group initially, but by the time of the exhibition only Brown, Crothall and Lanceley were able to dedicate themselves to the group.

During the summer of 1960-61 their ideas were named ‘Imitation Realism’. The term was coined by Crothall and the addition of ‘Annandale’ for the first exhibition made the acronym ‘AIR’. This no doubt appealed to the artists’ enjoyment of wordplay, though nowhere is this possibility discussed by them. Both ‘imitation’ and ‘realism’ were intended to offend the sensibilities of the Australian art world – no artist would admit to imitation, and mimetic realism was certainly not on the avant-garde agenda in Sydney circa 1960. The term was never clearly defined by the artists themselves, and they each used it in different ways. Combined, the words ‘Imitation Realism’ also indicate the project of the artists: a form of art that evoked the experiential reality of life in all its forms, as it was lived on the street, in the city, at home, in the imagination, with humour, in thinking about art, literature and slang.

There was a mixed reception of the exhibitions in the press. The venerable critic and artist Arnold Shore, writing in *The Age*, noted that ‘everyone with interest in art and everyone who knows only “what they like,” should visit the Museum of Modern Art and get a new interest in what can be done by intelligence, artistry and sheer joie de vivre.’³ Daniel Thomas concluded that the Sydney show was ‘tremendous fun’ but that ‘as works of art, too many of the objects have lost their aesthetic clarity.’⁴ The reviews uniformly concentrated on the medium in which the artists worked. This is unsurprising, given its novelty and the overwhelming nature of the exhibition installation. How the work related to a broader context within Australian art was not

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⁴ Daniel Thomas, ‘Art is upon the Town’, *Sunday Telegraph*, 27 May 1962, p. 66
discussed by any of the initial reviewers.\(^5\) This disappointed the artists, especially Crothall, who wrote that 'our critics – by their soft pedalling approval – invite us to the band wagon of Art Australianas, to leap thereon.'\(^6\) The frustration that had motivated the formation of the group, also contributed to the group’s demise, as the critics’ ‘soft pedalling approval’ did not cause the disruption to the art world for which they had apparently hoped. Crothall wrote about the Melbourne exhibition: 'we have neither offended the conservatives ... nor upset the aggressive equilibrium of the place, hence the entertainment which we have offered their staid and respectable city.'\(^7\)

The objective of this thesis is to demonstrate how the Imitation Realists’ work both adapted and contributed to changes to art in Australia. As the quotation above from Robert Hughes suggests, their exhibitions have since been regarded as some of the most interesting in Australian art during the 1960s. Yet there is a lack of detailed analysis of their work and this has resulted in a failure to understand how Imitation Realism relates to the Australian art of the period. Questions remain about the formative influences and training of the artists, and how their work related to contemporary Australian art of the late 1950s and early 1960s. I argue that when viewed in the context of the debates that shaped the reception and production of art in Australia, Imitation Realism reveals how artists’ ideas about materials, exhibition display and the national identity were changing in the late 1950s and early 1960s.

During the 1950s and early 1960s the nature and possibility of uniquely ‘Australian’ art was debated by artists, writers and curators in both Australia and Britain, largely in response to the *Antipodean Manifesto* and the exhibition *Recent Australian Painting 1961* (Whitechapel Gallery, London). Figurative and abstract art were used as markers to characterise the divide between Sydney and Melbourne, and were considered to indicate broader allegiances regarding Australia’s cultural identity. Abstraction was seen as characteristic of Sydney painting and indicative of artists


\(^6\) Ross Crothall, ‘Letter to the editor’, *arty wild oat*, no. 2, July 1962, p. 2

following trends in international art. Figurative art was seen to explore specifically Australian subject matter and to be predominant amongst Melbourne’s painters. I argue that to some extent the Imitation Realists created their work in opposition to the polarity of such debates. They attempted to create a form of art that was a true reflection of their experiences of life in Australia. They sought to respond to modern life, rather than modern art alone. In particular, I consider their use of assemblage to be an attempt to bypass the polarised debate between abstract and figurative painting. I use the term ‘assemblage’ to refer to the ‘use of three-dimensional found material to create art objects’ following the distinction made by authors such as Dianne Waldman, who uses ‘collage’ to refer specifically to works incorporating pasted paper, and ‘assemblage’ to constructed works.

The visual arts education of each artist was crucial to the formation of the group. The frustration and boredom Brown and Lanceley felt with the traditional, skills-focused training at the NAS prompted them to seek alternatives. Yet the school also provided them with an environment in which they formed a close bond with peers with whom they would collaborate. A few teachers, such as Peter Laverty and John Olsen, shaped their understanding of art and introduced them to the wider art world. Likewise, the informal mentoring that Crothall received in Auckland introduced him to an understanding of art that shaped his work; in particular the transformative effect of Maori art and influences from contemporary European art introduced to him by his mentor Theo Schoon. Each of these ingredients from Sydney and Auckland to some extent determined the work and philosophy of the Imitation Realists.


Diane Waldman, Collage, assemblage, and the found object, New York: H.N. Abrams, 1992. The terms ‘collage’ and ‘assemblage’ have not been used consistently in art history. Collage (from the French ‘coller’, ‘to stick’) has been used to refer to either works that use only papier collé or, more broadly, to any work that incorporates any found material. ‘Assemblage’ has been used to refer to both the style of particular artists at a specific time, and as a general term for the technique. An example of the former is Brandon Taylor’s use of ‘assemblage’ when referring to the practice of particular artists in California in the 1940s, such as Clay Spohn and Wallace Berman (Taylor, Collage: The making of modern art, London: Thames and Hudson, 2004, pp. 119-29.) The use of ‘assemblage’ as a general term to describe work constructed from found material gained wider usage after William C. Seitz anglicized the French assemblage, used by Jean Dubuffet to describe his own work, for the exhibition The Art of Assemblage at MoMA in 1961 (Seitz, letter to Dubuffet, April 19 1961, Exhibition File #695 ‘Art of Assemblage’, Dept of Painting and Sculpture, MoMA Archives, New York, and Seitz, The Art of Assemblage, New York: MoMA, 1961, p. 150)
When the Imitation Realists started using collage and assemblage in their work it was virtually unprecedented in Australian art. Yet internationally, it had been increasingly common since the Second World War; thus I consider the history and various meanings for such work in twentieth century Western art in this thesis. From the late 1950s there were attempts to survey and categorise such work, particularly in New York, which resulted in the perception that assemblage was the latest and most advanced form of contemporary art. This shaped the critical reception and promotion of the Imitation Realists in Australia and so needs to be understood in order to understand their place within the Australian art world of the early 1960s.

For these reasons, the work of the Imitation Realists is examined within the context of its development: the use of collage and assemblage by artists internationally, especially the contemporary use of assemblage and popular culture, and of the ongoing debates in the Australian art world. Close attention is paid in particular to the trans-Tasman influences that Crothall brought to the group. By situating Imitation Realism we are able to see how the group responded to all these influences, and aimed to create work that broke out of the polarised framework of abstract/figurative, international/Australian and Sydney/Melbourne that has characterised the art and art history of the period. It is argued that at the centre of both their Imitation Realist and subsequent work was an attempt to come to grips with being an artist in Australia – not to follow international art from afar, but not to parochially ignore it either – neither the cringe nor the strut, in A.A. Phillips' terms. In so doing their work can be seen to mark a change in Australian art, a move from the divisive battles of the 1940s and 50s toward the disparate styles of the 1960s. I use the word ‘authenticity’ to summarise what I argue the artists sought to evoke in their work, as a result of engagement with the material and popular culture of contemporary urban Australia. The artists sought to produce art that did not deny the European heritage of Australia as a settler colony while celebrating the reality of life as they experienced it: with the kitsch, tattered aspects presented along with the more refined references to literature and fine art.

Imitation Realism in Australian art history

Despite its acknowledged significance, there has been no extensive study dedicated to Imitation Realism. Apart from the initial reviews, in the 1960s Imitation Realism was understood within the context of the period. When *Art and Australia* was launched in 1963 – the first national visual arts journal since its predecessor *Art in Australia* had ceased publication in 1942 – both Hughes and Lynn published articles that devoted considerable attention to Imitation Realism, interpreting it within the framework of art in Australia and internationally. In 1969 Daniel Thomas attributed to Imitation Realism the instigation of a wave of assemblage work by Australian artists in the 1960s. Since the 1960s, however, explorations of Imitation Realism have mostly been exhibition catalogue essays, which have been limited in depth, either by length or their focus on just one of the artists.

Hughes situated the Imitation Realists within a context of Australian art based on his experience of their work, both at the house in Annandale and as seen in the exhibition in Sydney. He considered Imitation Realism as one instance of ‘Irrational Imagery in Australian Painting’. For Hughes, ‘irrational imagery is ... an invasion of the orderly pattern of the surface mind: it makes us acutely conscious of the abyss between reason and reaction.’ He argued that substantial instances of irrational imagery in Australian art occurred first in Melbourne in the 1940s in the painting of Sidney Nolan, Albert Tucker and others of their circle, and then in Sydney in the work of John Olsen, Elwyn Lynn and the Imitation Realists. In *The Art of Australia* Hughes included the Imitation Realists in the epilogue he wrote in 1968, after the first edition of the book had been pulped. The Imitation Realists, along with the subsequent work of Brown and Lanceley, is placed apart from the body of the book’s text, in which Hughes surveys the development of Australian art. This

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12 Robert Hughes, ‘Irrational Imagery in Australian Painting’, *Art and Australia*, vol. 1, no. 3 (Nov 1963), pp. 150-59
13 Hughes, ‘Irrational Imagery in Australian Painting’, p. 150
14 Hughes, ‘Irrational Imagery in Australian Painting’, pp. 154-9
emphasises their significance, as the final artists covered in the book, but isolates them from the wider context of Australian art.\textsuperscript{17}

Like Hughes, Lynn saw the work in its original context as well as in the Sydney exhibition, but he interpreted the group in relation to contemporary art internationally. He had written the introduction to the catalogue for the Melbourne exhibition, in which he placed Imitation Realism in the context of ‘junk culture’ internationally.\textsuperscript{18} In the same issue of \textit{Art and Australia} as Hughes’ essay, Lynn discussed Imitation Realism in a survey of Pop art.\textsuperscript{19} He contrasted the Imitation Realists with their contemporaries in the US and the UK, identifying them as a part of the broad tendency in contemporary art that had been labelled Pop art. He made distinctions in doing so, both between the Imitation Realists and overseas artists and between different artists internationally, particularly those of New York and London.

At the core of Imitation Realism was an attempt to capture in works of art the experience of life as it was lived. I argue that this captured the attention both of older artists, such as Lynn and Olsen, as well as their own peers. The Imitation Realists essentially rebelled against the forms of art predominant amongst the older, relatively established avant-garde. Those artists, however, responded to the Imitation Realists’ attempts to connect with primal creativity and their use of materials, because it connected their work to the latest emerging trends in London and New York. In 1969 Daniel Thomas identified Imitation Realism as an important tendency in Australian art during the 1960s, describing how the use of assemblage had ‘flourished’ since their exhibitions.\textsuperscript{20} Their work was concerned ‘as much with the real qualities of contemporary life as with the appearance of nature or with the life of artistic forms’, a tendency for which ‘there was little immediate precedent’ in Australian art.\textsuperscript{21} Younger artists responded to this material engagement with the environment in which they lived. The Imitation Realists were inspiring for their innovative use of display techniques and their creation of work that broke the rules

\textsuperscript{17} Along with the paintings of Elwyn Lynn, also considered in the epilogue. Hughes, \textit{The Art of Australia}, pp. 305-11

\textsuperscript{18} Elwyn Lynn, ‘Words, Words, Words?’, \textit{Annandale Imitation Realists}, exhibition catalogue, Melbourne: MOMAA, 1962. ‘Junk Culture’ is a term devised by Lawrence Alloway to refer to assemblage and collage work, particularly artists associated with the dissatisfying term ‘Neo-Dada’, as is discussed in chapter two.

\textsuperscript{19} Elwyn Lynn, ‘Pop Goes the Easel’, \textit{Art and Australia}, vol. 1, no. 3 (Nov 1963), pp. 166-72


of both the conservative art schools and the older avant-garde artists. Yet Thomas noted how the use of assemblage was 'not seen as a revolution and was not much resented' by older artists, which he attributed to the view that such work was an evolution from John Olsen's 'much-voiced idea of art as "total experience" ... Olsen's ideas and paintings gave permission.' Thomas' text was an introduction to *Present Day Art in Australia* and grounded the work of Australian painters of the late 1960s in the context of earlier artists. The Imitation Realists were significant in the blurring of the boundaries between painting and sculpture that Thomas viewed as characteristic of the period. In the work of Hughes, Lynn and Thomas we can see how Imitation Realism was seen as significant, both to local art and to the perception of contemporary art internationally. They had a detailed understanding of Imitation Realism that enabled them to position it within contemporary art. I seek to further the understanding of the group, their works and exhibitions within the now historical context of the late 1950s and 1960s.

In the second edition of *Australian Painting* in 1971, Bernard Smith described the materials used by the artists in general terms, as 'discarded objects, bric-a-brac of all kinds ... combined in bright plastic paints, posterish colours and matt textures'. His interpretation that 'their outlandish assemblages were put to a satirical purpose' is not assessed against specific examples of their work. Although satire was one component, it was not characteristic of their entire body of work, as is evident in the close scrutiny of the Melbourne exhibition in chapter three of this thesis. Smith attributes the formation of the group to Crothall, but does not mention the influences he brought to the group from New Zealand. Also, Smith incorrectly attributed Lanceley's statement in the *Subterranean Imitation Realist* catalogue to Crothall: a simple error, but one with significant implications on an understanding of the group. As the group did not hold one joint position and Lanceley's words are very different to Crothall's in the catalogue, this further clouds the already enigmatic figure of

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22 Thomas, 'Introduction', *Present Day Art in Australia*, 1969, p. 8  
23 Thomas, 'Introduction', *Present Day Art in Australia*, 1969, p. 8  
Crothall.28 After this quote Smith states that 'Crothall turned increasingly to writing and left the country.'29 It is unfortunate, but hardly surprising, that Crothall’s subsequent works (closely studied in chapter four) were not known to Smith, as they enable a better understanding of Crothall as an artist and of the ideas that shaped Imitation Realism.

Gary Catalano considered Imitation Realism both in a 1976 article in Meanjin and in his survey The Years of Hope: Australian Art and Criticism 1959-1968.30 In both he interprets the group’s work through textual analysis rather than the works. In ‘The aesthetics of the Imitation Realists’31 Catalano considers some of the statements that the artists made about their work but has only a limited selection of sources, which does not include either the Sydney exhibition catalogue32 or the statement the group made in the Contemporary Art Society of Victoria (CAS VIC) Broadsheet.33 What is particularly lacking from Catalano’s account is any appreciation of what Crothall contributed to the group – his account is focused on the Sydney art scene and does not consider Crothall’s background in New Zealand. In The Years of Hope Catalano structured a reading of the period through analysis of art criticism as it appeared in the contemporary newspapers, magazines and journals. For this reason, the chapter dedicated to Imitation Realism34 focuses on the critical response to their work rather than sustained analysis of the exhibitions or the works. Catalano explores ideas of place and identity in the work, but lapses into generalizations – so that ‘much of the new painting of any interest and competence came out of Sydney or Melbourne and can be classified according to its city of origin.’35 Unfortunately Catalano did not offer a sustained argument or analysis of exactly how location resulted in such an apparent effect on the work of its resident artists. Like Catalano, Geoffrey Dutton in The Innovators: the Sydney alternatives in the rise of modern art, literature and ideas, considers Imitation Realism within the context of place. For Dutton,

32 Brown, et al., Subterranean Imitation Realists, May 1962
34 Catalano, The Years of Hope, 1981, pp. 122-35
35 Catalano, The Years of Hope, 1981, p. 170
responses to modernism in the city have been shaped by the 'effervescence and hedonism [that] are still characteristic of Sydney', that resulted from its climate and landscape, 'where nature gives form to art.' Dutton's interpretation of Imitation Realism is accordingly focused on the interest in the 'shoddy vulgarity' of Sydney that the group shared with John Olsen. His emphasis on the effect of geography results in a polarised account of Australian art; so that the reception of the Imitation Realists in Melbourne is related to that city’s essential character: ‘Melbourne, with its tendency to glumness, liked the high spirits of the three artists.’ In this thesis I share Catalano and Dutton’s concern with the specifics of place but seek to trace its influence through networks of the art world, of artists, teachers, curators, dealers, scholars, critics and the broader audience, that all influenced and contributed to how the Imitation Realists worked and were received.

Christopher Heathcote situates the Annandale Imitation Realists exhibition within a time of generational change in the Melbourne art scene, in his *A quiet revolution: The rise of Australian art 1946-1968.* Heathcote focuses on the Melbourne art world in the book, and Imitation Realism is carefully situated in the history of modern art in Melbourne, particularly as it was understood and promoted by the CAS VIC, the MOMAA and John and Sunday Reed. Heathcote's analysis is insightful when he writes that 'Imitation Realism did not generate a fresh youth idiom. It was less a distinct style than mode of thought, an expression of frustration about the complacent art scene.' He identified Imitation Realism as a way to break through the increasing dissatisfaction that some artists felt with the dominance of landscape painting in Australian art.

There was a disjunction between image and reality, between the world that artists represented and what they knew that world to be. Painters were dealing in falsehoods, not truths. And it was this...

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37 Dutton, *The Innovators*, p. 4
40 Dutton, *The Innovators*, p. 219
42 Heathcote, *A quiet revolution*, p. 178
knowledge that was to shadow art over the following decade. What was the solution?\textsuperscript{43}

The view that Imitation Realism was an attempt to find a 'solution', an alternative to the existing forms of Australian art, is explored in this thesis. The focus and length of Heathcote's book did not allow analysis of the origins of Imitation Realism in the context of the Sydney art world, and particularly Crothall's influence. Through a close consideration of the training of the artists and the context of art in Sydney we are able to gain a deeper understanding of the Imitation Realists' work and how they tried to forge an alternative kind of Australian art.

Apart from surveys such as those of Hughes, Smith, Catalano, Dutton and Heathcote, the consideration of Imitation Realism in art history has primarily occurred within exhibition catalogues. Such catalogues, while significant, have been limited either in length or by their focus on just one of the artists. \textit{It ain't necessarily so... Mike Brown and the Imitation Realists}, curated by Kendrah Morgan, was shown at Heide from July to October 2006, and exhibited the works in the Heide collection by Brown, Crothall and Lanceley. The exhibition included a contemporary interpretation of the mural Brown painted in the dining room at Heide in 1969 (discussed in chapter four) and concentrated on his development as an artist and, as such, did not offer a substantial analysis of the group as a whole.\textsuperscript{44} Curated by Vincent Alessi, the exhibition \textit{Kite: Mike Brown and the Sydney Twelve} was similarly focussed on Mike Brown, and is a valuable examination of the period immediately following Imitation Realism and the context of the Sydney art world.\textsuperscript{45}

The largest survey exhibition and publication to date is also on Brown. The retrospective of his work held at the National Gallery of Victoria (NGV) in 1995, \textit{Power to the People}, accompanied by a catalogue with essays by Brown himself, Richard Haese and Charles Nodrum. The catalogue contains some of the most substantial discussion of Imitation Realism to date. This was the result of long collaboration between Brown and Haese, who has been preparing a monograph on

\textsuperscript{43} Heathcote, \textit{A quiet revolution}, p. 174
\textsuperscript{44} See the exhibition catalogue, Kendrah Morgan, \textit{It ain't necessarily so... Mike Brown and the Imitation Realists}, Melbourne: Heide Museum of Modern Art, 2006, and the room checklist, \textit{It ain't necessarily so... Mike Brown and the Imitation Realists}, kindly provided by Zara Stanhope at Heide.
\textsuperscript{45} See the exhibition catalogue, Vincent Alessi and Richard Haese, \textit{Mike Brown and the Sydney Twelve}, Melbourne: La Trobe University Art Museum, 2007
Brown since the 1980s, which is yet to be published.\textsuperscript{46} \textit{Power to the People} of course, was a retrospective of Brown's work, and so only a limited context for the Imitation Realists could be included; particularly the broader threads of Australian art history, in which this thesis situates the group. The retrospective of Colin Lanceley's work, held at the Art Gallery of NSW (AGNSW) in 1987 was subject to similar limitations. The texts in that catalogue – an introduction by Robert Hughes and an interview with the artist by William Wright – are useful sources about Lanceley's work, but they offer little about the Imitation Realists as a group or how they related to the wider context of art in Australia.\textsuperscript{47}

Margaret Plant's catalogue essay about Imitation Realism is one of the few dedicated to the group alone. \textit{Irreverent Sculpture}, an exhibition of the work of Barry Humphries, the Imitation Realists, Ti Parks, Clive Murray-White, Les Kossatz and Alexsander Danko, was a survey of work 'made during the 1950s and 1960s in opposition to the dominant modes current then in Australia.'\textsuperscript{48} The focus on sculpture makes it problematic as an approach to Imitation Realism, as so much of their work does not fit this definition. As one would expect from the 'irreverent' of the title, the exhibition focused on the humour that is a loose thread between all of these artists. The forms of the humour are, however, very different, as the art of Barry Humphries is centred on jokes, whereas Imitation Realist work contained jokes – just as day to day life contains humour without becoming a farce.\textsuperscript{49} Plant observed that all of the artists, although influenced by European Dada, were not imitating it, but that 'their art was a response to local conditions, to urban situations.'\textsuperscript{50} The Imitation Realists and Humphries share a common interest in the colloquial, but with very different intent. Humphries has made a career of mocking the social mores of suburban Australia, such as with his characters Dame Edna Everage and Sir Les Patterson. The Imitation Realists sought to include Australian slang and kitsch and thus connect art with life as it is lived outside the contemplative

\textsuperscript{46} Richard Haese was kind enough to discuss this book with the author, in November 2005, and his research is also mentioned by Mike Brown, in 'Kite II: Part 1: What on earth are you saying, Colin?', \textit{Art Monthly Australia}, September 1994, no. 73, p. 5
\textsuperscript{48} Margaret Plant, \textit{Irreverent Sculpture}, Melbourne: Monash University Gallery, 1985, p. 5
\textsuperscript{49} For Humphries work, see Plant, \textit{Irreverent Sculpture}, pp. 8-21
\textsuperscript{50} Plant, \textit{Irreverent Sculpture}, p. 5 (her emphasis)
sphere of the art gallery. Plant’s catalogue essay51 accompanied an exhibition focused on what she identified as the ‘irreverent’ sculpture of the period which made it difficult to fully consider the complex web of influences to which the Imitation Realists responded. It is the aim of this thesis to trace these threads. Each of these catalogues is a valuable source of information about Imitation Realism and especially the works that were in each of the exhibitions. This thesis draws on them in its analysis of the group, aiming to situate them within a framework that encompasses both the specifics of the group and the larger art world.

Imitation Realism cannot be understood without considering the then current debates regarding the nature of ‘Australian’ art, particularly those in response to the Antipodeans exhibition and manifesto of 1959, and the survey exhibitions of Australian art in London that were being compiled and shown in the period 1959 to 1963. The most substantial examination of the Sydney art scene in the 1950s is in Denise Whitehouse’s doctoral thesis, The Contemporary Art Society of New South Wales and the Theory and Production of Contemporary Abstraction in Australia 1947 – 1961.52 She argues for a distinct, local meaning for abstract painting rooted in the cultural context of postwar Australia, and specifically in Sydney, rather than as a form of painting derived from what was perceived as fashionable internationally.53 Whitehouse draws on contemporary art, criticism and cultural commentary from the period, along with later postcolonial theory, to build an argument for the ‘cultural meaning’ of abstract art in Sydney during the period.54 Her analysis has informed the discussion of the ideas that were current in Sydney’s art world during the 1950s in the first two chapters of this thesis. Whitehouse concludes where this thesis begins, and her closing date of 1961 is not insignificant in relation to the Imitation Realists and the other, slightly younger, artists who would come to prominence in the 1960s. She identifies the changing ideas of Australian culture and identity that shaped the period following that of her study.

As the provincial debate took hold in the 1960s, the irrational and primitive was increasingly referred to as an identifiable characteristic

51 Plant, Irreverent Sculpture, pp. 22-54
53 Whitehouse, The Contemporary Art Society of New South Wales, for example, p. 355 ff
54 Whitehouse, The Contemporary Art Society of New South Wales, p. 3
of Australia’s radical art practice by artists (Annandale Imitation Realists), critics (Robert Hughes) and historians (Virginia Spate). Its use by artists was clearly meant as a critique of Australia’s cultural establishment and consequently it was also a critique of the mother culture. The manner in which Australian artists used the irrational and ideas of cultural alienation as a differentiating strategy to establish their opposition to the centre has yet to be explored by historians.55

I share with Whitehouse the concern to articulate the cultural meanings of art in Australia, for both artists and for the audience of their work. In this thesis I look to European art and the theories of Herbert Read to examine the roots for the use of ‘irrational and primitive’ material and then how it was employed in Australia by the Imitation Realists as a ‘differentiating strategy’ by using identifiably Australian content. They attempted to create a sense of authenticity in their work through this combination of deliberately naïve techniques and immediately recognisable materials.

**Thesis overview**

As can be seen from the discussion of the publications that consider this topic, the lack of detailed analysis of the work of the Imitation Realists has resulted in varied interpretations and misunderstandings of their work. The first aim of this thesis is to establish the context for the development of the Imitation Realists’ practice. This is achieved through close examination of the works of art and archival sources, including photographs, gallery records, interviews and manuscript material throughout the thesis. Most of these sources are unpublished and bringing them together allows for a considerably deeper understanding of Imitation Realism. Through this we can appreciate that although Imitation Realism was a unique phenomenon, it was one that was grounded in the debates that shaped art both internationally and those within Australia at this time.

Each of the four chapters situates Imitation Realism within a particular framework. The first chapter examines the early development of the Imitation Realists. I argue that the primary cause for the formation of the group was as a response to the teaching at the NAS; its frustrating conservatism resulted in a close knit group of friends who were seeking an alternative. When Lanceley and Brown became good friends with Crothall they found another option in the philosophy of art that he had

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55 Whitehouse, The Contemporary Art Society of New South Wales, p. 322
developed in New Zealand. Detailed discussion of the artists’ training in the visual arts, at the NAS for Brown and Lanceley, and an informal mentorship in Auckland for Crothall, has been lacking within the scholarship, and this chapter is intended to correct this absence through close examination of source material. For the NAS this centres on the East Sydney Technical College (ESTC) handbooks, teachers’ and students’ recollections, published accounts of the history of the school, artist monographs of former students and interviews I conducted with Colin Lanceley, Leonora Howlett, Vivienne Binns and Martin Sharp. Crothall brought vitality from New Zealand and an alternative to what was available in Sydney. For Brown especially, this was a catalyst for Imitation Realism and his later work.

Contemporary New Zealand art, particularly that of Theo Schoon and Colin McCahon and their attempts to find a way to locate their practice through the use of Maori iconography, techniques and the landscape, is examined for its shaping influences on Crothall and through him Imitation Realism.

Having considered the background specific to the development of Imitation Realism, I then relate it to the broader context of Australian art and the struggle with its identity. The possibility of identifiably ‘Australian’ art was being questioned, particularly in response to the Antipodean Manifesto and survey exhibitions of Australian art in London in the 1960s. This in turn related to debates in Australian culture more generally about the national identity. Within the visual arts, the debate tended to focus on the roles of myth and landscape and the possibilities for figurative and abstract painting in shaping an authentically ‘Australian’ form of art. The Imitation Realists attempted to find an alternative from these debates, one that expressed their experience of living in the region. The Imitation Realists were not creating work in isolation from the broader culture, or attempting to relate to ideas about art that they learnt from European or American art, but were very much grounded in the Australian art world and sought to find an authentic form for their experience. This is then explored through an analysis of the Imitation Realists’ statement in the CAS VIC Broadsheet of March 1962. Aside from their works this constitutes the most substantial statement that they would ever make as a group.

In chapter two, Imitation Realism is placed within a constellation of practices that used collage and assemblage to explore alternative forms of art. Collage and
assemblage are placed into an art historical context both internationally and domestically in order to understand how such uses of materials were seen to make possible a different response to popular culture and urban life. The chapter focuses on artists who since the Second World War have used collage and assemblage as a form to express dissent – either from contemporary forms of art or with society more generally. The context for the use of collage and assemblage contemporary to that of the Imitation Realists was studied through examining works at the Centre Pompidou and Picasso Museum (Paris), Tate Modern (London), Smithsonian American Art Gallery, National Gallery of Art, Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden (Washington D.C.) and the Museum of Modern Art and the Metropolitan Museum of Art (New York) in 2006. The works of the critic and art historian Herbert Read are of particular interest as they elucidate a theory, widely influential amongst Western artists, of creativity as a basic human instinct. It was held that this could be seen particularly clearly in the works of so-called ‘primitive’ peoples, as well as in the art of children and the mentally ill. Artists such as Jean Dubuffet, the CoBrA group, Elwyn Lynn, John Olsen and the Imitation Realists all responded to this idea and sought to capture the spirit of such untrammeled creativity in the forms of their work.

A considerable part of the chapter is then given to a detailed discussion of art in New York, dedicated to particular exhibitions and artists that focused on collage and assemblage. Lawrence Alloway and William C. Seitz are central to this for their attempts to theorize and survey the use of collage, and especially assemblage, in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Both were critical to Elwyn Lynn’s writing about the Imitation Realists, which was influential in shaping the response to their work; they were thus positioned as being amongst the leading contemporary artists internationally. I argue that this was contrary to their wishes, as their work was focused on relating to its local environment.

The final two chapters are focused on close analysis of the works of Brown, Crothall and Lanceley from the Imitation Realist exhibitions and the following period. The third chapter situates the Melbourne exhibition in the context of the art world of that city: of the CAS VIC, the MOMAA and the patronage of John and Sunday Reed. It can be seen from this how the Imitation Realists were seen as continuing to explore
ideas that artists associated with the CAS and Heide had engaged with in the 1940s; these also related to the theories of Herbert Read, regarding the organic necessity of art and the role of the subconscious. Photographs of the Melbourne exhibition are then closely analysed to convey a sense of how the exhibition would have been experienced. The majority of these photographs have never been published and so a close discussion of them is vital to an understanding of what was seen as so dynamic and original by the first audience of this work. I argue that the group attempted to create a total environment within the exhibition that sought to evoke the materiality of everyday life. They constructed temporary installations that forced the viewer to walk in and around the objects that were displayed on the walls, floor, constructions and ceiling. There was little hierarchical distinction between works of art and ephemeral decorations. Many of the works are no longer extant so it is only through examination of the photographs that the range of art created by the group can be encountered. In the final section of the chapter I discuss the creation of the Café Balzac mural in Melbourne and the Sydney exhibition catalogue; these last joint productions of the group show the increasingly independent directions that the artists were taking.

In the fourth chapter I examine the directions that Lanceley, Crothall and Brown each took in their work after 1962. From this can be seen the different meanings that Imitation Realism had for each of the artists, and in particular, the distinct difference between Lanceley’s practice and that of both Crothall and Brown. They all continued to find ways to protest or escape the art scene in Sydney: they all physically left Sydney for varying periods of time and continued to develop new forms for their art that were in opposition to the status quo. I consider the influence the group had on other young artists as well as why the group disbanded. I argue that the increasing popularity and awareness of Pop art meant that Imitation Realism was seen as a part of the same trend internationally. The group resisted this categorisation and the seemingly superficial reception of their work was a significant factor in why they ceased working together. Subsequent interpretation of Imitation Realism by the artists is also examined – these are almost non existent for Crothall, but both Brown and Lanceley discussed and reflected on Imitation Realism throughout their careers. It was a formative experience for both artists, one that to some extent determined the direction that their work would take, in seemingly
opposite directions from one another. For all the artists involved, Imitation Realism was a vital alternative to what the Australian art world offered at that time.

Imitation Realism was seminal period, determining the nature of the rest of their known oeuvres. For Crothall this was to be short-lived, due to his disappearance in 1968. For Brown, the ideas of Imitation Realism would shape his practice until his death in 1997. Imitation Realism provided Lanceley with a philosophy of materials that, along with the idea of 'poetic form' that he elaborated between 1962 and 1965, has shaped his output until the present day.

In the Imitation Realists’ attempts to explore alternatives to the dominant modes in the art world of Sydney of the late 1950s can be found work that responds to concerns that shaped contemporary art internationally during the period, as well as issues that were distinctly local. Close examination of this work reveals both a continued sense of joie de vivre and playfulness as well as an attempt to respond to the totality of the cultural situation that the artists’ experienced. Understanding the complexity that surrounded the Imitation Realists and their work, both in the international art scene and within Australian visual arts and cultural thought, allows us to better understand not only these artists and their work, but to access a ‘snapshot’ of Australian art as it was poised on the cusp of the 1960s and the changes that decade would bring.
Chapter one

The formation of Imitation Realism

'Surveying the art world in Australia is like looking at a carcass painted by Clifton Pugh. It is not disappointing, but insufficient.'

Ross Crothall, 1964

When the Imitation Realists first exhibited in 1962 their work was markedly different to almost anything else in Australian art. The intent of this chapter is to explore how their work emerged from and related to this context. This will reveal how their work was formed by a notion of place, as the artists tried to find a unique and authentic mode of expression to explore and respond to their location in the Pacific. In the first section of the chapter I examine the artists’ visual arts training, arguing that the experiences of Mike Brown and Colin Lanceley at the National Art School (NAS) and of Ross Crothall in the avant-garde art scene in Auckland were vital to the formation of Imitation Realism. They rejected the traditional forms of art taught at the NAS and sought alternatives, such as Maori or Papua New Guinean art. Ross Crothall is the focus of the second section of this chapter. He was crucial to the development of Imitation Realism, particularly because of the influence of contemporary New Zealand art that he brought to the group. Crothall defined an identity for himself as a ‘transtasman’ artist; he did not seek to parochially ignore European or American art, but he was only interested in it if it related to his immediate surroundings. In the work of Theo Schoon he had seen how ideas from contemporary European art could be used to respond to the local situation in New Zealand. Through Colin McCahon’s paintings Crothall had encountered the use of text, humour and the New Zealand landscape to resituate Biblical narratives in New Zealand. Thus, when Crothall arrived in Australia he brought with him a philosophy

1 Ross Crothall to John Reed, 22 July 1964, box 2, file 1, Reed Papers, MS 13186, SLV
of art that centred on responding to local conditions and he found Australian art 'insufficient' in this regard.

In the final section of this chapter I will discuss the context for Imitation Realism in the Sydney art world of the 1950s and early 1960s. The arguments that surrounded the Antipodean Manifesto and the survey exhibition of Australian contemporary art held in 1961 at the Whitechapel Gallery, London, will be considered as examples of artists questioning the identity and form of 'Australian' art. The quotation from Crothall above indicates the dissatisfaction of the Imitation Realists with Australian art. I argue in this chapter that it was frustration with this sense of 'insufficiency' that motivated the formation of the group and their approach to their work. The apparent choice for artists between abstract art and figurative art, and the predilection of both for remote Australian landscapes, drove them to find an alternate mode for recognisably Australian content and subject matter.

**Art education in Sydney**

It was through art school that the protagonists of Imitation Realism first met. They rejected much of their art school training, and Imitation Realism emerged out of their shared rebellion. This was a formative influence on the Imitation Realists and so the teachers and practice of the school need to be understood. Brown, Lanceley and Leonora Howlett all started together in 1956 and fast became friends. Howlett recalled the sense that they were all outsiders, who formed a close bond at art school and shared the 'questioning of current values'\(^2\) of the conservative social and art mores of the 1950s. They had enrolled in the two year Preparatory Art course at the National Art School (NAS) with the intention of then continuing on to the three year Diploma in Painting. The primary provider of art education in Sydney in the 1950s was the NSW Government Department for Technical Education. The main campus was the NAS at East Sydney Technical College (ESTC) which was then the only large art school in Sydney. The NAS was based in the former Darlinghurst Gaol, in Darlinghurst, East Sydney. From the 1930s to the 1970s the NAS was the centre of art training in Sydney.\(^3\)

\(^2\) Leonora Howlett, taped interview with the author, Lilyfield, Sydney, 9 February 2006

\(^3\) The history of the development and changing names of the NAS are discussed by Deborah Beck, in her *Hope in Hell: A History of Darlinghurst Gaol and the National Art School*, Sydney: Allen &
Brown, Howlett and Lanceley’s first year at the school was characterised by a close bond that formed in a small class. Their class was remembered as a particularly creative one by Harvey. 4 As student numbers at NAS had expanded, it became necessary to offer the first year of Preparatory Art at some of the smaller technical colleges in Sydney, including North Sydney Technical College (NSTC). These operated as ‘feeder’ schools to the larger art department at East Sydney. 5 The Head Teacher of Art at North Sydney, E. A. Harvey found that the smaller class created an environment where a shared purpose and identity could emerge. 6 Both Brown and Lanceley enrolled at NTSC in 1956 and soon experienced a sense of belonging that they had not known in their previous education. At high school Brown had felt he was a ‘misfit’. Brown was interested in creative writing and art, and as a consequence, excluded from the school culture which centred on sport. His interest in art evolved from escapist doodling whilst bored in class. 7

I left school with a fairly clear idea already that I wanted to do something to do with art. My parents were very kind in indulging this sort of whim and they allowed me to go – paid for me to go – to the Technical College, the National Art School. ... In the first year I was at North Sydney Technical College ... This meant that it was a fairly small group and it was a very pleasant first year. I think because it was only a small group, probably 20 to 25, by the end of the year we were all very good friends and we’d all had fun right throughout the year. One of my best friends among these people was Colin Lanceley. I think at the end of the year we went hitchhiking into the country ... this was the beginning of quite a long friendship. 8

In 1954 Lanceley, at the insistence of his father who had wanted him to have a trade, had been apprenticed at 16 years of age as a half-tone etcher and attended evening art classes at NSTC. 9 He quit his apprenticeship and began full-time study for the Diploma of Art with a Commonwealth scholarship that enabled him to be

Unwin, 2005. Other avenues for tuition included the Julian Ashton Art School, the Orban School and briefly, the Mary White Art School, amongst others.
4 E. A. Harvey, It was a damn good school, unpublished manuscript, c.1970, AGNSW Research Library, p. 177
5 Beck, Hope in Hell, p. 85 and Harvey, It was a damn good school, pp. 175-78
6 Harvey, It was a damn good school, p. 177
7 Brown attended the Sydney Church of England Grammar School, also known as Shore, an exclusive private school in North Sydney. Mike Brown, interview with Hazel de Berg, Sydney, 9th December, 1969, tape 447, De Berg Tapes, Oral History Collection NLA
8 Brown, interview with de Berg, 1969
independent from family support. 10 He recalled having a miserable time at high school and had ‘always been interested in drawing and really jeopardized my academic work at school by persisting in drawing instead of getting on with the fundamentals.’ 11 Both Brown and Lanceley recalled introverted childhoods, spending a lot of time playing alone, especially in the bushland surrounding the suburbs in Sydney’s north where they grew up. 12 They fast became friends, along with Howlett and Margaret Woodward. 13 Howlett, Lanceley and Brown formed the nucleus of the group of friends from which would later emerge the phenomenon of Imitation Realism. Howlett had grown up in foster care, and ‘couldn’t imagine any other slot in the world that I could fit into’ other than art school. 14 Howlett was an integral part in the development of what would become Imitation Realism. However by 1961 the relationship between Howlett and Lanceley had broken up and it became too difficult for both to participate with the group. 15

The course provided a thorough grounding in traditional techniques which Howlett, Lanceley and Brown ultimately found restrictive. Harvey described the art department at North Sydney as being located in a long shed, divided into two classrooms by wooden partitions, and heavily infested by white ants. 16 The building ‘was classified as “temporary”, thus assuring its longevity.’ 17 The introductory course consisted of classes in:

- Drawing from Casts
- Quick Sketching from Figures
- Drawing (still-life and landscape)
- Modelling and carving
- Plant and Nature Study
- Oil and Water Colour Painting
- Design and Colour
- Methods, Techniques and Research
- Perspective
- Lettering

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10 Colin Lanceley, interview with Hazel de Berg, Sydney, 20 March 1970, Oral History Collection, NLA
11 Lanceley, interview with de Berg, 1970
12 Lanceley, interview with de Berg, 1970, and Brown, interview with de Berg, 1969
13 Brown, interview with de Berg, 1969
14 Howlett, interview with the author, 2006
16 Harvey, It was a damn good school, p. 176
17 Harvey, It was a damn good school, p. 176
The classes gave students a wide range of experience, but also meant that they switched between subjects every two hours. The course was a thirty-hour week, of three two-hour sessions a day.\textsuperscript{19} The class at NSTC was visited by specialist teachers for the classes that Harvey did not teach, and visited ESTC on Wednesday afternoons for cast drawing classes and to use the library. Harvey described that for 'the introductory year, drawing was their main preoccupation. My own training convinced me of its importance. Drawing was the first manifestation of the Artist in the dim dawning of the human race.'\textsuperscript{20} Harvey commented that he had been surprised by the strong tradition of drawing that already existed when he began teaching at the school in the 1930s.\textsuperscript{21}

\textbf{Historical development of the NAS curriculum}

Much of the curriculum at the NAS had been in place since the late nineteenth century and many of teachers since the 1930s and 1940s. For the Imitation Realists this meant that they encountered a school in which there was little interest or opportunity for students to experiment with less orthodox methods and approaches. Vivienne Binns, who started at the NAS two years after the Imitation Realists, shared their frustrations:

\begin{quote}
Overall I found the course to be singularly lacking in direction and depth. There was no art history or theory, I found that there was not enough discussion about ideas within the curriculum. Generally speaking, many of the lecturers seemed to be stuck in the period before the Second World War and some resented modernist abstraction and so on, and were waiting for the figure to come back.\textsuperscript{22}
\end{quote}

Courses such as Design and Colour on the curriculum reveal the school's origins and ongoing role as a technical college, contrasting with schools that evolved from the model of a European academy, such as the National Gallery School in Melbourne.\textsuperscript{23}

Yet the principle of giving a broad range of instruction in different visual arts

\textsuperscript{18} From the course description in the 1956 \textit{Handbook}, Sydney: NSW Department of Technical Education, p. 134
\textsuperscript{19} 1956 \textit{Handbook}, p. 134
\textsuperscript{20} Harvey, \textit{It was a damn good school}, p. 181
\textsuperscript{21} Harvey, \textit{It was a damn good school}, p. 93
\textsuperscript{22} Vivienne Binns, taped interview with the author, 4 September 2008, Canberra. Binns completed the Diploma of Art (Painting) at the school from 1958 until 1962.
\textsuperscript{23} For a comparative history of the origins of the Melbourne and Sydney schools see Christopher Allen, 'A Brief History of the National Art School' in Beck, \textit{Hope in Hell}, pp. 173-9
techniques including figure and landscape painting, design, modelling, sculpture and architecture was established when M. Lucien Henri was in charge of the school from 1883. He imported plaster casts that were still being drawn by students in the 1950s. By the 1950s architecture had been moved to the University of Technology but otherwise largely similar courses continued.

Harvey and Dundas both recalled how parts of the curriculum were reformed during the 1940s, when Frank Medworth was the Lecturer-in-Charge of Art. Medworth, author of the books *Perspective* and *Figure Drawing*, continued the focus on drawing that was the foundation of training at the school. He extended the academic and practical challenges of the school, introducing classes in art history, colour theory and geometric perspective. He was particularly remembered for transforming the Perspective class; challenging students to draw complicated exercises in geometric perspective: ‘for example, if you have a light at the top and to the side of a circular staircase, how do the shadows descend the stairs.’

Medworth’s role was vital in preparing for the School’s rapid postwar expansion, with the introduction of the Commonwealth Reconstruction Training Scheme (CRTS). After Medworth’s death in 1947 the Perspective class continued under Herbert Badham and Harvey. Contrary to teachers’ expectations, student numbers continued to increase in the 1950s rather than declining in proportion with the

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26 Frank Medworth, *Perspective*, London: Chapman & Hall, 1936, and *Figure Drawing*, London: Faber and Faber, 1940
27 Harvey, *It was a damn good school*, pp. 105-49, Badham, *A Study of Australian Art*, pp. 130-31, for the introduction of art history lectures, see Dundas, ‘ESTC’ [parts 1 & 2] pp. 4,7-8 [part 1], pp. 1-2 [part 2]
28 Harvey, *It was a damn good school*, p. 105
30 Harvey, *It was a damn good school*, p. 130
numbers of CRTS students. This was partly due to trainee secondary art teachers receiving practical training at the NAS, as well as the prosperous economic conditions of the 1950s allowing more students to pursue art rather than vocational training.

Along with the revivification of the curriculum under Medworth, in the 1940s a close-knit group of teachers formed, many of whom would be teaching throughout the next two decades at the school. These teachers shared a belief in teaching traditional techniques, and they largely shaped the experiences of Brown, Lanceley and Howlett at the school. They included Douglas Dundas, the Head of Painting, and later the Head of School, Lyndon Dadswell as Head of Sculpture, Harvey, who would become the Head of Art at NTSC, and then the Head of Introductory Art at NAS in 1958, Herbert Badham who would become Head of Intermediate Art, and Harold Abbott, later to be Deputy and then Head of the NAS, all of whom had trained under Julian Ashton and Henry Gibbons at the Sydney Art School in the 1920s (what would later become the Julian Ashton Art School). These, along with other long term teachers Dorothy Thornhill, Phyllis Shillito, C.H. Vacchini and James (Jimmy) Cook, gave the school a consistency in its approach and a general climate of consensus and mutual respect amongst the teachers that shaped the school and its curriculum until the early 1960s. There was a shared belief that a solid training in traditional techniques was essential to being a visual artist and that this centred on the development of fundamental skills, drawing: of casts, still-life, figures and landscape, followed by painting: figures, still-life and composition. The limited range of other opportunities for art education in Sydney meant that teachers at the college had an impact over virtually a generation of Sydney artists.

Dundas in particular was responsible for maintaining the traditional approach of the school. While allowing and instigating some change, ultimately he ensured that the focus of the curriculum remained on the acquisition of practical skills. As the head of painting since 1938, Dundas had promoted the hiring of artists who could

31 Harvey, *It was a damn good school*, pp. 158, 174
32 Harvey, *It was a damn good school*, pp. 142-3
33 Dundas, ‘ESTC’, [parts 1 & 2], Harvey, *It was a damn good school*, p. 8, see also, individual biographies in Badham, *A study of Australian Art*, pp. 127-51
34 See the sources above for examples of this, particularly Badham for his descriptions of the work of his colleagues.
demonstrate a range of artistic practices as he sought to provide a counterbalance between different points of view amongst the teachers.\textsuperscript{35} Dundas believed, however, that the painting workshop should concentrate on practical study of fundamental techniques.

My thoughts always while I was in charge of the Painting School were that the main subjects were Drawing, Painting and Composition [with] about eight hours weekly being devoted to each of those three subjects or thereabouts, and that the other areas could be such things as Portrait Painting or Portrait drawing ... [along with] History of Art, some Abstract Painting.\textsuperscript{36}

He encouraged different approaches to painting and to teaching, but ultimately this concentrated on traditional forms. His attitude towards less traditional techniques, such as those of the Imitation Realists, was demonstrated when he commented about the 1967 exhibition \textit{Two Decades of American Art}, that while he particularly appreciated the abstract works of Mark Rothko and enjoyed Warhol’s \textit{Soup Cans}, he did not like the work of artists ‘who use fabrics and all sorts of stuff attached to the canvas – I personally ... prefer purity in paint.’\textsuperscript{37} Looking back, he acknowledged the relative homogeneity of work at the school.

I tried to get a variety of points of view so that when, after my ideas had been implanted, it was possible to come into the Painting Studio and see each student at work and working in a rather different style. This was one of the things that people commented on. I suppose actually their styles didn’t vary very much because at that time Abstract Expressionism and movements of a freer nature hadn’t hit Sydney at all!\textsuperscript{38}

Like many of his colleagues, Dundas’ relatively conservative outlook had been shaped by his own training at the Sydney Art School in the 1920s. From the 1930s he was actively involved in the traditional institutions of the Sydney art scene, as a member and then president of the Society of Artists and as a trustee for the Art Gallery of NSW (AGNSW).\textsuperscript{39} He greatly admired the support and encouragement

\textsuperscript{35} Beck, \textit{Hope in Hell.}, p. 158; Dundas, \textit{‘ESTC’}, p. 3 [part 2]
\textsuperscript{36} Dundas, \textit{‘ESTC’}, p. 4 [part 2]
\textsuperscript{38} Dundas, ‘ESTC’, p. 8 [part 1]
\textsuperscript{39} Dundas studied at the Sydney Art School part-time from 1922 until 1927, when he was awarded the travelling artist scholarship and went to London to study at the Regent Street Polytechnic. He was elected a member of the Society of Artists in 1931, and was President of the Society from 1948 – 1960, and a Trustee of the AGNSW from 1948 – 1970. ‘Introduction’, Dundas, interviewed by Stratton, 1971, pp. 1-2
that Sydney Ure Smith gave to artists. As a teacher and in his various appointments Dundas tried to continue the support structure that Ure Smith had facilitated in Sydney. Both his taste and his involvement with established arts organisations meant that he did not accommodate more radical changes to visual arts practices in the 1950s and 1960s. He was unlikely to have appreciated the Imitation Realists works, as they lacked the purity he aspired to in painting. They also did not follow the career path that he believed was best for young artists: a gradual establishment over ‘at least five, sometimes ten, years’ to become ‘artists in their own right and be recognised by the public generally.’

The importance he placed on teaching fundamental technical skills and on formal values and the purity of media, is reflected by the lecturers he appointed. However, there was some openness to change and new developments within the basic framework, demonstrated by his attitude towards abstract art. Dundas included an abstract art course in the syllabus for the Diploma of Painting and appointed abstract painters to teach it including, at different times, Grace Crowley, Ralph Balson and Frank Hinder. Other full-time teachers, however, considered abstract art as only a minor part of the curriculum and more useful for training in composition than as possessing its own intrinsic value.

It was Dundas who appointed the teachers that shaped the experiences of Lanceley, Brown and Howlett at the school, such as Peter Laverty, Gordon McAuslan, Godfrey Miller, John Passmore and John Olsen.

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41 Dundas, ‘ESTC’ p. 3. [part 3]
42 Harvey, It was a damn good school, p. 156
43 Harvey wrote that ‘Abstract painting shed itself of phenomenal appearances and confined its attention to an abstract recreation suggested by appearances. Thus we are left with geometrical shapes, with colour and tonal intensities. There is no illusion of depth though a shallow depth is implied. Painting is, after all, a flat medium. The painter of appearances must have an understanding of this design process. Nature does not put frames around itself. Its very infinity requires intelligent interpretation. A great body of people around the world regarded abstract art as an end in itself and masterpieces have been created in this image. ... In my view if an artist moves too far from the centre and towards the classical and his work would be just sterile intellectually if he moves too far to the romantic end his work will have atmosphere and feeling but be quite formless until nothing is left but the grin on the Cheshire Cat.’ It was a damn good school, p. 157. Badham, in A study of Australian Art, carefully and objectively described ‘Abstract Art’ but the description of “‘Literal” Art’ is defensive: ‘This type of painting clings to representation, its emotive basis being controlled by the outward appearance of objects. The artist of this school does not permit himself the freedom of statement enjoyed by his scornful colleagues. His work is stigmatized as academic, photographic or illustrative, and is consequently held to be more or less an anachronism by the Expressionist cognoscenti.’, p. 121
The NAS, especially in the first year at NSTC, provided an exciting opportunity for Howlett, Lanceley and Brown to learn about the visual arts both practically and as one part of a broader understanding of culture. Howlett recalled her mixed experience at the school:

At the beginning, I enjoyed every minute of it, even boring subjects like lettering ... Towards the end, our group ideas became so important, I was impatient to finish, I felt that I'd absorbed all the traditional skills I could (whether I had or not) that the art school had to offer. The burgeoning ideas of the Imitation Realists were so engrossing that everything else seemed dead boring. But looking back I realise it was great to have year after year of traditional observation and drawing. I realise now that I absorbed it by osmosis, even if I wasn't really valuing it, so that in a way I got the best of both worlds.44

An important figure for Brown, Howlett and Lanceley in their early, enjoyable, days at the art school was Peter Laverty, who taught them at the NSTC. One of Dundas' appointees, Laverty (b.1926) emigrated from England to Sydney in 1951 and soon began to teach at the NAS and NSTC. Aged 25, when he began teaching at the art school, he was considerably younger than the other teachers - on occasion he was mistaken for a student45 - which seems to have aided an ability to relate to his students.46 He had trained at the Winchester School of Art in the south of England; where he gained an academic training with an emphasis on learning from the European tradition.47 His early work was shaped by his interest in Italian painting, such as Piero della Francesca and Masaccio, and in Post-impressionism, primarily Cézanne.48 He enjoyed teaching, concentrating on composition and later developing lectures in art history49 and would become head of the school (1970-71) and then director of the AGNSW (1971-77). Howlett recalled Laverty as having a 'European sensibility'50 - a broader view of the visual arts than they had yet encountered in Australia – seeing it as part of a spectrum with literature and music. He was a sophisticated presence in his students’ lives and a generous teacher who invited his

44 Howlett, interview with the author, 2006
45 Peter Laverty, interview with Hazel de Berg, Sydney, 19th August, 1972, tape 628, De Berg Tapes, Oral History Collection, NLA
46 Lanceley, interview with the author, 2006
47 Laverty, interview with de Berg, 1972
48 Laverty, interview with de Berg, 1972
49 Laverty, interview with de Berg, 1972
50 Howlett, interview with the author
students into his home. He shared his interests in books, astronomy and music;\(^{51}\) Lanceley recalled going on landscape painting excursions with Laverty on the weekend.\(^ {52}\) He challenged them to read two books a week, concentrating on the classics.\(^ {53}\) Laverty gave Lanceley crucial encouragement to give up his apprenticeship in the printing industry and study painting full-time.\(^ {54}\) The start at NSTC had fostered their sense of intimacy and isolation as a group and, through Laverty, set in place the key idea that as artists they should engage with all forms of culture and history. Due in part to Laverty as well as, no doubt, to the initial excitement of studying art full-time, the first year at college was a positive experience and the students were enthusiastic to continue.

After the first year, successful students transferred to the main campus of the NAS at ESTC\(^ {55}\) and in 1957 Brown, Lanceley, Woodward and Howlett transferred to continue with the second year of Preparatory Art. The course ensured that they had a solid foundation in traditional skills but did not allow room for much personal expression, or a wider awareness of art. It became increasingly frustrating for Brown, Lanceley and Howlett that they were not taught more about art history and contemporary art. In the Intermediate course students started to specialise in an area, such as painting, and continued the subjects: Drawing (still-life and landscape), Modelling and carving, Oil and Water Colour Painting, Design and Colour, Perspective, Lettering, and Pictorial Composition; and started: Figure Drawing, Anatomy, Landscape Painting and History of Art classes.\(^ {56}\) The timetable was the same: 30 hours per week, or three two-hour classes a day, five days a week. Third year was the start of a three year specialist diploma course, which Lanceley, Howlett and Brown began in 1958 for painting.\(^ {57}\) It was during 1958 that Brown's frustrations with the school increased to the point where he would quit the course.

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\(^ {51}\) Laverty, interview with de Berg, 1972, and Howlett, interview with the author, 2006
\(^ {52}\) Lanceley, de Berg interview, 1970
\(^ {53}\) Lanceley, de Berg interview, 1970
\(^ {54}\) Lanceley, interview with the author, 2006
\(^ {55}\) Deborah Beck, *Hope in Hell*, p. 85
\(^ {57}\) Brown left the college later in 1958 but Woodward, Howlett and Lanceley were awarded the Diploma of Art (Painting) by the Department of Technical Education, 14 June 1961. Woodward was awarded the Diploma with Honours, and the Bronze Medallion, Lanceley the Diploma with credit, and Howlett the pass Diploma, according to the presentation ceremony programme, NAS archives.
The History of Art lectures left the Imitation Realists with a sense that the school was ‘out of touch’ with contemporary art and alternative ideas. This ultimately assisted in them forming a stronger group identity, as it encouraged them to continue reading and discussing ideas away from the school. The lectures were given by teachers who were ‘given a particular field of art to lecture on’ according to ‘his particular ability’, in addition to their teaching duties in the workshops, rather than the appointment of lecturers dedicated to art history alone. A formal art history course was only added in the mid-1960s as part of ‘Related Studies’ when Douglas Dundas was the Head of School. Lanceley recalls art history at the school ranging from ‘Douglas Dundas showing holiday snapshots of the Uffizi or Piazza San Marco’ to the revelations about contemporary European art that John Olsen brought to the school in 1960. Howlett’s memory of art history at the school was that there was ‘virtually none, we would have some slides of the Renaissance artists and that was about it.’ The ad hoc nature of art history at the NAS up until the 1960s – based on what individual teachers chose to include in their classes – was to some extent supplemented by the library. The librarian at ESTC, John Kaplan, is remembered for being somewhat partisan in his development of the art section of the library over other subjects on offer at the campus. Kaplan ensured that many journals and books not otherwise available in Australia were in the library for the art school. He organised talks, exhibitions, concerts and film screenings in the ‘Round House’ at the centre of the school. The circular building was designed to be the physical heart of the campus, having originally housed the chapel of Darlinghurst Gaol. The Round House Association had been formed in 1953 with the aim to complement the ‘excellent’ facilities of the Technical College with some ‘possibility [for students] to reach the humanistic principles underlying any artistic occupation.’ The Association aimed to do this by supporting the library’s

58 Dundas, ‘ESTC’ [pt. 1]
59 Beck, Hope in Hell, p. 106, Laverty, interview with de Berg, 1972
60 Colin Lanceley, quoted by Robert Hughes, ‘Introduction’ in Lanceley, et al., Colin Lanceley, p. 7
62 Howlett, interview with the author, 2006
63 Beck, Hope in Hell, p. 98, Harvey, It was a damn good school, p. 169
64 Beck, Hope in Hell, p. 98
collection of books, films and reproductions. The film program of the same year lists general and experimental films such as *Nanook of the North, Four in the Afternoon* and *The Last Laugh*; the surrealist films *Meshes of the Afternoon* and *At Land*, as well as specialist art films such as *The Experience of Cubism, Anatomy, Grandma Moses, Utrillo* and *Matisse*. The combination of the library and their lecturers meant that students did learn something about European art history and more recent modern art history, including Dada and Surrealism and contemporary art such as Dubuffet and CoBrA. This was an issue of contention between Brown and Lanceley in 1994, after Lanceley’s recollections of Imitation Realism, published in *Art and Australia*, recorded that they had been ‘in true ignorance actually of surrealism and dada, if you can possibly believe it.’ Brown could not, and said as much in an inflammatory two-part article that he wrote for *Art Monthly Australia* in that year, ‘Kite II’, in which he discussed the sources and influences for Imitation Realism, particularly concentrating on the contribution of Ross Crothall. In a 1970 interview, Lanceley had also recalled their awareness of Dubuffet, Surrealism and Dada.

The two most influential teachers in the painting studio during the late 1950s were two of Dundas’ appointments, Godfrey Miller and John Passmore. Both were heavily influenced by Post-impressionism and were perhaps equally eccentric; both lived alone and were extremely private about their own work. Vivienne Binns described ‘that they made you fight for the information’ and that:

A lot of [students] were really worshipful of people like Passmore. I have this memory of a story about women in that group [in Brown’s

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66 Letter of invitation to join the Round House Association, 1953
67 The Round House, *Films: 2nd and 3rd Term 1953*, programme, NAS ephemera file, AGNSW Research Library
70 Brown, ‘Kite II: Part 1’, *Art Monthly Australia*, no. 73 (September 1994), pp. 4-7 and *Kite II: Part 2*, The significance of the title will be discussed in chapter four. Their disagreement is revealing of the significance that Imitation Realism had for both artist’s subsequent work, and the different meanings that it had for each of them. Lanceley’s perception of Imitation Realism will be examined, particularly with regard to the role that Imitation Realism has played as a formative experience in his development as an artist, in chapter four.
71 Lanceley, ‘Colin Lanceley interviewed by Terry Smith, Noel Hutchison, Tony McGillick’, *Other Voices*, vol. 1, no. 2 (August-September 1970), p. 36-8
Brown, Howlett and Lanceley rejected the quasi-mystical aura that surrounded Miller and Passmore and their approach to painting. Their unusual personalities meant that some students shared formative relationships with them, while others felt ignored.73

Dundas considered Miller to be an ‘exceptional artist’ who struggled ‘to give expression to his concept of unity – a remarkable blending of the visual and spiritual worlds.’74 He appointed Miller after two carefully arranged meetings ‘in which it wasn’t so much my interviewing [him] … as him interviewing me with a view to seeing whether I was the right kind of person to work with.’75 His employment was managed so as to avoid a formal interview process with the Public Service Board, as Dundas felt that neither the Board nor Miller would be left with a positive impression of the other.76 Miller tended to teach through the example of his own work rather than through lectures or discussion.77

Miller worked on his paintings, such as *Nude and the Moon* (1.01), over a period of years. Out of a network of intersecting diagonal lines, he painstakingly built up a surface of diamond-shaped tesserae of colour. Miller and Dundas shared fundamental similarities in their concern with the formal elements of composition, colour and line and in their desire for a sense of purity in their use of paint. He was extremely suspicious of any commercial motive, either on the part of an artist or a buyer, and reluctant to exhibit, except under very strict circumstances.78 Dundas

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72 Binns, interview with the author, 2008
77 Beck, *Hope in Hell*, p. 78
described him leaving the impression of being ‘elusive’ and that ‘there was more than a hint of mysticism’ about him.\(^{79}\)

His influence on students … was quite considerable. He would never rush in with criticism – he would like to mature in his mind what he thought about the work before he gave any comment on it. And certain students used to irritate him very much; others, … he would inquire into their minds, the way they were thinking, and, if they gave evidence of some sort of mature thinking that more or less tallied with his way of thought, they would become great favourites … It was not so much a personal association as one of an association of minds and thought.\(^{80}\)

Both in his own work and in his approach to art in general and to teaching Miller was secretive and absolute in his judgements. This made him a difficult person with whom to get along. Lanceley, who Miller taught Figure Drawing, did not share his mindset, and described him, as ‘grey and fugitive… and as to what he ever said to me, I can’t remember.’\(^{81}\) This elusive quality, that provoked some students to revere but others to revile, was one shared by John Passmore, another Dundas appointee.

Passmore began teaching at Julian Ashton’s in 1951 and then the NAS in 1956.\(^{82}\) His methods had a shaping influence on a large number of students. Beacons in Passmore’s own development as a painter were blue-period Picasso and Cézanne;\(^{83}\) the latter’s deconstruction of form into component elements can be seen influencing many of Passmore’s works, such as *Bathers* (1.02), and resulted in a limpid near-abstraction in others, such as *Boys Looking for Bait* (1.03). Like Miller, some students were in awe of him while others reacted against his methods.

Those who were not contemporaries of Passmore will find it difficult to appreciate the mystical reverence he evoked. Before the terms ‘guru’ and ‘charisma’ had been staled by common use, he was a charismatic, almost spiritual teacher whose few axioms were treasured.\(^{84}\)

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\(^{79}\) Dundas, ‘People’ 1971, p. 14
\(^{80}\) Dundas, ‘People’ 1971, p. 15
\(^{81}\) Colin Lanceley, in Dutton, *The Innovators*, p. 177-8
\(^{83}\) Pearce, *John Passmore*, p. 11, and Elwyn Lynn, ‘John Passmore and the legend of Paul Cézanne’, *Art and Australia*, v. 23, no. 1 (Spring 1985), pp. 55-61
\(^{84}\) Lynn, ‘John Passmore’, 1985, p. 55
John Olsen recalled how Passmore always had his students read the T.S. Eliot essay *Tradition and the Individual Talent* (1919). Eliot held that an artist must sacrifice all to create, and must maintain an ‘historical sense’ of the timeless and the temporal that both shaped and interacted with the artist’s own work. Passmore emphasised process in the creation of a painting, which would be a lasting legacy for Olsen. Olsen described him as ‘the person from whom I learned most’. Passmore would be similarly influential for Woodward, shaping her use of colour and philosophy toward art, and they would have a lasting friendship and correspondence. He demanded his students find their own path, not allowing them to see his own work lest it influence them, yet his unshakeable belief in the superiority of Cézanne frustrated some students. Lanceley’s experience contrasts with that of Olsen and Woodward: he saw Passmore’s influence as ‘crippling’ some students. This was a result of his ‘methodology for teaching ... all about putting warm and cool colours together and turning objects in space, and theories, like cool colours recede and warm colours come forward.’ As an Imitation Realist he expressed this frustration with his *Self-Portrait* (1.04), a wooden assemblage covered in a tracery of interconnected letters; these disguised a ‘rude poem about the way Paul Cézanne painted’ penned by Lanceley. Maughan recalled Passmore as an ‘elusive’ figure who left ‘many students to work alone without help or comment.’

Lanceley, Brown and Howlett found the focus on fundamental techniques and the purity of painting restrictive. The only teacher Howlett recalls Brown having a real relationship with was Gordon McAuslan, who taught landscape painting at the

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86 Lanceley, ‘Craven ’A’’, 1994, p. 16 and Olsen, *Drawn from Life*, p. 71f
88 Olsen, *Drawn from Life*, p. 6
89 Lanceley, *Craven ’A’*, p. 488
90 Fry, *Margaret Woodward*, p. 14
91 Colin Lanceley, quoted by Hughes, ‘Introduction’, *Colin Lanceley*, p. 7
92 Lanceley, interview with the author, 2006
93 Colin Lanceley, ‘Craven ’A’’, p. 488
95 Gordon Stewart McAuslan, 1913-1996, having studied drawing by correspondence he worked as an illustrator during the Depression, before war service that took him to New Guinea, after the war he travelled in England, studying pottery at Edinburgh Art College 1947-49 and tempera painting with the English surrealist Edward Wadsworth, and in Europe, where he visited the studios of Brancusi and
McAuslan was a New Zealander who had studied modern art in England and ethnographic collections in Sydney, Wellington and Dunedin. He worked as a sculptor, painter, illustrator and ceramicist and shared with Brown an interest in Surrealism. In 1952 his work was included in an exhibition of modern New Zealand art taken to London and Paris by the dealer Helen Hitchings. An abstract of McAuslan’s received praise by at least one critic, who commented on his use of Pacific art as a source possessing 'enormous possibilities.' McAuslan was an outsider from the Sydney avant-garde art world. Although he taught at the NAS and was a member of the CAS his works were not selected for the CAS group exhibitions. Having not been selected for the exhibition, he delivered a ‘Broadside’ to the CAS Broadsheet in April 1959, accusing the CAS committee of 'persistent and now total rejection of my work', because he did not conform to 'current fashion' from modern art overseas. Brown does not mention McAuslan in any of his available recollections of art school and so it is important not to overstate his influence. But it does not seem unlikely that McAuslan introduced ideas about non-Western and contemporary New Zealand art that made Brown more receptive to the profound influence Ross Crothall would have on his work.


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96 Lanceley, interview with the author, 2006
97 Skillitzi, 'Gordon McAuslan 1913-1996', pp. 106-8
98 Maurice Collis, 'New Zealand Art in London', New Zealand Listener, 12 September 1952, p. 9 quoted in Leonard Bell, 'Landfall, the 'Primitive', and the Visual Arts in the 1950s', Landfall, the fifties, vol. 1, no. 1, April 1993, p. 109-10. For the exhibition see J.C. Beaglehole, 'Note on a collection of Paintings', Landfall, vol. 5, no. 3 (September 1951), pp. 227-30. Also included in the exhibition were works by Colin McCahon, Toss Woollaston, and Dennis Knight Turner.
99 Gordon McAuslan, 'Broadside' April 1959, artist ephemera file, AGNSW Research Library
101 Pearce, John Passmore, p. 17
the other teachers at the school, a teacher who allowed a more inclusive, uninhibited philosophy of painting. Lanceley was the only one of the Imitation Realists that Olsen taught, but his significance to the group as a whole was not only as a teacher. He was central to Imitation Realism finding a larger audience; as the first ‘proper artist’ any of them knew in Sydney, Lanceley asked Olsen’s advice on exhibiting the works, and invited him to the house in Annandale. Olsen alerted Elwyn Lynn to their work, who then introduced them to John Reed and Rudy Komon, and thus instigated the exhibitions. In addition to this, Olsen was a prominent voice in avant-garde art circles in Sydney. As will be detailed in chapter two, he had been writing about contemporary art in the CAS NSW Broadsheet, and as Daniel Thomas observed, it was his ideas about art that made those of the Imitation Realists seem more explicable to their audience. Key to Olsen’s painting was Klee’s idea of ‘taking the line for a walk’, and in Lanceley’s early works the influence of Olsen is apparent, particularly in the fluid, sprawling quality of the paint. After his time in Europe in the late 1950s Olsen was attempting to express the Australian character:

I don’t like international painting – the slick sort of abstraction that one sees a surfeit of in Europe. If one is to get really down to the problem here one has to be banal even. The power of Australian society is this vulgarity. ... it’s a pretty bitter pill to take, but if you miss it you miss a lot. Let life as a totality come into your painting!

As Virginia Spate noted, Olsen shared an interest in primal, raw creativity with Jean Dubuffet and other contemporary European artists. It would find expression in his joyous depictions of Sydney Harbour, in which he was trying to capture a sense of the busy life of the harbour, such as Up and Down the Seaport (1.05). In some respects, his philosophy at this time was similar to that that the Imitation Realists were developing, in its embrace of the banal and the artist’s immediate surrounds – the urban environment of Sydney rather than that of the mythologised outback. Robert Hughes noted that this was central to Olsen’s influence amongst Sydney artists.

102 Howlett, interview with the author, 2006
103 Lanceley, interview with the author, 2006
105 John Olsen, quoted in the Sydney Morning Herald, June 2nd 1962, quoted in Spate, John Olsen, p. 12
106 Spate, John Olsen, p. 12
That is why John Olsen’s work was so liberating for me, and I suspect for others: it addressed what was really exuberant and hedonistic in Australian life without any doubts about its value. It saw hedonism and scepticism as the twin sides of the Sydney coin.\footnote{Robert Hughes, quoted in Dutton, }\footnote{Howlett, interview with the author, 2006} Olsen was assigned to teach the ‘Abstract’ class although he was not an abstract painter. He would be remembered by students as a gifted teacher, able to convey a committed approach to painting that was demanding for students. He brought a sense of European ‘bohemianism’\footnote{Howlett, interview with the author, 2006} and wide knowledge of contemporary and historical art.\footnote{Howlett, interview with the author, 2006} The ‘tremendous verve’ and ‘generosity of spirit [that he brought] into the art world’\footnote{Howlett, interview with the author, 2006} contrasted with the eccentricity of Miller and Passmore. His techniques, both in his teaching and his own work, provided alternatives to the Cézanne-derived painting that characterised the approaches of Miller, Passmore and Dundas. However his approach still shared the ethos of the school: the necessity of learning a solid foundation of traditional skills. He dissuaded students such as Lanceley and Peter Powditch from being abstract artists: ‘they had the notion that painting is all about shapes and colours, that’s all it is. ... I recommended that they go out and look.’\footnote{Howlett, interview with the author, 2006} Lanceley had been exploring abstraction, trying to convert Brown to abstract painting inspired by Kandinsky’s \emph{Concerning the Spiritual in Art} (1911), which he studied with the devotion of ‘a Bible study group.’\footnote{Howlett, interview with the author, 2006} He had devised a systematic approach to abstract art, exploring the relations of colour and shapes on the canvas, using tape to arrange the composition, inspired by Mondrian;\footnote{Howlett, interview with the author, 2006} most of this work he later destroyed.\footnote{Howlett, interview with the author, 2006}

The art school gave the artists a solid training in fundamental techniques, yet this training was also restrictive and became an authority to rebel against. The reverence that Miller and Passmore engendered in some students (as well as other art world figures) incited a rebellious response from Lanceley, Brown and Howlett. Their example inspired them to find alternatives to what they saw as a constricting approach to art. The example of Olsen would be particularly significant for

\footnotesize{\begin{itemize}
\item \footnote{Robert Hughes, quoted in Dutton, \emph{The Innovators}, p. 188}
\item \footnote{Howlett, interview with the author, 2006}
\item \footnote{Howlett, interview with the author, 2006, Margaret Woodward in Hendrikson, \emph{Margaret Woodward}, and Colin Lanceley, Peter Powditch and Ann Thompson, quoted in Deborah Hart, \emph{John Olsen}. Sydney: Craftsman House, 1991, p. 62}
\item \footnote{Howlett, interview with the author, 2006}
\item \footnote{John Olsen, \emph{Drawn from Life}, 1997, p. 50}
\item \footnote{Lanceley, ‘Craven A’, 1994, p. 482}
\item \footnote{Lanceley, interview with Terry Smith, \emph{et al.}, 1970, p. 36}
\item \footnote{Lanceley, interview with Terry Smith, \emph{et al.}, 1970, p. 36}
\end{itemize}}
Lanceley (and important to the Imitation Realists being known beyond Annandale), whereas influences from outside the art school would ultimately be more significant for Brown. For all three however, the small class size had encouraged them to form a tight-knit group, which encouraged joint intellectual exploration and discussion. Attending art school before the expansion of art education of the 1960s\textsuperscript{115} there was a feeling of intimacy and uniqueness amongst students at the art school.

Because there were only 13 of us in the class, you felt that you were special, that you had a vocation, you were going to live in permanent poverty, but it didn’t matter, you thought you were inspired, and I think that stayed with most of us for the rest of our lives.\textsuperscript{116}

Brown, Lanceley and Howlett all developed a sense of identity through their friendship and shared ideas. When they moved to the ESTC campus they also began to inhabit a nearby café, the ‘Claridges Coffee Lounge’.\textsuperscript{117} Here they met Ross Crothall, who had arrived from Auckland in 1958, seeking a more diverse society than New Zealand had to offer. Crothall began evening classes during 1958 but would only study at the school for two months before leaving as ‘he didn’t agree with art the way it was taught there.’\textsuperscript{118} Brown also left the art school during 1958, his third year, and did not complete the diploma, having come ‘quite suddenly to the conclusion that I was learning nothing there that was of any use to me.’\textsuperscript{119} He remembered it as a ‘stifling’ environment.\textsuperscript{120} Crothall and Brown were both frustrated by the formal, academic nature of art school training. Howlett recalls Brown’s dissatisfaction with the influence of art from first Paris and then New York on local art and that this was why he responded so quickly to Crothall’s interest in Maori art, as it was centred on their immediate environment.\textsuperscript{121}

He didn’t fit in with the kind of abstract expressionist experience of painting ... His was not the gestural image, it was the very carefully

\begin{footnotes}
\item[116] Howlett, interview with the author, 2006
\item[117] 28 Flinders Street, Darlinghurst, run by Magda Kohn.
\item[118] Magda Kohn, in an interview with Clive Evatt, 8 August 1972, quoted in his *The Imitation Realists and Australian pop art*, unpublished research essay, Power Institute of Fine Arts, Sydney University, 1972, p. 3
\item[119] Pearce, *John Passmore*, p. 17
\item[120] Brown, *Kite II: Part 1*, p. 4
\item[121] Howlett, interview with the author, 2006
\end{footnotes}
considered image with much more of an intellectual background rather than the spontaneous image.\textsuperscript{122}

Brown later recorded that Crothall’s influence on him was ‘overwhelming’, as ‘Crothall’s impact on me and that of the condensed New Zealand culture he brought with him in scrapbooks’ was the first truly ‘sympathetic’ influence Brown experienced in Sydney.\textsuperscript{123} It was a few months after meeting Crothall that Brown left the school and ‘every assumption of western cultural superiority’ behind him.\textsuperscript{124}

**The development of Imitation Realism 1958 - 1961**

The period between 1958 and 1961 was the crucial time for the formation of the group. This was when the group acquired a name and most of the works for the exhibition were produced. Crothall met students from the NAS while he haunted Claridges, because the coffee shop was run by his girlfriend, Magda Kohn. For Crothall, Claridges seems to have been a recreation of the scene he had experienced in an Auckland cafe in the late 1950s (discussed below). During the days in the coffee shop Crothall shared what he had learnt about art in New Zealand, especially from his mentor, Theo Schoon. His ideas contrasted with what was taught at the NAS, especially in the freedom with which he approached materials and tradition. Kohn did not consider herself an artist, but was keen to encourage the students and allowed them to hang work in the coffee shop.\textsuperscript{125} Crothall encouraged her to participate in the group and to collaborate on works. The *Annandale Imitation Realists* exhibition included five collaborations and one individual piece by Kohn (see appendix II).

Lanceley, Brown, Howlett, Gale, Kohn and Crothall would spend hours discussing art and literature. Laverty’s encouragement to read two books a week resulted in the group reading and discussing them together. They built a close working relationship as they exchanged ideas and learnt from one another. This would be increasingly important as their frustration with the art school grew. They played a game known as ‘aesthetic chess’ – taking turns to move whatever small items were to hand on the table, then critiquing whether this improved the composition. The balance between

\textsuperscript{122} Howlett, interview with the author, 2006
\textsuperscript{123} Brown, *Kite II: Part 1*, p. 6
\textsuperscript{124} Brown, *Kite II: Part 1*, p. 6
\textsuperscript{125} Howlett, interview with the author, 2006
compromise and individual opinion that is necessary for collaboration seems to have been developed here. As will be seen in chapter four the aesthetic chess games were particularly important for Lanceley’s later work, his interest in using assemblage to create balance and form can be seen to emerge here.

During 1959 and 1960 the group remained close friends, but went their own ways. Howlett and Lanceley stayed at the art school to finish their diplomas, and were married for a few months. The subsequent breakdown of their marriage saw the end of Howlett’s close involvement with the group. Crothall worked a series of short-term jobs in this period and during 1960 he and Kohn studied philosophy at the University of Sydney. He rented a terrace house in Rose Street, Annandale, that Brown moved into later that year, on his return from Papua New Guinea (PNG). Since leaving NAS in 1958, Brown had travelled to New Zealand for six months and spent three months working in PNG. He travelled throughout New Zealand as a result of meeting Crothall, feeling that he would learn more about art there than in Australia, especially Maori art. Works from the time show the transformative effect indigenous art forms had on his art (1.06-7), especially when compared to a student piece he completed in the same year, The Nun (1.08).

The Nun reflects the training of the NAS, particularly the system of tonal modelling based on warm and cool colours taught by Passmore. The change is dramatic between this painting and the works he completed after the trip to New Zealand. Ultimately, these were also unsatisfactory, as they seemed derivative to him, rather than a new form that was inspired by Maori art.

The three months that Brown spent in PNG during 1960, working for the Commonwealth Film Unit, had a transforming effect on his approach to materials. He was initially employed as a Production Assistant to work in the Sydney office of the Unit. Brown was sent to PNG when three other assistants were found to be neces...
medically unfit to work there. He assisted on the sets for the films *A woman called Gima* and *An agricultural officer in Papua and New Guinea*. He was in PNG from August to October 1960, working in Port Moresby and Rabaul (New Britain). This meant that Brown experienced some of the diversity of PNG, and did so at a time of great change for the country. Young men were increasingly moving to Port Moresby and other cities in search of work, taking with them the traditional designs and techniques of their art. Brown saw sculptures that were made with traditional techniques and meanings and how these customs had been adapted to suit the changes that had occurred since European colonisation. Although the form of the works was maintained, the artists used different materials, such as buttons instead of shells. This adaptability has been a part of art in many parts of PNG. Examples of sculptures that used buttons in place of shells are held in the collection of the American Museum of Natural History (New York) that were collected by Margaret Mead in the 1930s. Other examples include customary woven masks

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130 *A woman called Gima* (1963) was directed by William H. Shepherd and produced by The Australian Commonwealth Film Unit for the Department of Agriculture, Stock and Fisheries, Territory of Papua and New Guinea and was intended to be screened in Papua New Guinea to encourage the development of women’s groups to discuss healthcare and social issues by local women. *An agricultural officer in Papua and New Guinea* (1961) was directed by William H. Shepherd and produced by The Australian Commonwealth Film Unit for the Department of Agriculture, Stock and Fisheries, Territory of Papua and New Guinea and was intended to recruit qualified young Australians to work for the Department in PNG. Records of Brown’s involvement on these projects is held by NAA: SP1265/1 Film Production files, FP1340 ‘PNG Newsreel’, FP1340/1 ‘Department of Territories Programme 1960-61’, FP1346 ‘Women’s Clubs in PNG’, FP1345 ‘Recruiting Agricultural Officers’.  
131 On 29 July 1960 Hawes cabled Williams that he would ‘send Michael Brown as additional assistant to Shepherd. No other suitable person available.’, on 29 September 1960 Williams wrote to Hawes notifying him that Brown was one of four people who would be returning to Australia on 8 October 1960. NAA: SP1265/1 Film Production files, FP1340 ‘PNG Newsreel’.  
132 Demonstrated by the Film Unit’s production *Writing Home in New Guinea*, the film was intended to educate the Papua New Guineans about using the postal service, to encourage communication between those that had moved to the cities and their home villages. Directed by John Morris for The Australian Commonwealth Film Unit for the Department of Agriculture, Stock and Fisheries, Territory of Papua and New Guinea. NAA: SP1265/1, FP1344/5 ‘Writing Home in New Guinea’.  
133 It should be acknowledged that the modern country of Papua New Guinea encompasses many hundreds of traditional tribal, cultural and language groups. See Nicholas Thomas, *Oceanic Art*, London: Thames and Hudson, 1995; Susan Cochrane and Michael Mel, *Contemporary Art in Papua New Guinea*, Sydney: Craftsman House, 1997  
134 Including, artist unknown, ‘Mask’, cat. no. 80.0/8099, carved wood with shells, plant fibre and buttons, 61 cm length, and artist unknown, ‘Mask’, cat. no. 80.1/2090, carved wood with buttons, feathers, pigment, plant fibre, 19.5 x 19.5 x 3.5 cm; both collected from the Chambri [formerly Tchambuli] Lakes region, in the East Sepik province of Papua New Guinea, by Margaret Mead on the American Museum of Natural History expedition to Papua New Guinea in 1933-4. Both can be seen in the Pacific Ethnographic Database, Division of Anthropology, American Museum of Natural History, website: http://anthro.amnh.org/anthropology/databases/pacific_public/pacific_public.htm [accessed 7 December 2007]
that incorporated pieces of European china and labels from tin cans used in headdresses and sculptures.\textsuperscript{135}

For Brown, PNG art opened up a way for him to forge a connection between how he experienced life and the form of his work. He responded to the sight of traditional art that used cowrie shells for eyes on sculptures, and then the contemporary counterparts that used mother of pearl buttons, the incorporation of the commonplace into the extraordinary. Brown would repeatedly refer to this instance as a key moment in his understanding of the possibilities of art and materials.\textsuperscript{136} He (and the other Imitation Realists) had already been keenly aware of PNG art, particularly masks and carvings from the region of the Sepik River. These were then widely available in Sydney through the collections of both the Australian Museum and other artists.\textsuperscript{137} Brown had felt his previous attempt to respond to their influence, with \textit{Mug Lair} (1.09), a carving from an old red gum post, was derivative of such sculpture (1.14).\textsuperscript{138} Visiting the country meant that he had seen the physical context for the creation of some PNG art and he was able to make connections to his own experience in Sydney. The artists he had seen used material from their immediate environment to create their work and this gave it a tangible connection with day to day life.

The parallel that Brown drew between what he saw in PNG and what he hoped to achieve in his own work was also a crucial difference between the interest of the Imitation Realists and the Surrealists of the 1920s in PNG art. For the Surrealists it exemplified the other, art that was almost unimaginably distant from that of the coffee shops and galleries of Paris.\textsuperscript{139} The Imitation Realists saw it as art from their


\textsuperscript{137} Howlett, interview with the author, 2006, Lanceley, interview with the author, 2006. A typical example of the PNG masks that were collected by artists can be seen in a 1940s photograph of Loudon Sainthill's studio at Merioola in Christine France, \textit{Merioola and after}, Sydney: National Trust of Australia, 1986, p. 7.

\textsuperscript{138} Haese, \textit{Power to the People}, p. 42-4

\textsuperscript{139} A concise account of the Surrealists and their interest in art from PNG is Philippe Peltier, 'Oceania: Objects of Revelation and Desire', in Gregory Hodgins, \textit{et. al. New Guinea Art}:
region, as an authentic form of local art. For both the Surrealists and the Imitation Realists the use of assemblage in PNG art offered an approach to materials that combined objects to evoke new meanings through juxtapositions. This followed from the Surrealists inspiration in the collages of Max Ernst and the potential they seemed to hold to reveal the subconscious. Art from PNG had been collected and exhibited widely by American and European collectors since the 1870s\textsuperscript{140} and the items particularly prized were those made prior to contact with the West.\textsuperscript{141} In contrast to this, the Imitation Realists were interested in the tendency that Brown had seen in PNG art, for artists to adapt their work to their contemporary surroundings. This was an approach that he was particularly receptive to after becoming friends with Crothall. It was on his return to Sydney that he moved into the house at Annandale and the most fertile period for Imitation Realist work began.\textsuperscript{142}

It was early in 1961 that Crothall came up with the name ‘Imitation Realism’ to describe their work.\textsuperscript{143} As stated in the introduction, the term had no absolute meaning; instead it seemed to hold for the artists the appeal of ambiguity. Having a name signified that they were attempting to do something markedly different from other artists, but also mocked the kind of seriousness associated with other named groups, such as The Antipodeans (who are discussed further below). In one sense their work was an ‘imitation’ of ‘realism’ in that it tried to capture a tangible sense of the materiality of contemporary urban life, but the term was also a jest at the expense of artists who would not admit either imitation or mimetic realism into their work. The uncertainty created by the term offered the artists freedom from any ideology – either of art, as they had encountered at the NAS, or of politics, which as we shall see was associated with the debate that surrounded The Antipodeans.


\textsuperscript{140} For an overview of this activity, see Robert L. Welsch, ‘One Symphony from Many Voices: Collectors, Collecting Activities, and the Culture of Collecting since 1870’, in Hodgins, \textit{New Guinea Art}, pp. 8-22

\textsuperscript{141} Hodgins, \textit{New Guinea Art}, p. 9

\textsuperscript{142} Ross Crothall, quoted in ‘Closer to home’, NSW CAS Broadsheet, October 1964, p. 6

\textsuperscript{143} Crothall, ‘Closer to home’, 1964, Brown, Kite II: Part I, pp. 4-5
They attempted to make work that responded to all aspects of contemporary life, not only those normally deemed 'worthy' to be considered subject matter for fine art. With Crothall’s assistance, Brown resumed work on *Mug Lair*. He was inspired to change the direction of the work after his trip, having seen artists adapting traditional forms to contemporary circumstances. Brown attempted to give *Mug Lair* a local identity by embedding it into his immediate surroundings. His use of colourful synthetic paint is an adaptation to what was available and what was true to his experience. Bright commercial paints were more a part of Brown’s own environment than the natural earth pigments traditionally used in PNG. ‘Mug Lair’ is defined as a slang term ‘applied to someone supposed to be both stupid and vulgar.’ His use of such slang makes clear that this is an example of the way the Imitation Realists embraced the everyday street culture of urban Australia. They celebrated, rather than derided, the culture of the then lower-middle class Sydney suburb of Annandale. This meant that at times they indulged in stereotypes that are no longer acceptable, such as Brown’s *Night of the Coon Moon* (3.54) or Crothall’s *Woman driver* (3.39).

Crothall and Brown rejected the idea of the artist as an isolated genius and increasingly worked collaboratively. This can be seen as a rejection of the idea of the artist that was modelled at the NAS by teachers such as Miller and Passmore. As Brown recollected:

> We felt that the history of Western art in which individualism has been so extremely important, even since the Renaissance, was something in the nature of a strange diversion from a normal state of affairs.

They worked on drawings that they exchanged across the kitchen table for the other to work on, and began making paintings and sculptures together. Brown recalled *Sailing to Byzantium* (1.10) as the first painting on which the two collaborated (discussed further below). As well as their works they collaborated on a body of iconography that was repeated throughout the Imitation Realists’ work; these were

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144 Crothall, ‘Closer to home’, 1964
146 See appendix II for a full list of titles of the works in the exhibitions.
147 Brown, interview with de Berg, 1969
148 Mike Brown, ‘Kite II: Part I’, p. 5
149 Letter from Mike Brown to John Jones, Curator, Australian Painting and Sculpture, ANG (now the NGA), 28 October 1980, 7th October 1985, NGA file reference no. 68/2429
invented figures such as Mug Lair, Captain Orpheus, Mirg and the Transtasmanian Wendigo and references to legendary and literary figures, such as the Bunyip and the poetry of Yeats. These were then all combined, reflecting the cultural landscape of which they were a part. Brown’s *The Easter Island Bunyip* (1.11) located the indigenous Australian figure of the Bunyip on Easter Island. The work used the shallow surface depth and patterning of PNG and Maori art joined with an exuberant, cartoon-like style. The period at the house seems to have been an intensely creative one, allowing them to further and develop the ideas that fuelled the group.

The house in Annandale was perhaps their largest collaboration, with works covering every available surface and making a lasting impression on all who visited it, as Robert Hughes attested (and is quoted in the introduction). Their incorporation of their work into their domestic environment suggests the immediacy of their art to their daily life. Having a separate studio was economically unviable, but a benefit to working and living in the same space meant that their art was not separate from the rest of life. The Merioola Group was a forerunner to the Imitation Realists, as a group that emerged from a shared dwelling who also exhibited first in Melbourne and then Sydney. However, the Merioola artists were linked more by the circumstance of sharing a boarding house, rather than by a shared artistic philosophy or project. In contrast with Merioola, the Imitation Realists’ domestic environment seems to be crucial to their art, the display at Annandale seems to have evolved as a part of their overall creation. It suggests the habit of producing domestic crafts as a part of day to day life that were then on display in the home.

During this time they started to incorporate assemblage in their art, using what was readily available as the material for their work. A nearby furniture factory was a particularly rich source, and timber scraps can be found throughout the Imitation Realists’ work. For example, Crothall used them to make a pair of sculptures, *Venus* (1.12) and *Jupiter* (1.13), with which he aimed to express sexuality with the

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151 France, *Merioola and after*, 1986
openness that he saw in art from PNG (1.14-15). As off cuts from furniture making, the wood had been turned and shaped into forms that could be easily incorporated into assemblage. They could determine the subject of the piece, for example, Brown used such pieces to construct Motor Scooter Moll (1.16), a freestanding sculpture of a woman whose automotive character is suggested by the 'helmet' and the white timber circles that double as breasts and headlights.

Lanceley joined the group in mid-1961. He had completed the five year Diploma at the NAS, and formed a close bond with John Olsen. Olsen’s linear, abstracted style of painting can be seen in Lanceley’s Imitation Realist works such as The glad family picnic (1.17) where his painting was combined with assemblage. In these works Lanceley can be seen to attempt to marry Olsen’s approach to painting – ‘Let life as a totality come into your painting!’ – with the approach the Imitation Realists were developing. Like Olsen they sought to evoke the ‘totality’ of experience in their work, but sought to incorporate material aspects of it into their work, to make the work out of the kitsch and refuse life offered. Lanceley began making assemblage sculptures as well as paintings, employing scraps to construct purposefully naïve pieces, such as Narcissist in curlers (1.18). The recycled materials appear to have grown into an amorphous organic creature, not dissimilar to one of Jean Dubuffet’s assemblage figures. The strategy of assembling works from these accessible materials was not only necessitated by poverty, but was also inspired by a desire to create art that art had immediacy. Using materials from everyday life asserted the connection between art and everyday life.

Imitation Realism was shaped in response to art in Sydney, both as it was taught at NAS and, as we shall see in the final section of this chapter, the debates about the meanings and possibility of a uniquely ‘Australian’ art with regard to the Antipodean Manifesto and the Whitechapel exhibition. But in addition to this local context, it was the ideas and influences that Crothall brought from New Zealand that were of vital importance in shaping Imitation Realism. For these reasons, contemporary avant-garde art in New Zealand, particularly the art of Theo Schoon and Colin

153 Crothall, ‘Closer to home’, 1964
154 John Olsen, quoted in the Sydney Morning Herald, June 2nd 1962, quoted in Spate, John Olsen, p. 12
155 Dubuffet’s influence on the group is further discussed in chapter two.
McCa hon, will be analysed, to further understand the ideas of the Imitation Realists and the web of influences that formed the group.

**Ross Crothall**

Crothall largely initiated Imitation Realism; it seems that because he was a few years older than the others he had a more defined sense of himself as an artist. The relationship he had with Mike Brown was particularly important in the latter’s development. Brown held him in esteem for the rest of his life, and attributed his unique influence, in part, to his being a New Zealander.

I regard him as the main instigator or innovator of the group. He was a bit older than me and a bit more cluey about what was going on and I think he had some very interesting influences in New Zealand that we just didn’t have over here. I mean, I think people like Colin McCahon and Theo Schoon were much more interesting people to have around than practically any of the others that were a potential influence on me. ... Ross Crothall did introduce this thing of taking an intensive interest in primitive art to me. ... I’ve always regarded him as my main mentor. 156

Due to his disappearance in 1968 (and it is assumed, subsequent death due to suicide or misadventure), his role in Imitation Realism and the influences he communicated between New Zealand and Australian art have been either misunderstood or overshadowed by the subsequent success of Colin Lanceley, and to a lesser extent, Mike Brown.

Crothall was brought up in an economic environment that demanded people ‘make do’ with whatever they had. A connection can be seen between his upbringing and his later use of materials. He was born in 1934, in Otorohanga, New Zealand, the younger brother to three sisters. As a child, Crothall lived in different parts of New Zealand, as the family moved in pursuit of work for his father.157 The economy of the time demanded creativity and recycling - Crothall’s mother was a skilled dressmaker and made all the family’s clothes. Crothall’s older sister, Edna Skinner, recalls her father building several houses, as well as furniture for the family, and in

156 Brown, interview with Topliss, 1995
157 The New Zealand Registrar-General’s Office records the birth of Ross James Crothall on 25 June 1934, Otorohanga (in Waikato, south of Auckland on New Zealand’s North Island), to Frank Crothall, Butcher, aged 42, and Elsie Lillian Crothall, aged 42.
158 Information on the family is courtesy of Ross’ sister, Edna Skinner, and niece, Carron Boswell, taped interview with the author, 12 June 2006, Auckland, New Zealand.
miniature for her dolls, which in turn he had made from clothes pegs. Crothall’s work as an Imitation Realist suggests the influence of his early surroundings, for example *Shower of raindrops and clothes pegs* (3.6) echoes his family’s ability to recycle and recreate. His *Trinket boxes* (1.19) were sewn together by his mother, and so actually includes this background in Imitation Realism, as well as demonstrating that Crothall did not see an hierarchical distinction between craft and fine art. The group’s philosophy, to make art that connected with the experience of daily life, reflects Crothall’s childhood, where such craft was a necessary and ordinary part of life.

Crothall showed an interest in and ability with art while still a teenager. Skinner remembers her brother as a ‘romantic’, who was interested in art from his childhood, making ‘beautifully crafted’ decorations for her 21st birthday, when he was aged 14. Others who knew him as a child also remember him for his interest in the arts, Skinner later met a school friend of Crothall’s who referred to him as ‘that arty bloke’, and another schoolmate, artist Lois McIvor, remembered him for drawing caricatures, being good at art and having ‘a clever “quirky mind”’. An early encouragement for Crothall’s artistic ambitions was having a work selected as the cover image for the school annual (1.20). Although obviously an immature work, it demonstrates that Crothall had had some engagement with Maori culture and the conventions of Western art. The linocut illustrated the Maori legend of ‘Tamatane, having assumed the guise of a Kotuku (White Heron) flies to the Maori Heaven’. ‘Kia Tamatane’ has been the school’s motto since 1931 (well before the inclusion of Maori culture became the norm for New Zealand schools). The work adapts European religious art to picture a Maori myth, using the Christian concept of ‘heaven’ as a higher realm, pictured as physically above earthly reality. The traditional depiction of the ascension of Jesus and other holy figures made the ‘figure

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159 Skinner, interview with the author, 2006
160 Brown, ‘Kite II: part 1’, p. 15
161 Brown, ‘Kite II: part 1’, p. 15 and Brown, interview with de Berg, 1969
162 Skinner, interview with the author, 2006
164 Explanatory note, Kotuku, Otahuhu College, 1951
165 Barry Haddock provided the image and background information on the inclusion of Maori culture in public schools during this period, email to the author, 26 June 2006. Haddock was a student at Otahuhu College in the 1950s and then a teacher and deputy principal, 1964 – present.
in the sky' a symbol for the voyage to the next life. Here, the linear landscape of the earth is divided by clouds from the supernatural scene above. The clouds frame the spiritual scene of the tiki figure ascending at the centre of a pyramid, a composition convention from European art. The circular ‘tunnel’ formed by clouds reveals the fence and structure of a traditional Maori meeting house, central to Maori community and spiritual life, and the carved figures that adorn such meeting houses (although here with the unconventional addition of wings). Although clearly not the work of a mature artist, the print quite skilfully combines conventional Western illustration with Maori iconography.

In 1953 Crothall began training at Ardmore Teachers’ College, Auckland, but did not complete the course, leaving the college in May 1954, where the surviving records indicate that he resigned as he was ‘unsuited to teaching.’ 166 His niece remembers him as someone who was excellent with children - ‘when he was with you he was fully there with you, not as an adult talking down to you’ - and considers that the requirement to enforce discipline would have detracted from Crothall’s desire for creativity and mentoring in the classroom. 167 From 1954 Crothall lived in Auckland and made friends with artists, including Gordon Walters and Theo Schoon, becoming a part of the emerging avant-garde art scene there.

**New Zealand art in the 1950s**

The art world that Crothall encountered in 1950s Auckland was one where the dominance of art society shows had only begun to be challenged and modernism was only barely tolerated. 168 Those interested in avant-garde forms of art were few in number and within Auckland, they mostly knew one another. As in Australia, there was a preoccupation with defining the national identity: what unique qualities did this geographically remote country possess? Distance, of course, is relative: a question of where the centres are perceived. The 1950s saw growing interest in

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166 Enrolment records show Crothall’s date of admission to the college as 1 February 1953 and that he resigned from the course, 28 May 1954, ‘Return of Students for the Year 1954’, BCDQ/A739/4380b Auckland and Ardmore teaching colleges – 1951-1955, Department of Education, National Archives of New Zealand, Auckland

167 Carron Boswell, interview with the author, 10 June 2006, Auckland

168 See, for example, the modernisation of the ACAG during the 1950s, with the purchase of modern art for the collection, touring exhibitions of international art, and the 1956 decision to refuse the amateur ‘Fellowship of Artists’ exhibition space. Courtney Johnston, ‘Feeling and Illustration: Reading Peter Tomory’s Art History’, *The Journal of New Zealand Art History*, vol. 27, 2006, pp. 27-8, and *Landfall: The fifties issue*, vol 1, no. 1, (April 1993)
Maori art and its potential to symbolise New Zealand’s identity amongst art circles and society in general.\textsuperscript{169}

Crothall became a part of this world through Theo Schoon. Schoon’s work was influential for Crothall and a number of other artists. Gordon Walters is one of the artists who attested to Schoon’s influence. Walters wrote of how when he returned in 1953 to live in Wellington, from a trip to Europe and then a stay in Australia, there were no visual arts publications, dealer galleries or forums for discussion.

The awful part was that there were only one or two people I could talk to – Theo Schoon, Ross Crothall, a proto Pop artist who later went to Australia and disappeared, and Keith Jacobs, a poet who was very perceptive about art – and by then they were all in Auckland.\textsuperscript{170}

Peter Webb, a curator and art dealer in Auckland since the 1950s, likewise remembers the importance Theo Schoon had in art circles of the time. Webb became part of the circle that inhabited Somervell’s coffee bar in the centre of Auckland, ‘whose misfortune it was to have his establishment selected as the social headquarters of the Auckland art scene.’

It was in a back booth at Somervell’s that Theo Schoon would almost always be found late afternoons, and it was from him that I first heard of Colin McCahon and Gordon Walters.\textsuperscript{171}

The informal group that met at Somervell’s for discussion seems to have been replicated for Crothall in Claridges a few years later. The recollections of both Walters and Webb emphasise the importance of Schoon in the contemporary art world of Auckland, and indeed New Zealand, of the 1950s.

\textsuperscript{169} The gradual embrace of Maori culture is exemplified by Gordon Tovey, National Supervisor of Arts and Crafts, NZ Department of Education, 1944-1966, who introduced Maori art into the curriculum and trained Maori art specialists to teach in state schools. Tovey has been widely credited with stimulating and supporting the emerging generation of Maori contemporary artists in the 1960s and for inclusive educational policies. See Arnold Wilson, ‘Beginning to Bubble’, \textit{Landfall: The fifties issue}, vol 1, no. 1, (April 1993), pp. 23-7; Damian Skinner, ‘Finding the Family Resemblance: Gordon Tovey and the Tovey Generation’, \textit{Art New Zealand}, no. 91 (Winter 1999), pp. 64-7 and Francis Pound, \textit{The Space Between: Pakeha use of Maori Motifs in Modernist New Zealand Art}, Auckland: Workshop Press, 1994

\textsuperscript{170} Gordon Walters, ‘A Difficult Time for Artists’, \textit{Landfall: The fifties issue}, No. 185, April 1993, p. 22

\textsuperscript{171} Peter Webb, ‘Notes from a Fifties Diary’, \textit{Landfall: The fifties issue}, No. 185, April 1993, p. 17
Theo Schoon

Schoon introduced Crothall to Maori and contemporary European art and a philosophy of art that was able to combine them. He had a formative influence on Crothall and through him the Imitation Realists. He rejected convention in either art or life. Schoon’s friend, the art historian Michael Dunn, described him thus:

Schoon was an arrogant, egotistical person who few could live with for long or fail to fall out with. Yet he could be generous, helpful and inspirational. He wanted the best and was impatient with those who settled for less. His yardstick was international not local. 172

Crothall was one of that few with whom Schoon had a close relationship, from 1954 until Crothall went missing in 1968. They became close after Crothall left college and moved to Auckland. Skinner recalls them being virtually inseparable from 1954 until Crothall went to Sydney in 1958. 173 Crothall later referred to these years as his ‘formative period’. 174 Schoon was crucial to Crothall’s development as an artist, and an important part of this was that he was such a contrast to the norms of New Zealand society and its visual arts practice of the 1950s.

Schoon’s training meant that he was knowledgeable about contemporary European art, including de Stijl, the Bauhaus and the use of ‘primitive’ art as a source by modern artists to rejuvenate what they saw as outdated academic painting traditions. 175 Born on 31 July 1915 to Dutch parents in Indonesia, Schoon grew up in East Java, and he would identify with Indonesian cultures for his whole life. 176 He attended the Rotterdam Academy of Fine Arts in Holland in the 1930s, before arriving in New Zealand in 1939, and attending the Canterbury College of Fine Art. He learnt traditional techniques such as painting and drawing, as well as professional photography. 177 He was aware of Surrealism and the interest in subconscious sources of creativity and the demonstrations of this in the art of non-western

173 Skinner, interview with the author, 2006
societies and that created by children or the mentally ill. This background would shape his practice in New Zealand, and in turn influence Crothall. Schoon introduced him to the works of Jean Dubuffet, who would become ‘Crothall’s favourite modernist’. Schoon stayed abreast with modern art in Europe through publications and from those who travelled to Europe. This was particularly the case with Gordon Walters, who returned from Europe and introduced to him to the work of Giuseppe Capogrossi. The submerged and barely recognisable patterns from Pacific art in Capogrossi’s work (1.21) influenced Schoon’s use of Maori art. Capogrossi provided an example of how to integrate material from indigenous cultures into western art. Capogrossi, and especially Dubuffet, were particularly important for Crothall and then for Imitation Realism.

Schoon seems to have been a perennial outsider, growing up Dutch in Java, only travelling to Europe for the first time in his teens, and then forced to relocate to New Zealand because of the Second World War. His homosexuality reinforced his outsider status in New Zealand. He was aware that his identity was one constructed in the space between the cultures of East and West. In this he embodied the difficulties for the descendents of colonisers – identifying with the culture that they have grown up in, but unable to participate in it fully as they remain outside of the indigenous cultures. Schoon seems to have made no attempt to ‘fit in’ socially – he did not hide his homosexuality, dressed and behaved eccentrically and rejected Christianity. As an artist he was similarly unconventional; he primarily worked in media that was not widely accepted as ‘fine art’ – abstract works, photography, and jade and gourd carving. From the mid-1940s his work was primarily centred on using Maori techniques and subject matter. His documentation, use and practice of Maori art have played an ambiguous role in New Zealand art and his work thus demonstrates the complexity of appropriating material from other cultures.

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Schoon, Maori art and ‘primitivism’

As a result of both his eclectic cultural background and his knowledge of European avant-garde art, Schoon recognised the sophisticated visual imagery of Maori rock drawings. He was one of the first European artists to take a serious interest in Maori art and was vital to documenting and campaigning for the preservation of the rock drawings, after first encountering them in Dunedin in 1945. From the 1940s to the 1970s he would play a significant role in introducing Maori art to Pakeha artists, including Crothall, Walters, McCahon and Denis Knight Turner, as well as the New Zealand community as a whole.

Schoon’s recording of the rock drawings of the South Island were intended to preserve the visual art of the earliest known inhabitants of New Zealand. However, the material he recorded was subject to his own embellishments. He altered the original drawings in order to record them photographically, thus to some extent he imposed his creative will onto the works. This indicates that although he appreciated their quality, he did not see them as equal with his own work. His alterations were not appreciated by the Department of Internal Affairs (the Department), which had commissioned Schoon to document the originals as an anthropological record. Dunn argues that Schoon’s primary motive was to make ‘original creative works … where the fantastic and the real merge together seamlessly.’

In the 1950s, Schoon became interested in the Maori craft of gourd carving. Gourds were traditionally used to store preserved food and were sometimes decorated with carved patterns. Schoon appears to have been one of the few who practiced this craft and helped to ensure its survival. He learnt from Pine Taiapa, one of the few Maori craftspeople who still practised these skills. He carved patterns derived from Maori

184 A non-Maori New Zealander, especially those of European descent.
185 Apart from establishing one of the largest records of photos and drawings of the rock drawings, in the Canterbury Museum, one of his earliest attempts to share his knowledge with the broader public was an article, ‘New Zealand’s Oldest Art Galleries’, in the New Zealand Listener, 12 September 1947. See Woods, op. cit. for Schoon’s influence on other artists, and for his influence on Colin McCahon specifically, see Jonathan Mane-Whenua, ‘McCahon and the Maori ‘Walk’, Colin McCahon: A Question of Faith: Papers from a seminar, Auckland: Auckland Art Gallery, 2003, p. 51
art, and attempted to continue the Maori tradition (1.22). He tried to ensure that the craft remained a living art, developing new designs from the rock drawings and other Maori carvings that he photographed extensively.\(^{188}\) Then living in Auckland, he grew gourds on a trellis he built in his garden and his art making took over his entire house, a way of working that was reflected in Crothall’s Annandale home a few years later.

The works he made after encountering Maori art contrast starkly with those he had made previously. His earlier works were conventional figurative photographs, paintings and drawings, often portraits, such as those of Rita Angus (1.23-24) and Dennis Knight Turner.\(^{189}\) In 1972 Schoon described the period in which he was camping in caves and documenting the rock drawings as when he ‘began to escape from the whole European tradition of painting, and to develop a fresh new vision.’\(^{190}\) Damian Skinner cites this description to support the argument that Schoon was ‘myth-making’, as he ‘formulates his own primitivist vision as coming not from a European discourse, but rather from the rock drawings themselves.’\(^{191}\) It should be noted that Schoon’s article refers primarily to the natural landscape that he was encountering, and that it was this that had had the transformative effect on his work, rather than Maori art.

Yet whether it was the rock drawings or the landscape that had the most impact, it is clear that Schoon’s work developed in radically different directions after this period, and that he attributed the changes to his New Zealand experiences, rather than his knowledge of European modernism. Schoon wrote in letters, however, that he had been interested in cave painting while still a student in Rotterdam, and had shared the interest of other art students in ‘a growing number of books on Primitive art; Asian, African, Pacific and Amerindian art.’\(^{192}\) In 1947 he described how he used the works of the ethnologist Leo Frobenius and Herbert Read to convince the

\(^{188}\) Schoon travelled throughout New Zealand in the 1950s and 60s, documenting Maori art, especially carvings at whare runanga (meeting houses), Theo Schoon Estate Archives, Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, Wellington, CA000825, CA000839

\(^{189}\) Schoon’s Portrait of Dennis Knight Turner, c.1944, pastel on paper, 62.5 x 48.5mm, is illustrated in Art New Zealand, no. 95 (Winter 2000), p. 89


\(^{191}\) Damian Skinner, Theo Schoon’s Interaction with Aspects of Maori Art, 1996, p. 53

Department of the rock drawings’ significance and the need to document them. Schoon knew well the wider context for his Maori-inspired work within European modernism, and it does not seem unlikely that he saw such work as the way to make his forced isolation in New Zealand work to his advantage as an artist.

The most extensive published account by Schoon of his attitude towards Maori art is in his book *Jade Country*, published in 1973, about jade carving, especially the traditional Maori and contemporary practice in New Zealand. The book gives insight into the way Schoon considered Maori cultural heritage and of interaction with it by Pakeha visual artists.

Meeting these descendants of the original patrons of the local tradition are amongst my most treasured experiences in art .... For many New Zealanders the interaction between Maori and European art remains little more than an embarrassing academic question, but open-minded understanding leads to appreciation, and this guides the creative mind to use this knowledge constructively. The more I have learned from Maori art, the more I have become convinced of its importance, viability, and potential in New Zealand's contemporary art. The unprejudiced designer emerges with a deep respect for the achievements of many primitive art forms and is invariably inspired by them.

Schoon clearly values Maori art, but views these encounters solely from the perspective of the Pakeha artist. He later refers to his frustration with Pakeha society, as it would seemingly not be able to appreciate Maori art forms until they were understood in the context of ‘primitivism’ as it was employed in European modern art. He does not address, however, the effects of this on Maori culture; his analysis is in terms of a vital New Zealand art made by both Pakeha and Maori artists, but not whether it was appropriate for Pakeha to appropriate from Maori culture. As can be seen from his attitude towards gourd carving, Schoon felt that his work could continue the tradition of Maori visual arts, which denied the full significance of these practices within Maori culture. The Western tradition of the visual arts had long absorbed the religious significance of art objects originally created for Catholic churches or ancient Greek temples, to the point where they could be incorporated into art works without conflicting with the creators’ ritualistic

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195 Schoon, *Jade Country*, p. 96
intentions for these works. In Walter Benjamin's terms, the 'aura' that they had had in their original context had been removed by constant references to them for their meaning in art history, rather than for their original purpose in ritual. Thus we see that when Schoon applied this Western tradition of appropriation to work that still possessed this aura or ritualistic significance there is a collision between the colonisers and the colonised; the former exercising power to forcibly relocate Maori culture within Western art history.

Schoon consciously sought what was unique in New Zealand's culture and society to form authentic contemporary art that could be both relevant to New Zealanders and a new direction in international art. His works reveal the problems of power in colonised cultural spaces, his attempts to appropriate from Maori culture can appear arrogant towards, or disrespectful of, the heritage and culture of Maori people. Schoon embodied the situation of Pakeha artists in New Zealand. As the statement to his 1966 exhibition at the New Vision Gallery in Auckland concluded, 'His particular views, reacting against European art and his concern with a pacific heritage, runs parallel in many ways with the dilemma of New Zealand painting.' The exhibition seems intended to position Schoon in this way, the statement opened:

Theo Schoon was born in Indonesia. His first contact with art was at the abandoned temples of the ancient Hindu Empire. He was sent to art school in Holland. This disparity between East and West has been a constant factor in his critical attitude towards the rather exclusive Dutch tradition. This very conflict gave him an increasing awareness that the universal aspects of art could be the only answer to the parochial concepts of the European art tradition, so dependent on Greco-Roman art. The open-minded embrace of visual art from all cultures was characteristic of all Schoon's work, and this was his strongest influence on Crothall. We can see in Crothall's work a gradual assimilation of the approach to art making found in indigenous art practices, rather than purely the appropriation of the techniques and motifs. It was this approach that was to be influential on the Imitation Realists. The 'universal aspects of art' for which Schoon searched, would emerge in Crothall's work as an understanding of art as a community practice, not one that excluded non-professionals or was separate from daily life. Crothall also looked to the so-called

196 New Vision Gallery, 'Theo Schoon: Exhibition of paintings and relief prints' Exhibition statement and invitation, Auckland, April 1965
'primitive' art of the region to forge a connection between his work and the place in which it was created. Like Schoon, he rejected the traditional hierarchy of media, but his would be radically different to that of his mentor in his use of assembled detritus in his work.

Colin McCahon

Colin McCahon is the other artist identified by Howlett and Brown as having the most influence on Crothall in New Zealand, and through him, Imitation Realism. Within art history McCahon’s status has towered above other artists in New Zealand because of his canonisation in contemporary art internationally. He is best known for the large-scale near-monochromatic paintings that use both image and text to create powerful yet enigmatic reflections on life, spirituality and death. In 1953 McCahon had just been appointed by the new director Eric Westbrook to the Auckland Art Gallery, and he would play a key role in modernising the gallery. McCahon was one of the figures who pushed New Zealand art to have a broader awareness of international contemporary art, as well as Maori art and culture, as an artist, curator and teacher. Schoon had been friends with McCahon since the 1940s and Lois McIvor recalls meeting Crothall at McCahon’s house in the 1960s, so it seems likely that they would have at least been acquaintances in the period before Crothall left for Australia. Both Howlett and Brown remember Crothall speaking about McCahon’s influence – years before McCahon’s work became familiar to Australians – so Crothall certainly knew his work. Contrasting with the ‘metanarrative’ themes in his work is a strand of gentle humour and the influence of comic books, which can be detected both in his use of panels, such as *Six Days in Nelson and Canterbury* (1.25), and the handwritten script which he first used in 1943 and becomes common in his work from 1954. Comic books are particularly relevant to works such as *The Crucifixion according to St Mark* (1.26) with its use of speech bubbles.

199 McIvor, ‘Ross Crothall’ 1997, p. 29
McCahon consciously situated his work in New Zealand. This was recognised by Alexa M. Johnston when she wrote in 1984 with reference to his depiction of Biblical scenes, that:

This is one of McCahon's great strengths. His responses to tradition, both religious and artistic, always involve an acute awareness of his situation as a painter in twentieth century New Zealand; a complex meshing of landscapes and peoples.201

From the 1940s McCahon was deliberately placing his works in the New Zealand landscape. He recognised the shaping influence it had on his work and how different landscapes evoked different responses. He described the experience of returning home to New Zealand after three months in the USA in 1958:

I had seen deserts and tumbleweed in fences and the Salt Lake Flats, and the Faulkner country with magnolias in bloom, cities – taller by far than kauri trees. My lovely kauris became too much for me. I fled north in memory and painted the Northland Panels.202

Painting the Northland Panels was a way to ground himself back in New Zealand after the overwhelming exposure to unfamiliar landscapes. In different ways, McCahon and Schoon both sought to engage with the particularity of place and Crothall would also attempt to evoke it in much of his work, both with the Imitation Realists and subsequently.

The inclusion of humour and text are obvious similarities with Crothall’s work, but the scale and subjects of their works makes them otherwise completely different. Crothall’s works such as I do I do I do (1.28) and Festive cavalier personage with robot bodyguards and lipstick (1.29) use text to make humorous points rather than the religious texts or poetry of McCahon. As in McCahon, Crothall used text to include the title as a part of the work itself, as a commentary on the work and as a part of the composition. As we shall see in chapter four, this would develop to be more significant in his later works, after he pursued this interest through studying lettering and sign writing. Crothall’s work was never on the physical scale of McCahon’s but their use of text shares a diaristic effect, seeming to record something of the artist’s experience but never being completely explicit about what it

was. The content of McCahon’s work is often cryptic, giving scholars much to puzzle over in deciphering the meanings and sources of his works. Much of his work is autobiographical drawing on his interests in poetry, the Bible, people and the landscape he struggled with throughout his life. Greg O’Brien described McCahon’s works as ‘seldom the embodiment of moments of great lucidity or clarity – rather they are memorialised struggles.’ Crothall would follow McCahon’s path of working out a personal vocabulary but one that would not seem so tortured: any causes for doubt would be masked behind humour. The use of text was an important part of Imitation Realist art and Colin McCahon is a more likely influence on this aspect of their work than American or English pop art. It is probably the earliest example of the ongoing influence McCahon would have on Australian art.

In the art scene in Auckland Crothall had thus experienced the work of artists who were focused on exploring contemporary forms of avant-garde art with identifiably New Zealand subject matter.

In Crothall and Brown’s first collaborative painting can be seen an attempt to reflect the cultural environment in which they found themselves. Text in *Sailing to Byzantium* is used to make humorous notations, rather than to ask philosophical questions or for Biblical quotations. *Sailing to Byzantium* offers a commentary of itself: the title is noted along the bottom of the work in lettering by Crothall, and the ‘2.30pm interstellar’ service is specified (1.10.1). The left and right feet of Mirg, a fictional personage, who would appear in several works, are also indicated, despite apparently being his hands. Crothall and Brown here combine the interest that the Imitation Realists had in the everyday life of urban Australia, with the influences Crothall brought from New Zealand, specifically the approach to combining different cultural influences from Schoon, from Maori art and the text and comic book style from McCahon.

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205 Brown, *et al., Colin McCahon*, 2003, p. 41
206 For McCahon’s influence on artists including Imants Tillers and Rosalie Gascoigne, see Jan White, ‘Antipodean Translations: Colin McCahon and his Topoi of Belief’, *Antipodes*, v. 20, no. 1 (June 2006), pp. 4-10
The title is a reference to Yeats, but relocated to the Pacific and, instead of the poet sailing to 'the holy city of Byzantium', the Mug Lair is taking a canoe. Text on the painting informs the viewer that the Mug Lair, 'Warranted' and 'Customs Passed', is being sent 'Xpress Freight to Byzantium' (1.10.2). Yeats' figure of the elderly poet seeks to be gathered 'into the artifice of eternity', to gain immortality through art, whereas here the archetype of the Australian slang term 'Mug Lair' is being sent to be preserved as an 'Archetypal Ooze Dwelling Anthropoid': an ethnographic exhibit rather than Yeats immortal art gallery. Paraphrasing another work from the Western literary canon, William Blake's *The Tiger* is intertwined with the Mug Lair's feet. Instead of the 'fearful symmetry' of Blake's, theirs is a comic-book tiger. Issuing from its mouth is a speech bubble, describing itself as 'burning bright'. The light-hearted approach to these icons of Western literature exemplifies the open attitude that these artists took to culture. Sacred cows were not to be revered, but played with, in order to actively engage with the entirety of the cultural context of which they were a part. This approach, of drawing on everything in their surroundings, was one they had adopted from their understanding of traditional indigenous art from the region. The work combines sources that they had learnt at art school with those they gained from their local environment and abstract patterns from Indigenous arts rather than Western modernism. The panel of the painting was mounted by the artists on the larger panel to give the effect of a frame but making it a part of the work, rather than separating the work from what was around it and vice versa. The combination of such diverse cultural influences sought to express their experience of life in an urban settler society in the Pacific and the different strands of culture it combined. It was a deliberate juxtaposition of elements from all parts of their cultural heritage. This allowed them to find an authentic form for their work as Australian and New Zealand artists; as will be discussed below, this was an ongoing concern amongst Australian artists, and Imitation Realism can be seen as a response to this situation.

**The Transtasmanian Wendigo and Antipodean arguments**

The engagement with regional identity was central to Imitation Realism. Instead of looking to Europe or the United States the group wanted to form art out of their own surroundings. As we have seen, contemporary New Zealand art shaped Crothall's art philosophy and practice. Crothall was consciously aware of his regional identity and it was expressed in a persona that he created while living with Brown, the
Transtasmanian Wendigo. According to Brown, this character, represented by works in the exhibition, was invented as a personification of his 'mission ... of cultural exchange between Sydney and his home town, Auckland.' In this section I first consider the debates that surrounded the idea of 'Australian' art and its relation to the traditional European centres of fine art, through the Antipodean Manifesto and the response to the Whitechapel exhibition. I then examine the Imitation Realists explanation of their work, a kind of 'anti-manifesto', that appeared the CAS VIC Broadsheet just after their Melbourne exhibition.

After the infamous Antipodeans exhibition and manifesto of 1959, the nature of 'Australian' art was fiercely debated by many artists. In Australian cultural thought at this time the national identity was continually discussed. A.A. Phillips had diagnosed 'The Cultural Cringe' in 1950: the belief that any Australian effort in the arts or academia is automatically inferior to that produced overseas (referring to certain centres of Western culture). Russel Ward had traced the development of a distinctly Australian character through history since European settlement in The Australian Legend. Australia’s geopolitical identity and role was changing as a result of both World Wars, the decline of the British Empire and the United States’ struggle against communism, which made Australia an important ally to the USA in the region. Australia’s changing demographics and increasing material wealth also gave new dimensions to Australian society. Art had a greater prominence in society, due in part to both expanded secondary and tertiary study of art and art history and to media attention on contemporary art exhibitions, such as industry-sponsored art prizes, and the cultural component to events like the Melbourne Olympics in 1956. There was less of a sense of ‘mother England’ and more of a

207 The 'wendigo' is taken from 'the folklore of the northern Algonquian Indians: a cannibalistic giant, the transformation of a person who has eaten human flesh. 'Wendigo', Oxford English Dictionary.
208 Brown, 'Kite II: part 1', p. 5
211 Australian cultural thought regarding the modernism and the national identity between the two World Wars is explicated by John Williams, The Quarantined Culture: Australian Reactions to Modernism 1913-1939, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995
213 Palmer, Centre of the Periphery., pp. 214-230, Heathcote, A Quiet Revolution, pp. 50-53
desire for a unique Australian culture – and constant discussion as to what that might entail. Whitehouse argues that the implications of this for the visual arts were that:

The 1950s were a period when artists were under constant pressure to serve the national agenda. A postwar expansion of tertiary education combined with a vast number of corporate, media and institution-sponsored art prizes and competitions, encouraged greater public involvement in the arts and expectations of artists as intellectuals and opinion makers. At the same time, Cold War politics intruded into cultural production as anti-communist drives threatened intellectual freedom, and forced artists to redefine cultural activism, distancing art from all political agendas.²¹⁴

In this context Elwyn Lynn and others associated with the CAS NSW were attempting to position a local form of Abstract Expressionism as ‘the advanced stream of modernism’²¹⁵ in opposition to the so-called ‘Charm School’. This was informed by abstraction in contemporary art from the USA and Europe, as well as the ‘intense debate about the nature of Australian art and its relation to society.’²¹⁶ Whitehouse concluded that throughout the 1950s the CAS NSW, and especially Lynn, attempted to maintain ‘ideological identity and autonomy in an increasingly institutionalised and commercialised art infrastructure.’²¹⁷ True art was distinct from commerce and kitsch, as Lynn argued in his first article as editor in the CAS Broadsheet in 1955.²¹⁸ ‘Kitsch is made for a market, whereas art doesn’t know its market and audience until it is created. Kitsch is adulterated imitation.’²¹⁹ The Charm School seemed to cater to such a ready market. The term ‘Charm School’ originated in art criticism in Sydney from the 1940s and 1950s.²²⁰ It referred to a number of artists who were perceived as dominant within the visual arts in Sydney, originally centred around Merioola and its residents. The artists included Donald Friend, Margaret Olley, David Strachan, Cedric Flower, Justin O’Brien, Peter Kaiser and Jean Bellette. Their work was considered objectionable for seeming to

²¹⁴ Whitehouse, The Contemporary Art Society of NSW, pp., 12-13
²¹⁵ Whitehouse, The Contemporary Art Society of NSW, p. 11
²¹⁶ Whitehouse, The Contemporary Art Society of NSW, p. 15
²¹⁷ Whitehouse, The Contemporary Art Society of NSW, p. 189
²¹⁸ Elwyn Lynn, ‘Abstract and Kitsch’, CAS NSW Broadsheet, April 1955, pp. 2-4
²²⁰ The term ‘charm school’ appears to have been an invention by Paul Haefliger who employed it in his review of Jocelyn Rickards’ work, where he noted that she would have to abandon the ‘charm-school’ when she ‘leaves the cloistered precincts of Merioola and experiences some of the vicissitudes of life’. Art Critic [Paul Haefliger], ‘Artist relies on charm’, SMH, 20 October 1948 (My thanks to Sasha Grishin for alerting me to Haefliger’s use of the term). The term Charm School gained currency in the CAS NSW Broadsheet in the late 1950s and popularity in the early 1960s in the writings of Robert Hughes, see Dutton, The innovators, 1986, pp. 98-99
concentrate on style over substance, for being overly decorative rather than probing the substance and content of art.

Lynn received and promoted the Imitation Realists’ work in the context of contemporary European and American artists work with non-traditional materials (whose work will be considered further in chapter two). This positioned the Imitation Realists as practitioners of the next phase of the avant-garde art that the CAS promoted. However, Crothall and Brown consciously attempted to give a specific, local identity to their work, and both made this central to their practice beyond Imitation Realism. It was the local context of Australian art that was more significant to Imitation Realism than the ‘junkster’ artists Lynn referenced in the introduction to their Melbourne exhibition catalogue.221

Along with the broader debates about what it was to be ‘Australian’ in the 1950s, the art world itself was changing. In the second half of the 1950s there was a change in exhibition practice; as more commercial galleries opened,222 solo exhibitions were gradually becoming more common, rather than the predominance of competitions and art society shows.223 During this period the nature and possibility for a uniquely ‘Australian’ form of art was debated by artists, writers and curators both in Australia and overseas. The debate tied into broader discussions about the Australian national identity, its role in the British Commonwealth and its relationship with America as the postwar global superpower. Figurative and abstract art were considered as evidence for broader allegiances and the mud thrown at both obscured the complexities of the art. The Imitation Realists to some extent created their work partly in a rejection of such debates, partly in an attempt to create a form of art that was a true reflection of the identity they saw in the Pacific region.

222 While the Macquarie Galleries had operated since 1925, the David Jones Gallery, Grosvenor Galleries and The Clune Gallery opened in 1957, Blaxland Gallery in Farmers Department store opened 1958, the Barry Stern Gallery, and the Rudy Komon Gallery opened 1959, the Dominion Galleries and Hungry Horse Gallery opened in 1962, and Gallery A (Sydney) in 1964
Antipodean arguments

The Imitation Realists sought to express a regional identity in their work and this was informed and shaped by the context of the Australian art scene more broadly. The Sydney art world in the 1950s was less complex than that of today: there were fewer publications, galleries, art schools and artists. Since Art in Australia ceased publication in 1942 and until Art and Australia began publication in 1963 there was no national visual arts journal. Modern Art News made a brief attempt to fill this gap in 1959 but only lasted two issues. Instead, those interested in the discussion of Australian art relied on literary journals such as Quadrant and Meanjin and art criticism in the mainstream press, in newspapers and magazines such as the Observer and Nation. The newsletters of the different branches of the CAS in Brisbane, Adelaide, Melbourne and Sydney became an essential source for detailed information about exhibitions and competitions, and for discussion about both international and local contemporary art, as well as art world issues. The NSW Broadsheet was the most substantial of these publications and played a key role in advancing the Imitation Realists. Lynn was the editor from April 1955 and he extended its coverage from being like a ‘parish newsletter’ to something that aimed to keep artists informed about international contemporary art, major exhibitions and publications. As discussed in detail in the next chapter, members reported to the Broadsheet while travelling overseas on the successes of Australian art and on developments in international contemporary art. Lectures were also held for members by the society, about art history, contemporary art and art techniques.

The debate in the late 1950s and early 1960s about what distinctively ‘Australian’ art would be like is particularly clear in the discussions that surrounded the Antipodeans exhibition and manifesto, and then the exhibition Recent Australian Painting 1961 at the Whitechapel Gallery, London. The Antipodeans’ exhibition, at the Victorian Artists’ Society (August 1959), was a show by a group of established Australian artists: Charles Blackman, Arthur Boyd, David Boyd, John Brack, Robert Dickerson, John Perceval and Clifton Pugh. If it were not for the manifesto published in the catalogue, largely written by Bernard Smith, from contributions by each artist and signed by them all, it would barely rate a mention in Australian art history. The

manifesto proclaimed that as modern artists the authors felt abstract art threatened 'the existence of painting as an independent art' by its 'bland and pretentious mysteries', revealing 'a death of the mind and spirit', incapable of true communication. They likewise rejected the 'dominance of socialist realism in the East' for constraining the independence of the artist. They denied that they were 'seeking to create a national style.'

But we have both a right and a duty to draw upon our experience both of society and nature in Australia for the materials of our art. For Europeans this country has always been a primordial and curious land ... for us, Europeans by heritage (but not by birth) much of this strangeness lingers. It is natural therefore that we should see and experience nature differently in some degree from the artists of the northern hemisphere. We live in a young society still making its myths. The emergence of myth is a continuous social activity. In the growth and transformation of its myths a society achieves its own sense of identity. In this process the artist may play a creative and liberating role. The ways in which a society images its own feelings and attitudes in myth provides him with one of the deepest sources of art. Nevertheless our final obligation is neither to place nor nation. 225

The manifesto reveals the importance of Herbert Read's theory of the significance of Jungian archetypal forms in art and that of the debate throughout the 1950s surrounding the artist's role in society. 226 The emphasis on the European reaction to the Australian landscape, and the opportunity for Australian artists to offer something unique to the northern hemisphere, reflects Smith's doctoral thesis, completed in 1957. Published in 1960, European Vision and the South Pacific 227 examined 'the significance of the impact of the Pacific upon Europe.' 228 Smith was later to describe the manifesto as 'the most radical act I ever performed in my life'. 229 He has argued since that the motivation for it was to protest against all forms of political interference. This encompassed both American Cold War politics and the accompanying emphasis on abstraction as the expression of freedom from tyranny, as well as the propaganda pieces that characterised Soviet and Communist

226 This is detailed and discussed in chapter two.
229 Bernard Smith, 'My Dear Humphrey', *Art Monthly*, issue 21, June 1989, p. 4
Party approved art. Its purpose was therefore to protest any prescriptive political formula for art, not to formulate one. However, despite arguing for the essential freedom of the artist, by calling themselves ‘The Antipodeans’, declaring the artist’s ‘duty’ and concluding with the ‘necessity’ to defend the image, the group asserted a specifically ‘Australian’ quality in their art that was defined against ‘American-based modes of abstraction.’ The manifesto’s demand was seemingly to create a unique Australian art through emphasising its difference from that of the Northern Hemisphere, and that this could only effectively be done in figurative art. When Lynn read the manifesto he commented that it was the ‘only conservative manifesto in history’, a response that was largely representative of the reaction of contemporary artists in Sydney.

In *European Vision* and the *Antipodean Manifesto*, and more recent works such as *Modernism’s History*, Smith has argued for the validity and significance of the peripheries speaking back to the centre, the colonies to the colonisers. According to Smith, The Antipodeans were so named because the original intention was to organise an exhibition in London, debating ‘essentially an aesthetic question, the relative merits of figural and abstract art’. The name served to identify the origin of their work, to posit Australia as an alternate voice internationally to the promotion of figurative or abstract art for political ends. However, used in Melbourne and with seven of the eight participants then living in Melbourne, it served to exacerbate the tensions and perceived divide between the Sydney and Melbourne art worlds. They railed that abstract art had ‘dazzled’ young artists ‘wherever we look, New York, Paris, London, San Francisco or Sydney’, but that actually ‘the great Tachiste Emperor has no clothes … He is only a blot – a most colourful, elegant and shapely

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231 Smith, *Two Commentaries*, 1984, p. 5
232 Pinson, Elwyn Lynn, 2002, p. 38
This both evaded the specificities and local circumstances of the development of abstract art in each of those locations and resulted in the perception that they sought to withdraw ‘within the local’ out of a fear that the ‘Sydney abstractionists held the future.’ This focus on the region can be contrasted with that of the Imitation Realists: both sought to find a unique voice, but the Antipodeans were committed to broadcasting this voice back to London, the cultural centre, whereas the Imitation Realists wanted to express it locally.

Survey exhibitions of Australian art at this time continued the attempt to identify what was characteristic of ‘Australian’ art. Smith’s contact with Sir Kenneth Clark about an exhibition in London of The Antipodeans contributed to the subsequent arrival of Bryan Robertson, the director of the Whitechapel Gallery and of the 1961 exhibition *Recent Australian Painting*. Instead of the smaller exhibition of seven artists that Smith had envisioned, Robertson assembled a larger exhibition as a survey of contemporary Australian painting, of both abstract and figurative art. In the 1950s and early 1960s the Whitechapel was associated with the promotion and support for avant-garde practices in contemporary art, as one of the first galleries to give survey exhibitions to younger British and American artists and was considered a shortcut to critical recognition. The 1957 Sidney Nolan retrospective was credited with ensuring international fame for Nolan’s work. The Whitechapel director Bryan Robertson was a key figure in the developing interest in Australian art in the English art world. Robertson was the first English curator who travelled to Australia to curate an exhibition of Australian painting. Through the exhibitions he curated at the Whitechapel, Robertson made known avant-garde contemporary art, including the Independent Group and the American Abstract Expressionists, such as Jackson Pollock. This meant that Australian artists received support from those interested in more radical forms of modern art, as well as those with fairly conservative taste.

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239 John Douglas Pringle and Sir Kenneth Clark, ‘Nolan’ *The Observer Weekend Review*, feature article, 12 June 1960
such as Sir Kenneth Clark, the former director of the National Gallery of Art in London, and Sir John Rothenstein, the director of the Tate Gallery.\textsuperscript{240}

The exhibition received wide coverage in the British press, which was keenly followed in Australia, especially by artists. As Robertson wrote in the catalogue, Australian artists ‘are at once passionately interested in what is Australian art and highly suspicious of any answer.’\textsuperscript{241} The July 1961 edition of the CAS NSW Broadsheet included a seventeen page supplement of excerpts from the exhibition catalogue and the various British press reviews of the exhibition. Lynn commented that ‘critics and commentators’ were ‘intent on finding Australia’, hence the emphasis on the geography and sociology of Australia in the reviews; his conclusion was that the reception in London has been staggering, but in the long run it will be local appreciation that counts and there’s a moral somewhere that in the fifty artists represented in the exhibition ten are living in London.\textsuperscript{242}

Robertson characterised both abstract and figurative Australian painting as sharing ‘a general pull towards metaphysical abstraction … [searching for] some transcendent image, to reveal itself.’ He attributed to Australian artists a freshness of vision, ‘absolutely authentic … without embarrassment [or] recourse to decoration’,\textsuperscript{243} they were without the ‘problem of a landscape saturated with the gaze of five centuries of artists’\textsuperscript{244} and experienced a closeness to the landscape that European artists did not

\textsuperscript{240} Both of these influential figures in postwar British art had a preference for figurative art and played a significant role in its promotion, believing abstract art would ultimately be exhausted. Rothenstein wrote that ‘I fail, beyond a certain point, to respond to the uncommunicative forms and relationships which constitute at the same time the language and message of abstract art.’ in Modern English Painters II: Lewis to Moore London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1956, p. 261, for a summary of Clark’s views see Garlake, \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 11-14, and Meryle Secrest, \textit{Kenneth Clark: A biography}, London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 1984, pp. 110-12, 206-8. Sir Kenneth Clark supported artists such as Sidney Nolan and Russell Drysdale, after his 1949 visit to Australia. See his autobiography, \textit{Other half: a self portrait}, London : J. Murray, 1977, p. 147ff, and Lou Klepac, \textit{Russell Drysdale}, Sydney: Murdoch Books, 1996, pp. 121, 155. Rothenstein sought to hold a survey exhibition of Australian painting from the mid-1950s. Minutes of a meeting of the Commonwealth Art Advisory Board refer to the approach by Rothenstein on behalf of the Tate Gallery to hold this exhibition, which was refused on the grounds that the Committee were unable to meet the specified requirements for the exhibition, 8 February 1955, p. 6, minutes are held in the file: Commonwealth Art Advisory Board - Panel of artists, A3753, 1972/1458, 1954 – 1972, Canberra: National Archives of Australia. The exhibition was ultimately held in 1963, \textit{Australian Painting: Colonial Impressionist Contemporary} at the Tate Gallery, London, and was curated by the Commonwealth Art Advisory Board.


\textsuperscript{242} Elwyn Lynn, ‘Recent Australian Painting at the Whitechapel Galleries, London’, CAS NSW Broadsheet, July 1961, p. 4

\textsuperscript{243} Robertson \textit{Recent Australian Painting 1961}, p. 11

\textsuperscript{244} Robertson \textit{Recent Australian Painting 1961}, p. 8
possess. In his catalogue essay Robert Hughes attributed the uniqueness of Australian painting to the country’s isolation from the Renaissance tradition. The Tatler cited this isolation as the reason for the fresh vision of Australian artists, whereas modern artists from the ‘tired old continent’ of Europe endeavoured unsuccessfully to start ‘from scratch’, ‘Australian artists had it as a birthright!’

Smith and Lynn agreed that the interest in Australian art for its depictions of the strange and other worldly was an extremely disappointing result for an exhibition that both had wanted. In 1984 Smith considered it to be a ‘disaster’ that the art was presented as ‘a splendid example of a raw-boned art that had arisen in a country that possessed no awareness of tradition.’ It ‘packaged’ Australian art ‘as exoticism … high fashion for a season and then discarded’, rather than presenting it as an alternate voice, one from within the European tradition but with a different perspective on politics and contemporary art. To some extent this view can be seen as a later denial of an argument in the manifesto: that Australian artists have a different experience of nature, due to the lingering ‘strangeness’ of the Australian landscape, that they can offer the northern hemisphere. The apparent contradiction between Smith’s later views and the manifesto can partly be seen as a result of the difficulty of his task in marrying together the statements of different artists into one manifesto. His argument on the conflicting roles of the neo-colonial artist had also continued to develop throughout the intervening years.

Smith held that the descendents of colonisers were ‘displaced Europeans’ unable to reject the masterpieces of European art that were cast aside by the European avant-garde for ‘representing the dead weight of tradition.’ The European avant-garde had sought fresh inspiration from so-called primitive art, to which the neo-colonial avant-garde were unable to respond as they had been taught ‘to despise tribal peoples

245 Robertson Recent Australian Painting 1961, p. 9
246 ‘A loud ticking from down under’, The Tatler, 21 June 1961
247 Smith, ‘The Truth About the Antipodeans’, 1984, pp. 5-6
249 David Boyd, Clifford Pugh, John Brack and Charles Blackman all provided statements for the manifesto, with David Boyd’s and John Brack’s being the most divergent, according to Smith, see Smith, ‘The Truth About the Antipodeans’, 1984, p. 204
and reject their art. They treasured European masterpieces 'as emblems of their own displaced ethnicity.' It resulted in a situation where they either had to emigrate and try to contribute to the development of European modernism, or they could remain in their neo-colonial societies and seek to create an art in the spatial interstices that [were] opening out between their own European colonial art and the contemporary arts of the indigenous people with whom they shared the same land.

The work of the Imitation Realists can be seen as that of artists committed to 'staying put'. They sought to authentically depict their experience and not romanticise the 'strangeness' of the landscape, as for them it was not. They concentrated on their immediate surrounds rather than trying to follow the developments of international contemporary art. Their own environment was also not that of remote or rural Australia, which seemed to garner so much attention from artists. In a review titled 'Abs and figs for export', Robert Hughes observed how the landscape seemed to figure throughout contemporary Australian painting, both abstract and figurative.

In some cases, the pursuit of landscape is only a rationalisation for timid abstract painters ... An abstract image becomes more accessible if you call it a landscape. But behind most Australian art today lies an intense concern with physical experience, and landscape is one of the most accessible of all experiences. And so it crops up constantly, unselfconsciously: obsessively.

Landscape was primary in the way that Australian artists engaged with place. Imitation Realism shared the 'concern with physical experience' but wanted it to be the immediate, lived environment, not places remote to them. They attempted to absorb all influences to produce something genuinely of the region, that in Phillips' terms, would demonstrate the 'relaxed erectness of carriage', opposite to 'the Strut' of aggressively an Australian work, that was instead 'the art of being unselfconsciously ourselves'. These influences included all parts of life that they found themselves surrounded by - of the fine arts they saw in art galleries, the debris they picked up off the streets, the kitsch they found at the supermarket.

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251 Smith, 'Modernism and Post-Modernism: A Neo-Colonial Viewpoint', 1992
252 Smith, 'Modernism and Post-Modernism: A Neo-Colonial Viewpoint', 1992
253 Smith, 'Modernism and Post-Modernism: A Neo-Colonial Viewpoint', 1992
255 Phillips, 'The Cultural Cringe', p. 302
Key to Imitation Realism was the relationship between art and the society by which it was surrounded locally and internationally. They did not share the isolationist attitude that can be discerned in the Antipodean Manifesto, they were open to appreciate, respect and be influenced by – indeed, imitate – the work of artists internationally. But they rejected the idea that Australian artists needed to desperately watch what was happening overseas, lest they be revealed as out of touch provincials. Nor did they seek to jump on the next boat out of Sydney to search out the ‘centre’. They saw where they were as a potential cultural centre. Along with analysis of the works they created, the Imitation Realists’ response to the debates within the art world can be seen in their statement in the CAS VIC Broadsheet. Written at the time of their Melbourne exhibition, it makes clear how Imitation Realism emerged in the context of the debates that surrounded the Antipodean Manifesto and the possibility of ‘Australian’ art.

**Victorian CAS Broadsheet March 1962**

The statement that they made in the Broadsheet is the most extensive the artists ever made as a group. It can be read as a kind of ‘anti-manifesto’ as the authors’ main concern is the complete freedom of artists to choose materials, style and subject without consideration to any ideology, artistic or otherwise. The article was titled ‘Zed to 3 in Subterrania’ and the words were repeated throughout the densely detailed cover illustration. This included collage, of a face that was combination spaceman and tribal mask, as well as the artists’ nicknames written in decorative scripts. Their essay demonstrates their working method as a group. It is a collaborative piece but their individual sections are identified, they do not write as one voice, instead expressing their individual opinions and expanding on those of the others. They use humour disarmingly, refusing the separation between it and the expression of more serious ideas. The humour can, however, at first reading, obscure the seriousness of their intent to disrupt the conventions of the art world.

Of the three, Lanceley wrote the least, only three paragraphs of the six pages, the remainder of which was split evenly between Crothall and Brown. Crothall opened the piece, writing that:

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256 Mike Brown, Ross Crothall and Colin Lanceley, ‘Zed to 3 in Subterrania’, Broadsheet, CAS VIC, March 1962, pp. 2-8
New things in art can always be taken as a joke – until they are taken seriously. ... Sometimes the seemingly incongruous materials we have used, the seemingly incongruous images which we have produced, have, in fact originated from an I-don't-care attitude, or from purely iconoclastic delight, or from the sheer joy of conscious and unaffected whimsy. But only sometimes. There are times when the joking mood has abruptly ceased and turned into something more serious – like this little bit of verbal filigree which I am writing now, which is as serious as hell. Yes serious. And perhaps to you the reader, still seeming to be a joke.257

In this piece Crothall’s love of words and writing can be seen, as he plays with words and their meanings and acknowledges the possibility that the role of humour in their works may appear to detract from them, for those that are not used to finding jokes in art. The use of humour here is almost as a dare, challenging the reader to see that although there was humour and puns there was also serious thought about art. With Crothall’s next point he arrives early at postmodernism, when he writes:

that our work doesn’t pretend to be anything else than what it is, and that you yourself, on seeing what we have done, can decide what it is for yourself ... we ourselves, the makers of the work itself, have decided for ourselves, what the nature of the work is for us ... as soon as we feel certain of what our work is for us, we discover new implications, new possibilities of adaption of our work in new directions ... and all that we have, all that we truly know, is the trail of objects and experiences which we have left behind us.258

Imitation Realism is here very much a process of discovery rather than a destination. It is a framework for the creation of art as a response to life, rather than an ideology or a manifesto. Lanceley followed Crothall’s opening remarks with his short statement, which focuses firstly on the critical response to Imitation Realism and then to his attitude to his materials, which increasingly became the focus of his work in the early to mid-1960s. He wrote that

critics of our work ... seem fond of first looking for the antecedents to what is confronting them. It is the safe road of reassurance. ... Imitation Realism is not Anti-Art, although many Champions of Art maybe anti Imitation Realism.

I have no bias as far as the orthodoxy of materials is concerned. I take from the world in which I live, the materials which I encounter in living, much of this is junk objects, discarded by our society as it lives itself out. Most objects bear the scars of living, their usefulness seemingly having been exhausted and they possess a strange sense

257 Crothall in ‘Zed to 3 in Subterrania’, p. 2
258 Crothall in ‘Zed to 3 in Subterrania’, pp. 2-3
of personality and character ... the criteria of choice is personal poetry.

In the collage of incongruous objects of which some of my paintings are made the individual nature of the objects is never completely lost, although they become transformed in the mental journey of expression.259

Like Crothall, Lanceley writes about his works in terms of a journey, but for Lanceley it is the materials that the works are made from that have taken the journey, and it is through them that he explores his work. As will be discussed in chapter four, his reading of Vance Packard is apparent when he describes 'society as it lives itself out', a quite different avenue of thought to that Crothall and Brown take in their statements about the group's work. The difference Lanceley brought to the group as a whole is acknowledged in Crothall's next section:

When Countdown Lanceley joined us he accelerated and broadened and deepened the trend of I R immeasurably. With his first I R painting he introduced a collation of actions, objects, and abstractions, where orthodox procedures, skills, and techniques, became part and parcel with his easy flow of collage. So at this point, I might as well say he extended the I R concept by making it infinitely extendable – to include as many ways of making art, and kinds of approach to art, as the personalities of Imitation Realists could involve.260

Had Lanceley not joined then, the group would likely have been quite different, with a stronger sense of the ideas that Brown and Crothall shared, along with Magda Kohn, Peggy Gale and Leonora Howlett, to varying degrees. With Lanceley on board the group project seems to have become a 'broader church'. It now included Lanceley's professional training in the traditional Western fine arts – the only one of the three to finish the five year course at the NAS – along with his increasing preoccupation with the worn out and used up detritus of urban society for its capacity to convey that 'strange sense of personality and character'.

Brown wrote his first section following Lanceley's, and identified the motivation in the group's early works as an attempt to create work that responded to the experience of contemporary life. He was going to respond to questions about how Imitation Realism had started, but found that 'although I am a member of it the history of the

259 Lanceley in 'Zed to 3 in Subterrania', p. 4
260 Crothall in 'Zed to 3 in Subterrania', p. 5
A. I. R. group eludes me"\textsuperscript{261} and found that in trying to describe the beginning of Imitation Realism 'we come across the one difficulty that beset us from the start, an inconvenience my colleague Crotto mentioned earlier in the day, the trouble is, the difficulty about it is to try to work out where we’re up to.'\textsuperscript{262} He identified the earliest Imitation Realist pieces – Crothall’s \textit{Cigarette Mural}:

1500 Craven A cigarettes in an intricately uninteresting pattern on a piece of tattered Cane-ite – maybe his despair concerning the irrelevance of the general run of modern art to modern life led him to the desperate deliberate step of wasting all those cigarettes.\textsuperscript{263}

Along with his work \textit{Mary Lou}, ‘a crude and rudimentary woman figure out of materials that were deliberately incongruous in their degree of valubleness and aesthetic appeal’ out of a determination ‘to make something as horribly and deliciously eclectic as Western Civilisation.’\textsuperscript{264} His comments on ‘modern life’ and ‘Western Civilisation’ reveal that the group saw a division between their experience of life and contemporary art and that they were trying to find a form for their work that made a connection between the two.

In Crothall’s second section he insisted on Imitation Realism’s freedom from any kind of ideology. He articulated more clearly the crucial attitudes of the Imitation Realists towards their work:

The conscious side of I R seems to obstruct the pigeon-holing of particular art forms, or of particular objectives in art – and the most consistent characteristic of Imitation Realist work, seems to have been that the work, as a whole, has organically and naturally evolved. Yet our work has not slavishly followed its own organic developments at some points it even contradicts them. Thus, the situation has arisen that nothing in the I R ideology is sacrosanct, and therefore the idea of an I R ideology of any sort is immediately absurd nonsense. It merely means that some things can be said about what Imitation Realism tends to do, and that only in so far as it does these things, may I R assume its own specific and definable identity. ...

Let it be said then, as an intellectual Life-Saver – that Imitation Realism merely tends to eschew the use of formal values for their own sake ... And perhaps as an intellectual laxative – let it be said that the only kinds of prejudices which our work might seem to throw up, are restricted to the recurring natural impulses of ourselves as individuals. We are people after all, and the limitations of our work is contained

\textsuperscript{261} Brown, in \textit{‘Zed to 3 in Subterraria’}, p. 4
\textsuperscript{262} Brown, in \textit{‘Zed to 3 in Subterraria’}, p. 5
\textsuperscript{263} Brown, in \textit{‘Zed to 3 in Subterraria’}, p. 5
\textsuperscript{264} Brown, in \textit{‘Zed to 3 in Subterraria’}, p. 5
within us, and within our response to the environment. It can be said that we feel free to represent phenomena of the visible world, yet never for its own sake — and likewise, that we feel free to give vent to the reality of deeply felt inner experiences, should we want to ... To ask What is this thing, What does I R mean — such enigmatic questions do no harm, for they are almost conditionally unanswerable — excepting, that Imitation Realism affords greater freedoms of expression than had hitherto been the case.\textsuperscript{265}

What becomes increasingly clear throughout the text is the importance of the individual experience in providing the raw material for the creation of art, rather than expectations from traditional fine art practices, art training or existing art movements. As we shall see in the next chapter, the terms Crothall uses — ‘organic’, ‘formal values’ — were ones familiar to readers of both Herbert Read and the CAS NSW Broadsheet. Yet while acknowledging their importance Crothall denies that they ultimately determined the form of Imitation Realist work. In contrast to the view Lynn expressed in ‘Abstract and Kitsch’ regarding the purity of true art, Crothall finds such ‘sacrosanct’ ideas ‘absurd’ within Imitation Realism. As will be seen in the following chapter in more detail, the works of the Imitation Realists provide a unique response to the totality of their environment in urban Australia of the late 1950s and early 1960s.

Brown continued on from Crothall, and offers a connection between the development of Imitation Realism and Australian art history:

And maybe the seeds of Imitation Realism were planted way back in the 12th Century, when Alberto Nolan, Albrecht Tucker and Giovanni Boyd — and also Michael Angelo Drysdale — broke out of the straight jacket of futuristic action painting, decreed as the official art-form of the United States of Milan, and dazed the astonished world to view their painterly anthologies of Antipodean pre-history. Their love of the art of mythologizing on popular and unpopular themes has been perpetuated in a somewhat Imitation Realist fashion by our happy band of Irritation Realtors.\textsuperscript{266}

Like the Imitation Realists these painters were interested in Australian subject matter, and not in following what was deemed fashionable internationally. Although Brown is referring here to the artists who had begun this in the 1940s he does so in the terms of the Antipodean Manifesto. Of the artists he listed only Boyd was involved in both, the others all being overseas by the late 1950s and/or unwilling to

\textsuperscript{265} Crothall in ‘Zed to 3 in Subterrania’, pp. 6-7
\textsuperscript{266} Brown, in ‘Zed to 3 in Subterrania’, p. 7
participate with that group. When he describes the rejection of ‘futuristic action painting’ he especially echoes the *Antipodean Manifesto*. This indicates that to some extent he shared that group’s aim of finding an identifiably Australian form of art and mythology, one that did not continue traditions from half a world away. But with Imitation Realism, Brown found a radically different way to do use ‘popular and unpopular themes’.

He continued this final section of the piece with a description of the Imitation Realists response to mass urban culture:

Modern artists have always been concerned with an attempt to slow down and eventually halt the giant tidal wave of sick sentiment, piebald absurdity, ribald inanity, skewbald insanity, tasteless sensationalism, and corrupted vulgarianism that rushes through the 20th Century cultural scene with gathering speed. Not wanting to become part of the wave, artists have built walls and dykes to try and stop it, they have climbed ivory towers and studiously ignored it ... Perhaps our new direction in art was born with a quite sudden realization of the fact that we were powerless to stop it, that no power on earth could ever slow it down.

So we have bought ourselves the latest featherweight imitation-foam-plastic surf-boards and with these we joyfully ride the wave ... we pour all the boredom, all the commonplaceness and straightoutsilly-rubbish, as well as any prettiness, or tizziness or cissyness or any heart-rending glorious beauty that happens to have been left lying around, we pour it all into our paintings and sculptures until they seem to us to yawn, sit up, blink their eyes and start to be filled with a life of their own. 267

We can see from Brown’s words how the group felt that much of contemporary life was deemed as kitsch by modern artists, who attempted to create work in isolation from it. Instead of judging what was worthy to include in the fine arts they decided to embrace the entirety of their surroundings and include whatever they had to hand in their works. In the Imitation Realists statement overall can be seen an attempt to explain their work as an alternative to the debates surrounding the *Antipodean Manifesto* and the Whitechapel exhibition. Instead of prescriptive definitions of what was or was not ‘Australian’ art, the Imitation Realists sought to give free rein to their creative will and let the viewer interpret the resulting works for themselves. They wanted to break down barriers between ‘kitsch’ and ‘art’ and insist on the primacy of the individual’s creative will rather than any external style or influence.

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267 Brown, in ‘Zed to 3 in Subterrania’, p. 7
Conclusion

Imitation Realism emerged out of a desire, shared by Crothall, Lanceley and Brown, to find an alternative to the forms and philosophies of art that were then prevalent in Sydney. They formed a different idea of the artist than that that was modelled by inscrutable teachers such as Passmore and Miller. Brown and Lanceley rebelled against the conservative curriculum of the NAS and responded to the ideas that Crothall brought from New Zealand. The milieu of which Crothall was a part in 1950s Auckland provided ideas about how art could engage with place and identity. Schoon and McCahon demonstrated a different approach, inspired by indigenous arts of the region. This gave the Imitation Realists impetus to explore new forms and materials for their work. They deliberately responded to the entirety of their surroundings, incorporating the materiality of daily life into their work – resulting in a dramatically different form of ‘Australian’ art.

Assemblage offered them a way to bypass the debate between figurative and abstract painting and include the entirety of their surroundings in their work. As will be shown in the next chapter, it also meant that their work was seen to be a part of the next generation of avant-garde artists internationally. Lynn was to position their work as the next phase of work that furthered and continued the CAS’s attempts to promote contemporary art. In doing so, their work was aligned with the use of assemblage internationally, rather than for its distinctly local context. Viewing the work in the context of the Antipodean Manifesto reveals how the Imitation Realists used assemblage a way to avoid the ideological associations of both figurative and abstract painting. Assemblage asserted their freedom as artists to use whatever materials and subject matter they desired. It provided a form of untrammelled creativity where anything and everything could be incorporated into the work, either culturally or physically.
Chapter two
Collage and Assemblage 1912 – 1962

The most immediately striking aspect of Imitation Realism is the artists’ use of materials. They paid no heed to traditional techniques; instead of the art supply store they relied on back lanes, supermarkets and hardware stores. The extent and form of their use of collage and assemblage was new in Australian art. In this chapter I will examine the use of collage and assemblage internationally, considering how it related to art in Australia in general and to the Imitation Realists in particular. More than just a concern with form motivated their use of materials; instead a desire to capture a sense of the experience of life propelled them onto the streets to find their subjects and media. With the use of assemblage they found a way to create art that authentically responded to the Australian urban environment. In doing so their work can be seen to propose a form of ‘Australian’ art that bypassed the debates surrounding figurative and abstract painting that were discussed in the previous chapter. In this chapter I will embed Imitation Realism within the period internationally, paying close attention to artists from the 1940s to the 1960s who shared their desire to connect their work to contemporary life through the use of assemblage. It can be seen through this how assemblage was frequently employed as a strategy of dissent from traditional arts practice.

This chapter is divided into three sections, in the first I discuss the earliest uses of collage in modern art by the Cubists, examining the notion that the use of collage breaks down the boundary between art and life, within the framework of relativity theory proposed by Donald Kuspit. Dada and Surrealism are then considered, both formative movements in modern art that shaped the way subsequent artists would use collage. Both were influential on philosophies of art in the 1950s, including that of the Imitation Realists. The history of Australian artists’ use of collage is discussed to establish the context for the Imitation Realists. Given the existing histories of collage and assemblage I do not attempt an exhaustive survey of its use. The artists discussed in this chapter are those illustrative of the potential and possibilities that the Imitation Realists also found in the use of assemblage.
There have been numerous substantial surveys of the collage and assemblage that will be referred to in this chapter. These started with *The Art of Assemblage*, the exhibition catalogue by William C Seitz for the Museum of Modern Art, and Harriet Janis and Rudi Blesh’s *Collage: Personalities Concepts Techniques*, both published in 1961. Subsequent texts include Herta Wescher’s *Collage* (1971), Florian Rodari’s *Collage: pasted, cut, and torn papers* (1988), Diane Waldman’s *Collage, Assemblage and the Found Object* (1992) and Brandon Taylor’s *Collage: The making of modern art* (2004). Each acknowledged the long history of collage techniques in European art, usually in the form of domestic crafts such as covered screens or pasted silhouettes. 1912, when Braque and Picasso began the Cubist practice of collage, is the agreed starting point for close analysis of twentieth century collage in art history. Each author considers collage and assemblage a vital thread of twentieth century modernism for how it seems to capture, for both artists and viewers, something of the experience of contemporary life.

As I will detail in the final section, Seitz held that assemblage expressed the essence of the postwar period. Arthur McIntyre similarly argued, in the only substantial attempt to survey Australian collage, that collage summed up the experience of life in the late twentieth century:

> Collage in painting, drawing, film, photography, sound and book form, is flourishing in Australia in the final decades of the twentieth century – which can logically be termed the Age of Collage.

McIntyre’s text is a personal one, driven by a long appreciation of collage, and a belief that it is underappreciated within the Australian art world. There is however a lack of academic rigour in parts of the book, including the discussion of Imitation Realism, which McIntyre refers to as ‘Annandale Realism’.

An essay by Andrew Sayers in McIntyre’s volume surveyed, as its title suggests, ‘The Modern Collage in Australia’. Sayers gives a detailed account of earlier

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Australian artists who used collage, such as Sidney Nolan, James Gleeson and Robert Klippel, and an overview of younger artists such as the Imitation Realists, the subsequent work of Mike Brown and Colin Lanceley and their contemporaries such as Martin Sharp and Garry Shead. His summary of Imitation Realism demonstrates that his understanding of the group largely came from the work and words of Lanceley.

In many ways the assemblages made by the Imitation Realist were, in the tradition of other collages made in Australia, an extension of a design exercise. This exercise, dubbed by the artists 'Aesthetic Chess', was a game in which miscellaneous small objects would be moved around a table top to create 'visual tensions and patterns'.

Sayers' view is not substantiated by the material presented in this thesis. I argue that the Imitation Realists used collage and assemblage as primarily a technique with which to engage with the experience of modern urban life, rather than for formal reasons.

In the second section I focus on the interest in 'raw' art amongst postwar European artists: art that attempted to capture a sense of creativity that was integral to human nature. It was widely believed that this was to be found in work by those seen as untouched by the constricting effects of Western academic art, such as children, the mentally ill and so-called 'primitive' peoples. Jean Dubuffet and his collection of Art Brut are considered as particularly influential on the interest in such art. The notion of creativity as fundamental to human identity was central to Herbert Read's understanding of art. The most widely read theorist of modern art in Australia, his work will be used to understand the philosophy of modern art that was current in Australia. Art in London during the 1950s, particularly that of the Independent Group, will be considered. This will situate the development of the influential critic and curator Lawrence Alloway, as well as some of the responses of the postwar generation to the mass media, Dubuffet and Read. Elwyn Lynn and John Olsen are discussed in the final two sections as they were key figures in writing and teaching others in Australia about the art that they saw in Europe during the late 1950s, as

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8 Andrew Sayers, 'The Modern Collage in Australia' in McIntyre, *Contemporary Australian Collage*, pp. 29-38
9 Sayers, 'The Modern Collage in Australia' in McIntyre, *Contemporary Australian Collage*, pp. 30-34
10 Sayers, 'The Modern Collage in Australia' in McIntyre, *Contemporary Australian Collage*, pp. 19, 22. Sayers quotes Lanceley from an interview he conducted with the artist in Sydney in 1987.
well as absorbing its influence in their own work. It can be seen from Lynn and Olsen’s writings in the CAS NSW Broadsheet that they were influential in establishing the idea amongst the Sydney avant-garde that assemblage was the most advanced form of contemporary art internationally.

In the final section I will consider ‘junk art’ as it emerged in New York during the 1950s, focusing on key artists and exhibitions that appeared in journals such as ArtNews and Art International, as well as mainstream news magazines such as Time and Newsweek. They followed the changing uses of materials, the renewed interest in Dada, the development of and debate about ‘Neo-Dada’ as well as the emerging art historical conception of collage in modern art. These sources were particularly significant in conveying developments in contemporary art to Australia during this period. Particular attention will be paid to the exhibition The Art of Assemblage and its catalogue as this was one of the earliest substantial histories of collage that also drew together a theoretical conception of its contemporary use. In this chapter I establish a context for the analysis of the Imitation Realists’ work within postwar international art and the previous use of collage by Australian artists. This considers how the interest in collage and assemblage internationally created the framework for the reception of Imitation Realism in Australia that shall be contrasted with the artists’ own objectives.

1. Modern collage

Collage and relativity

Braque and Picasso used collage from 1912 as a formal device, as a new way to depict reality on the surface of a two-dimensional work. ‘It brought art and life closer together.’\(^{11}\) Braque’s first collage was Fruit dish and glass (2.01) in 1912, when he used woodgrain-pattern wallpaper for the structure of the table around the bowl.\(^{12}\) By using a representation of wood in this work to represent the table, he simultaneously challenged the idea that it was the role of the artist to create a mimetic image, and forced the viewer to be aware of the picture surface. Picasso had similarly used patterned oil cloth in his Still life with Chair Caning (2.02) a few months earlier, using the faux-cane cloth to create a jarring sense of depth in the

\(^{11}\) Rodari, Collage, p. 11
\(^{12}\) Blesh & Janis, Collage, p. 17
work as it dislocates the usual point of view, from looking horizontally into the picture plane at eye-level, to looking down at the table and chair from above.\textsuperscript{13} Braque and Picasso often used words cut from newspapers and advertising to create puns and allusions to certain subjects.\textsuperscript{14} In Picasso’s \textit{Glass and Bottle of Suze (2.03)}, the pasted paper fulfils its original purpose – as bottle label and newspaper – but also constructs the shapes of the glass, the shadows, table top and surrounding shapes. Picasso also employed collage as a political statement by including an article protesting contemporary events.\textsuperscript{15} In these multiple uses of collage – for colour, shape, social content and their original ‘life’ – we see the possibilities and ambiguities of its use.

Throughout twentieth century art, collage is referred to as a technique that bridges the gap between art and life. Donald Kuspit addresses how it does this in an essay arguing that collage demonstrates relativity in art.\textsuperscript{16} Kuspit’s essay was originally part of the volume of essays \textit{Relativism in the arts},\textsuperscript{17} which examined the implications of Einstein’s theory for literature and the performing and visual arts. Kuspit draws on definitions of relativity from philosophy, psychology and sociology as a disruption of the idea of the subject as a complete, independent entity.\textsuperscript{18}

\textit{This is the relativistic message of collage: the keeping in play of the possibility of the entry of the many into the one, the fusion of the many into the one. … Collage, for the first time in art, makes uncertainty a method of creation, apparent indeterminacy a procedure. … There is no clear-cut, single ground of art in the collage: art is no longer either representational (an imitation of nature issuing in an illusion of life) or abstract (a formal construction issuing in a style).}\textsuperscript{19}

Kuspit attributes the fascination with collaged fragments to the ambiguous sense of personal significance that they hold; they have not been selected purely by chance,

\textsuperscript{13} Blesh & Janis, \textit{Collage}, p. 19
\textsuperscript{17} Craige, \textit{Relativism in the arts.}
\textsuperscript{18} Kuspit, \textit{Collage}, pp. 40-2
\textsuperscript{19} Kuspit, \textit{Collage}, pp. 42-3
they bear some important, yet mysterious, meaning for the artist. They both attest and trouble the categorizations with which the individual orders reality.

As such, the collage becomes emblematic of the task of art at least since Baudelaire: the redemption of individuality in mass society, with its standardizations or categorizations – its banalization or deindividualizing of belief. Collage makes poetry with the prosaic fragments of dailiness.

Kuspit limits his discussion of collage to the Cubists, but he frames their work as 'the beginning – one might say, the model – for what has come to be called “junk art”' and considers its impact to be even broader, as from 'Cubist collage on, art can never be understood as anything but relative in its nature.' He concludes that 'Art and life become unexpected in the collage, which gives us the opportunity for a creative relationship with both of them.' His essay articulates the impulse towards collage that re-emerges throughout modern art. It is germane to junk art and the idea of collage as an expression of the self within society. It is relevant to a consideration of Imitation Realism as it helps illuminate why assemblage offered the artists a way forward in their work, when, as Brown later described it, the artists:

didn't feel anything in common with anything that was happening in the art scene at that time ... Things that we saw in exhibitions around Sydney seemed to us to have no virtue beyond a certain of serious mindedness. We wanted above all, I think, for things to be a real experience.

By incorporating fragments of the 'real' into their work they were able to break through the disconnect they felt existed between art and life and embed one in the other.

When the Cubists disrupted the autonomy of art, by introducing this possibility of 'the fusion of the many into the one', they did so primarily to extend its formal boundaries. Although there was an element of social commentary in some works, the more immediate concern was with formal aspects of art making, extending the

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20 Kuspit, Collage, p. 46
21 Kuspit, Collage, pp. 48-51
22 Kuspit, Collage, p. 48
23 Kuspit, Collage, p. 40
24 Kuspit, Collage, p. 42
25 Kuspit, Collage, p. 53
26 Mike Brown, interview with Hazel de Berg, (Sydney: 9th December 1969) Tape 442 Oral History Collection, NLA
surface of the work to include and challenge the viewer in new ways. Explicit social and political rebellion would find expression through collage during World War I, by artists associated with Dada. The atrocities of the battlefield left them disillusioned with the promises of Western rationalism; Dada broke with the traditional practice of the visual arts, literature, theatre, and music. The Dada artists sought to avoid the unique, manmade object and the hierarchy of individual genius that had shaped Western art. 27 To this end, Hans Arp employed chance in the construction of his collages in order to avoid the idea of ‘personal’ creation. 28 Duchamp challenged the notion of the artist as creator with the power to exhibit an object and sanctify it as ‘art’ with both his readymades and his alterations to reproductions of well-known works (L.H.O.O.Q., 2.04). One of the most influential uses of collage that arose from Dada was that of Max Ernst. 29 He developed a technique of using printed images he found in old magazines, catalogues, anatomical engravings and newspapers, to construct new images in painted and drawn backgrounds. He eroded hieratic categorisation of images and their sources. 30 In *Here everything is still floating* (2.05) a boat-like object constructed out of anatomical drawings, alongside an x-ray image of a fish, could be drifting through the sky, or sinking in a dead sea. The boat and the fish both emit smoke, alluding to some kind of disaster or destruction at hand. Such a work creates a sense of unease, it is impossible to pin down meaning as the collaged materials combine to create a dislocated image. At first glance it appears to be an image in the Western narrative tradition, depicting an event that can be ‘read’ by the viewer, yet on closer inspection the elements of its construction disrupt such expectation and the familiar is made unfamiliar.

Aligned with Dada, although never formally a member, was Kurt Schwitters who in 1919 invented the title ‘Merz’ for his work: ‘I looked for a collective term for this new style, since I could not fit all my pictures into the older categories.’ 31 Schwitters was a pioneer in his use of both collage and assemblage; his work has never fitted

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28 Blesh & Janis, *Collage*, p. 46
29 Taylor, *Collage*, pp. 55-58, 66-7
into neat categories within modern art discourse. Merz attempted to capture all of life, it was an intimate art constructed out of the materials that surrounded him, which in turn he used to gradually surround himself. Wherever he lived, Schwitters created sculptural assemblage environments, most famously in his apartment in Hanover, the Merzbau (2.06), which grew to encompass two floors, a hamster and numerous niches dedicated to Schwitters’ friends that incorporated their personal possessions. He himself ‘compared Dada in its most serious form with Merz, and came to this conclusion: ... Pure Merz is art, pure Dada is non-art; in both cases deliberately so.’

In addition to this large sculpture, Schwitters created Merz pictures (2.07), small collages (a few square inches) made out of scraps that he would collect off the streets – bus tickets, newspapers, fliers, handwritten letters and envelopes, stamps, labels, fabric – often assembled while wet, so that the different materials melded into one another. The rhythms created in the composition of these works, through the colours and the shapes of the materials, testify to the care and consideration of Schwitters’ construction process. He shared the formal intentions of the Cubists, but they sought out the right piece of paper for the work, perhaps through the purchase of wallpaper or a newspaper. Schwitters’ approach was the reverse, finding the aesthetically captivating on the streets and incorporating it into his work. This creates a different experience for the viewer, a re-evaluation of the detritus that surrounds the urban-dweller everyday on the streets. It would be this aspect of transformation that would prove crucial for later assemblage artists, such as the Imitation Realists. His use of junk as a source material would be important to the creation and understanding of junk art in the 1950s. Dada was the subject of renewed interest in the 1950s, as we will see with the Independent Group in London and junk art or Neo-Dada in New York, and would contrast with the influence of Surrealism on older artists in both cities, as well as in Australia.

With the emergence of Surrealism from Dada in the early to mid-1920s in Paris, collage and assemblage were utilised for their possibilities of ‘disruption’. Elza

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32 Rudi Fuchs, Conflicts with Modernism or the Absence of Kurt Schwitters, Bern: Gachnang & Springer, 1991
33 See Blesh & Janis, Collage, p. 63 for specific examples.
34 Kurt Schwitters, quoted in John Elderfield, Kurt Schwitters, New York: Thames & Hudson, 1985, p. 67
Adamowicz proposes an approach to surrealist collage which 'considers collage as a
process rather than a product, an experimental mode of textual and pictorial
production more than a fixed genre, a disruptive activity, not a static form.' The
disruptive aspect of collage that Adamowicz draws attention to in Surrealism is one
that can be seen throughout much collage work in the twentieth century. Collage
creates juxtapositions, disjunctions and associations between materials that disrupt
straightforward readings. Where the original source for the materials is not
disguised, the process of the work’s creation is transparent and does not acquire the
‘static’ autonomy of a work using a traditional medium. The Surrealists not only
protested, as Dada had, the brutalities that could result from rationalism, but sought
alternatives to it. Breton defined Surrealism in his manifesto of 1924 as: ‘Pure
psychic automatism, by which one intends to express ... the real functioning of the
mind.’ Surrealist artists found collage a useful technique with which to explore the
use of chance and automatism to tap into the subconscious mind. Ernst was the
most influential figure in the development of surrealist collage. In the collages he
made from engraved illustrations he appropriated methods of depicting coherent
scenes. He manipulated the methods that were associated in the viewer’s mind with
some measure of ‘truth’, using techniques of representation to depict the fantastic.
Sympathetic to the Surrealists, although he did not identify as one, was the New
York artist Joseph Cornell. Cornell was self taught and best known for boxes in
which he arranged model-like scenes of juxtaposed objects. His boxes evoke
the crafts of a nineteenth century parlour, with an atmosphere of deliberate nostalgia
created through their already aged contents. His work was subject to increasing
notice amongst New York artists in the 1950s with the interest in assemblage and
junk art.

35 Adamowicz, Surrealist Collage, p. 25
36 André Breton, Manifeste du Surréalisme, Paris, 1924, p. 42, quoted in William S. Rubin, Dada,
Surrealism and their Heritage, New York: MoMA, 1968, p. 64
37 Most famously in the creation of the Cadavre exquis collaborative collages of the 1920s and 30s.
cf. Adamowicz, Surrealist Collage, p. 78
38 Adamowicz, Surrealist Collage, p. 3-5
39 Werner Spies, ‘Getting Rid of Oedipus: Max Ernst’s collages: contradiction as a way of knowing’,
96-103
41 Seitz, The Art of Assemblage, pp. 72-3, 85-6
The Surrealists used art to facilitate the expression of the subconscious and to explore creativity as a primal instinct, inherent to human nature. As will be discussed below, this would be influential on the formation of Abstract Expressionism, the theories of Herbert Read, Jean Dubuffet and the understanding of abstract art in Sydney during the 1940s and 1950s. Surrealism gave rise to introspection by the artist, an emphasis that was rejected by the generation emerging in the 1950s who turned to aspects of Dada to overturn hierarchies, categorisation and the autonomy of art. These artists illustrate two objectives that shape the use of collage, firstly, of incorporating material for its formal qualities, and secondly, of embedding items into the work as referents to themselves, pointing beyond the frame to the world beyond. By using ‘the prosaic fragments of dailiness’ to create their work artists challenged the traditional Western conception of art as autonomous from its surroundings.

There was a renewed interest in Dada in the 1950s, in part because of the re-emergence of Duchamp in the art world and the New York junk artists and their categorisation as ‘Neo-Dada’ by critics. Surrealism was to have a shaping influence on the philosophy of mid-twentieth century Australian art. In particular, the ideas about the role of the subconscious and psychoanalysis transmitted through Herbert Read’s works were widespread. Before the Imitation Realists, collage was primarily used by Australian artists as a tool to develop composition and colour arrangement.

**Early collage in Australia**

Until the 1930s collage was used in Australia for graphic design, folk art or domestic craft, rather than ‘fine art’. Andrew Sayers documented these earliest uses in modern Australian art and design. This included graphic design, such as by Hera Roberts for the cover of *Home* magazine in March 1933, and as a tool for artists. Sydney artists Frank Hinder and Ralph Balson used it to experiment with composition, creating designs with coloured paper. One of the earliest artists to...
utilise assemblage in Australia was a New Zealander, George Finey, primarily known in Australia as an illustrator and cartoonist in the heyday of black and white graphics in the 1920s at publications Smith’s Weekly and The Bulletin. He possessed aspirations to be recognised as a painter and sculptor. In 1935, in his first solo exhibition at the David Jones Gallery, Sydney, he exhibited a series of paintings, some with collaged surfaces that included marbles, shoes, nails, paper, and cardboard. Finey remains known primarily as a graphic artist, his early use of detritus similar to that used by the Imitation Realists makes his work an interesting parallel to theirs, but his exhibitions never received the level of interest that the Imitation Realists did from critics and other artists. His exhibitions were frequently on the periphery of the already small art world and he did not exhibit with the CAS NSW, and so he was not seen as furthering the cause of avant-garde contemporary art. 45 By contrast, the artist Mary Webb was integral to the establishment of the CAS NSW and exhibited in the Annual NSW and Interstate Exhibitions. 46 She moved to London in 1948 where she lived at The Abbey with Robert Klippel and James Gleeson, and then moved to Paris in 1949, where she died in 1958. Her final solo exhibition in Paris consisted of gouaches, drawings and papier collé works. Her work as an abstract artist was slowly beginning to receive recognition in Paris at the time of her death. 47 Untitled (small collage) of 1956 used small pieces of torn coloured paper and labels to create an abstract pattern of colour in an oval shape at the centre of a sheet of white paper (2.09). The work explored the colour and texture of the paper, rather than its content. There is no evidence for her having ever exhibited these abstract formal collages in Australia, though they were known to at least some of the Australian artists whom she assisted on their arrival in Paris. 48 James Gleeson would later ensure they were acquired for the national collection, when he recommended them for (what was then) the Australian National Gallery in

45 For example, his exhibition in the Education Department Galleries (August 1948), the Katinka Library (July 1951), Pakies Club (October 1953)
46 Elwyn Lynn, ‘Mary Webb’, CAS NSW Broadsheet. Jan 1959 pp. 3-4, see Contemporary Art Society (NSW) Exhibitions, archives folder and the Mary Webb artist’s file, both AGNSW Research Library for details of exhibitions that included works by Webb.
47 This is indicated by her inclusion in Michel Seuphor, A Dictionary of Abstract Painting, London: Methuen 1958, p. 287, and the exhibition Fifty Years of Abstract Painting, Galerie Creuze, Paris, May 1957, that she exhibited with the Salon des Réalités Nouvelles from 1950 and was awarded the City of Paris Silver Medal in 1958.
the 1970s, and Elwyn Lynn recognised Webb as one of the few Australian artists to have employed collage. 49

The first major Australian modern artist for whom collage was an important dimension of his oeuvre is Sidney Nolan, who exhibited them in his first solo show in June 1940. Nolan was one of the artists best informed about European modernism in Australia at this time, through long hours in the Melbourne Public Library in the mid- to late-1930s. 50 He was trying to define himself as an artist and was experimenting intensively with different types of drawing, including monotypes, dye staining and transfer drawings on tissue paper. He began making collages from steel plate engravings, reproductions after Old Masters paintings from The Art Journal, as well as technical diagrams and photographs. 51 His Collage from 1938 (2.10) used steel engravings cut into squares to create a checkerboard pattern of fragmented imagery. He used them to obtain ‘the lucidity of the non-figurative image.’ 52 The work denies recognition of any subject matter, forcing the eye to encounter the techniques of image production rather than the results. These were a visual response to the juxtapositions created in literature by Rimbaud, whose poetry was a great influence on Nolan’s early work. 53 Collage was primarily used by Nolan to experiment and explore; in them he can be seen to be working out the spatial devices that he uses to structure the composition of his mature paintings, such as the Ned Kelly series. 54 Collage: The bathers, The studio, The waterfall (2.11) recedes into the picture plane; windows are cut into the engravings through which successive layers are seen. Instead of building up the surface with layers of collaged imagery, he has built into it. This pierces the illusion of the picture as a ‘window’ on a scene, forcing the eye to remain on the surface of the work. In the Kelly paintings this compositional device can be seen in the bold shapes Nolan places on the picture plane. The black square flat on the surface of the work, seemingly removed from the landscape behind it, can be read as Ned Kelly’s helmet. Nolan’s works on paper

49 Elwyn Lynn, ‘Collage’, CAS NSW Broadsheet, August 1962, p. 5
51 Clark, Sydney Nolan, p. 33
53 Anderson, ‘The Early Work of Sidney Nolan’
from this time demonstrate his conception of art; that it was open to anyone, a possibility that required unlocking rather than formal training. This was a belief he derived from European Surrealism, the interest in the so-called ‘primitive’, and naïve artists such as Rousseau.

Robert Klippel was the most serious practitioner of collage in Sydney during the 1950s. From his earliest work Klippel’s concern was to develop a formal language that expressed the internal nature of both organic and industrial objects. His collection of machinery catalogues prompted him to start creating collages of mechanical images on paper that were both surrealist and futuristic (2.12). Klippel lived in London and Paris between 1947 and 1950 and studied collections in galleries and museums of modern art, nature and science for their formal properties. Material that he collected at exhibitions of machinery during this time would be the raw material for his later collages. Klippel was one of a very small number of Australians who appreciated modern sculpture and was perhaps unique in the rigor with which he pursued and developed his own language of form. His adoption of collage enabled him to pursue the twin aims of chance and the revelation of inner structure in his sculptures. He began using images of machine parts in his drawings in 1952, which in the 1960s resulted in sculptures constructed from actual machine parts. Essential to Klippel’s practice, both the collages and his later assemblage sculpture, is that although the material is recognizable as a machine part, its original identity is disguised, subsumed into an ‘organic order of forms.’ The collages evolved from being ideas for metal sculptures into imagined cityscapes. The ideas were architecturally and sculpturally unrealisable, so the collage-drawings were an exploration of the fantastic, as well as a form in which he worked out many of the compositional techniques which served as the basis for his sculpture of the 1960s. The use of collage gave Klippel’s works on paper the ‘open-ness’ of his sculptures. Negative space was essential to the language of form that was at the centre of his art, and collage brought to his drawings the constructed, skeletal quality of his assembled sculptures. His time in the US in the late 1950s and early 1960s would allow him to

56 Gleeson, Robert Klippel, p. 125
57 Gleeson, Robert Klippel, p. 147, cf. p. 199
58 Gleeson, Robert Klippel, pp. 147, 198-9
realise the earlier collages in sculptural form. He returned to Sydney in 1963 and was an important friend and mentor to Colin Lanceley after the Imitation Realists disbanded (see chapter four).

Collage and assemblage were used in Cubism, Dada and Surrealism to explore new forms and to disrupt viewers' expectations. Australian artists also used collage to explore these possibilities but without the profile of its usage in European modernism. For both Nolan and Klippel collage was a vital artistic strategy through which they worked out the spatial and compositional devices that much of their later practice relied on. While each created significant works in collage, it was not central to their overall oeuvre. However, they both brought collage a new significance in Australian art, taking it out of the studio, as a technique for finished works rather than compositional exercises. Fundamental to their use of collage was appropriating material and subsuming its original meaning to their purpose, rather than using it as a 'quotation' that pointed to its original function or content. In Europe and the USA in the years following the Second World War, collage and assemblage were often used as a way to connect with what was perceived as an elemental or primal source of creativity. It responded to the material conditions of living in an urban environment, in which consumption and obsolescence were ever increasing. It was in this context that the Imitation Realists found in assemblage a way forward in their art.

2. Brut Force: Post World War II urban art

After World War II an increasing number of artists drew on ideas associated with Primitivism. These artists sought different, more authentic sources for creativity, outside of the Western 'fine arts' which were seen as too constrained by tradition and expectation to allow for genuine experimentation and expression by the artist. This is a view that it is at the heart of the Imitation Realists’ practice and motivation, and so it is important to establish the context for these ideas in postwar art. Braque and Picasso’s challenge to the barrier between art and life was radically furthered in the 1950s by artists including Jean Dubuffet, Antoni Tàpies, Enrico Baj, Alberto Burri and the members of the CoBrA group. To some extent these artists emerged independently of one another, but there were some common denominators in the inspiration for their work, found in the urban environment, popular culture and ‘Outsider’ art. Key ideas behind outsider art were shared by the art theorist Herbert
Read, whose books, such as *Art Now* (1933), *Surrealism* (1936), *Art and Society* (1937), *The Meaning of Art* (1949) and *Icon and Idea* (1955), were significant in communicating a theory of modernism to Australian artists.

Jean Dubuffet is crucial to understanding postwar assemblage and Primitivism. He attempted to capture a sense of untrained, raw, childish creativity in his work. Dubuffet coined the term *assemblage* to describe his own work. It was subsequently adopted to refer to the work of the many artists in the 1950s that rendered the term 'collage', with its associations of works with paper, inadequate.\(^{60}\) He had been linked with the Surrealists since the 1920s and shared their interest in expressions of creativity from outside the traditional sphere of the 'fine arts.'\(^{61}\) His work was a part of the tendency towards Primitivism in twentieth-century modernism, which believed that works created by 'primitive' cultures, children, the mentally ill and others marginalised from mainstream Western society to be more in touch with primal, subconscious creative urges.\(^ {62}\) Dubuffet had read Hans Prinzhorn's *Artistry of the Mentally Ill* in the 1920s, a groundbreaking study of art by mental patients from an aesthetic standpoint, rather than a purely therapeutic one.\(^ {63}\) He began an extensive collection of art by the mentally ill that he termed Art Brut; in French the term encompasses both ideas of being in a natural, raw state, as well as being ill-bred, but it has been observed that:

Dubuffet's early career — not as an artist, but working in the family wine business — provides the clue to the most celebratory and poetical meaning of Art Brut, namely that, like the best champagnes, brut here signifies the unadulterated, purest state of things.\(^ {64}\)

It is important to distinguish between the work that Dubuffet collected and his own work. Art Brut refers to art created entirely outside the academic and avant-garde practice of Western 'fine art'.\(^ {65}\) It 'is an art in open conflict with culture ... the

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\(^ {60}\) Seitz, *The Art of Assemblage*, pp. 93, 150


\(^ {63}\) Rhodes, *Primitivism and Modern Art*


\(^ {65}\) Michel Thévoz, *Art Brut*, New York: Rizzoli, 1976, p. 38. The *Compagnie de l'Art Brut* was formed in 1947 to care for the collection, and arranged publications and exhibitions pertaining to it. In 1951 the collection was moved to New York to be exhibited until 1962, when Dubuffet found a better location in Paris for its exhibition. In the 1970s the collection was permanently moved to Lausanne, and established as a public collection. pp. 41-4
maker of Art Brut remains fundamentally asocial. 66 Olsen's report on contemporary European art for the July 1958 CAS NSW Broadsheet indicated the prevalence of Art Brut when he wrote that 'if one must talk of trends one must point to children's drawings and the work of the insane, which are studied all over the Continent.' 67 As will be referred to further in chapter three, Dubuffet's influence can be seen in many of the Imitation Realists' works, such as the use of found media to construct a deliberately naïve style in Lanceley's Just like his Uncle Fred (2.13), and the amorphous, textured figures in Byzantium (2.14).

In the 1940s Dubuffet's works reflected his interest in Art Brut, emulating child-like, crude figures out of textured pastes and found objects including plaster, oil, tar, sand, rope and stones along with paint and canvas (2.15-16). He created collages from butterfly wings and crude figures that appeared to be assembled out of mud and twigs (2.17). He used found materials to build up works, evoking a sense of their primal source. Dubuffet's use of materials contrasts with later postwar artists who used collage to refer to the urban environment; Dubuffet instead wanted to somehow renounce the sophisticated, 'civilised' world and capture the origins of creativity. He held that there was a growing disillusionment with Western humanism in the twentieth century, a belief he discussed in a lecture he gave in 1951, 'Anticultural Positions'.

I think this [Western] culture is very much like a dead language, without anything in common with the language spoken in the street. This culture drifts further and further from daily life. ... For myself, I am for an art which would be in immediate connection with daily life, an art which would start from the daily life, and which would be a very direct and very sincere expression of our real life and our real moods. 68

There are immediate similarities here with how Mike Brown described Imitation Realism in 1969, which makes apparent the significance of Dubuffet's work when considering theirs:

We wanted above all, I think, for things to be a real experience, something that had something in common with just the normal

66 Thévoz, Art Brut p. 60
67 John Olsen, 'News from Abroad', CAS NSW Broadsheet, July 1958, p. 3
process of living or walking down a street. It seemed to us that art shouldn't be so cut off from general reality, and I think through a process of comparing with the type of art that we respected most, which was at that stage primitive art, in which a lot of objects or images from daily life are freely used, we wondered why it was that so little of modern civilisation had been allowed to get into painting.  

Dubuffet's work was shaped by his interest in graffiti, the informal expression of creativity, commentary and protest on the surface of the city itself. This desire to explore primary sources, of both materials and forms, was influential on many artists, internationally and within Australia. Claes Oldenburg recalled how Dubuffet 'influenced me to ask why art is made and what the art process consists of, instead of trying to conform to and extend a tradition.'  

Judy Cassab described Dubuffet's work as 'probably the most outstanding' of the contemporary art she saw in Paris, describing it as 'rich in texture, free, inventive, deep, far from decorative' in the Broadsheet in May 1958. Olsen wrote that Dubuffet's work was 'undoubtedly the most interesting of the newer generation, original and influencing many [he] rejoices in his wonderful surfaces and assures that it is still possible to create wittily.' In August 1958 Lynn described Dubuffet:

This a war on the decorative, a campaign against the slick, the received, and an attempt to breach the walls of normal, rational methods, to reveal the inner keep of art. He employs children's drawings, scrawls that are as evocative as they are unplanned, and a clumsiness of thick texture that is full of a peasant's insight. This is the school of the uncivilised; it is almost as irrational as the juxtaposed items on a page of a daily paper or in the newsreels where Dior follows a Baghdad massacre.

Lynn discusses Dubuffet in terms oppositional to the so-called 'Charm School' that the NSW CAS positioned themselves against and demonstrates Dubuffet's influence on the growing desire by Australian artists to express a primal, 'raw' creativity. Lynn wrote an essay on Dubuffet for the March 1961 CAS VIC Broadsheet, which noted his use of materials that were 'usually considered the antithesis of art'. He continued that just 'as there are no special artistic materials, so art is not the product

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69 Brown, interview with de Berg, 1969  
71 Judy Cassab, 'Paris', CAS NSW Broadsheet, May 1958, p. 3-4  
72 Olsen, 'News from Abroad', July 1958, p. 3  
73 Elwyn Lynn, 'It is a Mad World, My Masters', CAS NSW Broadsheet, August 1958, p. 3  
74 See Lynn's 'Avant Garde Painting in Sydney', Meanjin, vol. xx, no. 3 (Sept 1961), pp. 302-06
of an inspired elite.'

Lynn discussed Dubuffet's work from the mid-1940s until 1960, marking his wide range of materials, and his position outside of the art establishment – his rejection of the stultifying atmosphere of the art museum and refusal to participate in state sponsored competitions or for prize money, and the critical opposition to his work. That both Olsen and Lynn identified Dubuffet as a leader of his generation of European artists contextualises their appreciation of the Imitation Realists and their use of assemblage.

As we saw in chapter one, the influence of Dubuffet was equally important amongst avant-garde artists in New Zealand. Ross Crothall was introduced to the work of Dubuffet by Theo Schoon. Schoon shared Dubuffet's interest in the art of the mentally ill; he collected and emulated the work of Rolfe Hattaway, a schizophrenic patient of an asylum in which Schoon worked. Schoon kept a portfolio of Hattaway's drawings (2.18-19) and they were influential both on his own work and that of other artists, such as Gordon Walters, to whom Schoon showed the works. In Schoon's painting Meringue (2.20) can be seen the influence of Hattaway's abstract, coloured pencil drawings. As was discussed in the previous chapter, Schoon had developed his own form of Primitivism out of the unique possibilities New Zealand presented, through the combination of his own training with forms of Maori art and the drawings of Hattaway.

In his own work and his Art Brut collection, Dubuffet can be seen to employ the ability of collage, as Kuspit observed, to make 'uncertainty a method of creation, apparent indeterminacy a procedure.' His work celebrated the fragile and temporary rather than the immortal, and sought to represent surfaces corroded by life, rather than idealised and autonomous. Not confined by tradition to certain practitioners deemed 'artists' by academic societies, galleries or qualifications, Dubuffet's definition opened art to those who were compelled to make works that plainly demonstrated an aesthetic purpose, but were mysterious in their reason or meaning.

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77 Francis Pound, Walters en abyme, Auckland: Gus Fisher Gallery, University of Auckland, pp. 13-64, especially p. 42
78 Kuspit, Collage, p. 43
Dubuffet’s desire to reconnect with archetypal creative forms was shared by artists from across Europe, particularly those that joined to form CoBrA in 1948, named by combining the initials of the cities its founding members came from, Copenhagen, Brussels and Amsterdam. Key members included Asger Jorn, Pierre Alechinsky, Karel Appel, Corneille and Constant. The brutality of the Second World War saw them lose faith in Western rationalism and seek to create a utopian, universal practice that integrated art into the life of society, inspired by their understanding of Marxism, Surrealism and Jung.\(^9\) Constant explicated the groups emerging beliefs in the *Manifesto* he penned in 1948:

> Instead of solving problems posed by some preconceived aesthetic ideal, this art recognizes only the norms of expressivity, spontaneously directed by its own intuition. The great value of a people’s art is that, precisely because it is the form of expression of the untrained, the greatest possible latitude is given to the unconscious, thereby opening up ever wider perspectives for the comprehension of the secret of life.\(^80\)

They published journals, held group exhibitions and worked on collaborative projects between 1948 and 1951.\(^81\) The essence of CoBrA was the working relationships and exchanges of ideas that occurred via the network of artists in different locations. The most important location for this has been identified as a house outside Copenhagen in Bregnerød, lent to Jorn by the owners on the condition of decorating the inside.\(^82\) Jorn, together with artists including Anders Österlin, Carl Otton Hultén and Carl-Henning Pederson, along with their wives and children, covered the interior of the house with loosely painted, symbolic imagery.\(^83\) Like the Imitation Realists, they attempted to overcome the traditional Western concept of the artist as individual genius by working collaboratively and through spontaneously responding to their materials.\(^84\) Appel used fence palings and found timber to create his *Questioning Children* (2.21), which shares with Imitation Realist work its bright

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\(^81\) Stokvis, *Cobra*, passim.

\(^82\) Stokvis, *Cobra*, pp. 18-19, 36-7


\(^84\) Lambert, *Cobra*, pp. 95-6
colours and purposefully naïve technique. In the late 1950s John Olsen was inspired by the CoBrA artists, sharing as they did his spontaneous, wandering line and interest in Jungian archetypal forms and naïve creative expression. Olsen did not, however, share their adherence to Marxism, or their collaborative approach. In particular, sympathies can be detected with Olsen in the spiky lines and abstracted forms of Carl-Henning Pedersen, Asger Jorn and Corneille. Olsen described Corneille’s work (2.22) as depicting the landscape from a similar point of view, as ‘something to walk through rather than to contemplate as did Renaissance painters.’ This is the central idea of his own work from the time, such as his painting Spanish encounter of 1960 (2.23). Both Corneille and Appel were included in the exhibition Trends in Dutch Painting Since Van Gogh which toured Australia in 1961 and 1962. The catalogue embedded the work of the CoBrA artists in the response of Europe to the war and the demand for cultural change along with physical reconstruction. Appel’s Pair of Lovers (2.24) was one of the works exhibited, it demonstrates the expressive gestural marks of the CoBrA artists that were important both for Olsen and the Imitation Realists, particularly Lanceley, in works such as In the bush beside the water (3.18), as is further discussed in chapter three.

Artists in southern Europe also responded to urban environments and tried to connect with the elemental sources of creativity. The Spanish artist Antoni Tàpies built up dense surfaces of paint embedded with sand or marble dust to create a wall-like plane into which he inscribed his compositions (2.25). He shared with Dubuffet the interest in ‘raw’ materials and the graffiti from the streets. He confined his visual language to symbols – shapes and icons loaded with meaning – similar to those used by graffitists on city walls. In Sacco (2.26) the Italian painter, Alberto Burri replaced the pure arena of white canvas with stitched together pieces of burlap and hessian, using the patches and rips to create the composition. The rough construction of the piece eschews the delicacy and finesse of traditional art techniques. Cubist collage was the most immediate precursor for Burri’s forms. The previous life of the

86 K.E. Schuurman, Trends in Dutch Painting since Van Gogh, Melbourne: NGV, 1961
87 Gopnik & Varndoe, High and Low, p. 115
materials evokes the aged, worn surfaces that surround life in the city. The catalogue for his 1953 exhibition emphasises their immediacy:

as necessary as bread, as work, as miracles, as the drama of everyday days and of holidays. ... here is a work that could only be made today, here is an action which could only be carried out today, not yesterday, not tomorrow ... always free of the thin and second-rate eternity of the museological.89

The poverty of his materials proclaimed that the value of art transcended precious materials and protested wealth in the straitened economy of postwar Italy. The materials were an actual, physical connection with the surroundings of Burri and the first viewers of these works. Dubuffet, Burri and Tàpies were to be a lasting influence on Elwyn Lynn, who used materials such as sand, PVA, plaster, timber and oil paint to build up surfaces laden with symbols and allusions to excoriated landscapes. The landscape of postwar Germany, still shattered in 1958, was formative on Lynn’s conception of these works and seeing the work of the European matter painters helped shape his approach.90 His awareness of the range of the use of collage and assemblage in both his own and international art in turn shaped his appreciation and understanding of Imitation Realism.

Another artist important for Lynn was Enrico Baj, who used textured figures similar to those of Dubuffet to create excoriating portraits of military figures and their wives (2.27). Baj used gaudy upholstery materials to contrast with the corpulent authority figures. Baj was a founding member of the Nuclear movement who wrote ‘The End of Style’ manifesto, this summarised the objective of Baj and fellow signatories to overcome repetitive styles in art that constrict the artist to a commercialised or academic practice. ‘We state that in a world in which the artifices of celebration are rejected, a work of art should be known by the unity of its character, by the effective influence of its appearance and for the simple reality of its living presence.’91 They explored outside traditional mediums, styles and subjects of art to try and find authenticity for their practice. Lynn reported back to the CAS that whilst in Milan

90 Peter Pinson, Elwyn Lynn: metaphor + texture, Sydney: Craftsman House, 2002, pp. 27-33, 44
he had met 'members of the Nuclear Group and have their manifesto against “style”,
the last, they think, element of ye olde art to be blasted. Young painters here … are
more theoretically articulate and single in purpose than in Australia.' 92 In his
enthusiastic response to Imitation Realism he was perhaps reminded of the
passionate young artists he had encountered in Italy two years earlier. Donald
Kuspit summed up both Baj’s modus operandi, as well as this period in Europe
generally:

Both types of personage are equally intimidating, equally inhuman
and equally mocked by Baj. They are the passive and active sides of
the same absolutist self, a split personality Baj cuts down to size with
a variety of witty measures. All seem to exist in that most intriguing of
artistic spaces, deliberately mined by much 20th Century art: the
space between high and low imagery, between an avant-garde and
kitsch aesthetic, between transcendental and populist intention. It is a
space in which the medium seems to exist in its own right – to be
studied for the expressive effects inherent to it – but also ironically
exploited to make a communicative point. 93

Baj was part of a network of artists across Europe who explored these aspects of
expression in non-traditional media. These artists would be influential on artists in
England, the US and Australia in the 1950s and early 1960s. They furthered the
challenge to the boundaries between art and life with their wide-ranging use of
materials and by broadening definitions of ‘art’ to include work outside the Western
 canon. Whitehouse argued that ‘Sydney artists were attracted to the anti-art
statements of Art Brut, CoBrA and Dubuffet which they admired for their attacks on
the School of Paris establishment’s ideal of taste and decorum.’ 94 They saw parallels
in their own situation, trying to establish a more vital, primal creativity in contrast
with the decorative painting of the ‘Charm School’. The Imitation Realists, with
their use of deliberately naïve styles and assemblage, could be seen as the next
generation in this struggle.

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92 Elwyn Lynn, ‘From your editor abroad’, CAS NSW Broadsheet, January 1959, p. 2
93 Donald Kuspit, ‘Enrico Baj’s Human/Inhuman Comedy’ in Marisa del Re & Gio Marconi (eds),
94 Denise Whitehouse, The Contemporary Art Society of New South Wales and the Theory and
Arts, Faculty of Arts, Monash University. p. 322
Herbert Read

Herbert Read was critical in communicating information and ideas about modern art to artists in Australia. In 1959 he wrote, in *A Concise History of Modern Painting*, that to make an ‘attempt [at] classification’ of contemporary European art was then a ‘critical rather than a historical task’, but that he suspected:

> to the future historian the similarities will be more striking than the present differences. There is an endless counterchange between the real and the superreal, between the image and the concept, and an infinite scale of forms dissolving into the informal.95

The rejection of an ‘absolute standard’ by modern artists meant that ‘whatever aesthetic values may exist in the work of art … are merely incidental, or accidental. But there is always a chance that the accidental is also the archetypal.’96 The theory of art developed by Read was heavily influenced by first Freudian, and subsequently Jungian, psychoanalysis, which held that true art expressed archetypal forms from humanity’s collective unconscious.97 He had a shaping influence on the understanding of modern art in Australia; *Art Now* was the mostly widely read theory of modernism by Australian artists,98 including the Imitation Realists.99 His explanation of Jung was important to Olsen’s interest in portraying archetypes, forms that connected with ‘archaic patterns’, derived from myths and legends.100 His work provided an overarching theory that explained art from prehistoric times to the present day as an expression of the most vital concerns of human beings.101 Art was not a luxury ‘confined to a skilled elite’ but essential to human nature, to the development of an ‘integrated personality’.102 He looked to ‘primitive’ art to demonstrate the ‘true form’ of art:

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96 Read, *A Concise History of Modern Painting*, p. 283
97 Herbert Read, *The forms of things unknown*, Cleveland: Meridian, 1963
99 Colin Lanceley, taped interview with the author, Sydney, 5 July 2006
102 Herbert Read, ‘Art and the Development of the Personality’, *The Forms of Things Unknown*, p. 100-1
The virtue of a plant is in its seed: its form is implicitly in its first shoot. We can learn more of the essential nature of art from its earliest manifestations in primitive man (and in children) than from its intellectual elaboration in great periods of culture.\textsuperscript{103}

He saw modern art as a return to this true form of art, rather than continuing the artificial construction that had formed since the Renaissance.\textsuperscript{104} Read’s understanding of indigenous art refused to limit it to being only an ethnographic artefact. He argued for its value and understanding as art, for example in the introduction he wrote for \textit{Australia: Aboriginal Paintings, Arnhem Land}, published by UNESCO in 1959. However he generalised from Australian indigenous art to prehistoric art, seeing it as a path to understanding ‘the mode of life and the magical beliefs of prehistoric man.’\textsuperscript{105} The rarrk patterns of Arnhem Land were therefore evidence for the spiritual meaning in abstract or geometric patterning in all prehistoric art, and as an expression of the collective unconscious.\textsuperscript{106} Read saw in children’s art a form of untrained creativity that was essential to development\textsuperscript{107} and argued that art created by the mentally ill was more than just occupational therapy.\textsuperscript{108} He endeavoured to articulate a theory that art originated from a shared wellspring of creativity. This created a context in which Art Brut, Dubuffet, CoBrA, Tàpies, Burri and Baj could all be readily understood. Their attempts to find raw, immediate ways to communicate the everyday human experience shared his conception of art, as a basic human instinct that should be accessible to all people.

Read’s theories were both simple and influential; he shaped the thinking of many Australian artists from the 1930s onwards. Some Australian artists with little or no formal training, such as Nolan and Lynn, readily responded to his arguments for art as a primal part of human communication. Both Nolan and Lynn had developed a sophisticated understanding of art; Nolan through independent study, and Lynn through a Bachelor of Arts at Sydney University, where the influence of philosopher John Anderson was particularly important. It was Anderson who introduced Lynn to

\textsuperscript{103} Read, \textit{Art Now}, p. 46
\textsuperscript{106} Read, ‘Introduction’, \textit{Australia: Aboriginal Paintings}, p. 7
\textsuperscript{107} Herbert Read, \textit{Education through Art}, London: Faber & Faber, 1943
\textsuperscript{108} Read, ‘Art and the Development of the Personality’, p. 102
the theories of psychoanalysis, and their application to art became relevant through Read’s *Surrealism* in the early 1940s.\(^{109}\) As he began to mature as a painter, his work was shaped by an interest in extreme psychological states and an expressionist technique, such as *The Raft (2.28)*.\(^{110}\) He had already began exploring ways of building up surface texture using wax and pigment, and so his encounter in Europe with Tàpies, Burri, Dubuffet and other matter painters immediately had an impact on his use of materials.\(^{111}\) Lynn adopted the techniques he had seen in Europe and adapted them to evocations of the Australian landscape. *Ebb (2.29)* used timber, canvas, hessian and a richly textured surface of paint mixed with PVA or plaster. The shapes are repeated in different media across the surface of the work, divided near the centre by a vertical of timber, recalling the natural shapes of the landscape and the irruptions of human interventions into it. The apparently aged surface of the work evokes a landscape worn down by use and a harsh environment. The use of symbols (linear markings on the timber, the ‘x’ shapes on the timber and incised into one of the pieces of canvas, the circular holes at the top and lower left) suggests meanings from cartography or aerial landscape photography. The evocations that Lynn creates can be seen as a result of his meditation on the European art he had seen, and as an example of Read’s theory of the artist attempting to express archetypal images of human experience. Lynn’s wide experience of international contemporary art and his experimentation with media would be vital to his reception and understanding of the Imitation Realists.

**A ‘corrupt brightness’: London in the 1950s and the popular arts**

Read sought to make art accessible to all people, aside from his writings his most notable attempt to do this was in the establishment of the Institute of Contemporary Arts (ICA) in 1947 with E.L.T. Mesens and Roland Penrose. It furthered Read’s influence on the understanding of modern art, but also provided a forum in which his theories were questioned by the next generation, through the Independent Group (IG). The IG was a crucial centre for the consideration of visual culture in contemporary urban life and included influential figures from a range of disciplines, such as artists Eduardo Paolozzi and Richard Hamilton, architectural historian

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\(^{109}\) Peter Pinson, *Elwyn Lynn: Two Decades*, Sydney: The Ivan Dougherty Gallery, 1977, p. 4


Reyner Banham, architects Peter and Alison Smithson and curator and critic Lawrence Alloway. Their work is in stark contrast with that of the artists discussed above, for although they shared the interest in Outsider art that shaped the work of Dubuffet and of artists associated with CoBrA, it had a different result, in explorations of exhibition practices and popular culture. They considered the products of the mass media as a valid part of visual culture and argued against elitism in the arts. These interests were shared with the Imitation Realists, who also experimented with different forms of art and its exhibition.

Lawrence Alloway is of particular significance in the context of this thesis for his articulation of the trend amongst contemporary artists to incorporate advertising, design, popular culture and found objects into their work. The transatlantic trajectory of his career made his a significant voice in the analysis of both English and American art in the 1950s and 60s. His writing on his generation’s use of collage, which he termed ‘junk culture’, was influential for William C. Seitz, an art historian and curator at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York, and for Lynn, in his writing about the Imitation Realists and on collage in general. Seitz’s catalogue for the exhibition he curated, *The Art of Assemblage* at MoMA in 1961, was informed by Alloway’s writing. Similar in attitude to Seitz’s catalogue, if on a somewhat smaller scale, was Lynn’s explanation of Imitation Realism in the catalogue for the exhibition and the *Broadsheet*. Thus Alloway’s work is important in understanding the critical response to the art of the Imitation Realists and deserves exploration. Alloway is an oft-quoted source in the literature of art at this time, especially in early accounts of Pop art and is increasingly recognised as a key voice from the period.

The IG was established in 1952 at the ICA, as a forum to discuss new ideas and to stage lectures and exhibitions. Lawrence Alloway was involved from 1953, as well as being an assistant, and then deputy director, of the ICA. He had emerged in the early 1950s as an art critic, curator and writer supportive of postwar British

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113 cf. Kalina (ed.) *Lawrence Alloway*

abstraction.\textsuperscript{115} The IG helped both to form and support his ideas, and he participated in its exhibitions and events.\textsuperscript{116} He identified Roger Fry and Herbert Read as being the most prominent contemporary English critical writers on art, but noted the frustration that he and others felt because of the ‘aesthetic distance’ between Fry and Read’s theories and the art object. Read’s theories seemed overly complex, and disengaged from broader culture.\textsuperscript{117} Anne Massey has argued that the IG saw European modernism as a ‘starting point from which an analysis of culture was undertaken’ rather than the view of the ICA founders: that the ‘achievements of the European avant-garde … they never imagined could be surpassed.’\textsuperscript{118}

In the introduction to the \textit{This is Tomorrow} catalogue, Alloway discussed the purpose and origins of the exhibition of twelve groups, ‘devoted to the possibilities of collaboration between architects, painters and sculptors’.\textsuperscript{119} The exhibition is a significant example of Alloway’s developing cultural theory. \textit{This is Tomorrow} was the antithetical response to a proposal from the Parisian \textit{le groupe espace} to hold a joint exhibition in London. Rejecting their restrictive terms for the form of the exhibition, interested parties formed groups and held the exhibition to explore the possibility of working collaboratively and competitively simultaneously. The aspect of collaboration provides an interesting parallel with the Imitation Realists. The twelve groups devised their installations separately from one another, each exploring some aspect of the contemporary world that they believed significant for future directions in art, design and architecture.

\textit{The exhibits in This is Tomorrow can be viewed as display stands of ideas and the principles they symbolize are varied not unified. The independent and competing groups do not agree on any universal...}\\
\textsuperscript{116} Garlake, \textit{New Art New World}, p.137. For example, Alloway was an exhibitor in \textit{This is Tomorrow} and co-designer with Richard Hamilton and Victor Pasmore of ‘An Exhibit’ (ICA, 1957). This exhibition of abstract sliding panels intended to explore how the viewer’s physical and visual experience of an exhibition space could be controlled using only the structural components of the display, rather than the content. Judith Barry, “Designed Aesthetic: Exhibition Design and the Independent Group”, Alloway et. al. Modern Dreams: The Rise and Fall and Rise of Pop, New York: The Institute for Contemporary Art, 1988, pp. 40-45
\textsuperscript{117} Richard Kalina (ed.) \textit{Lawrence Alloway: Imagining the Present: context, content, and the role of the critic}, London: Routledge, 2006, pp. 51-2, 83
\textsuperscript{118} Massey, \textit{The Independent Group: Modernism and Mass Culture in Britain}, p. 2
\textsuperscript{119} Lawrence Alloway, ‘Introduction’, \textit{This is Tomorrow}, London: Whitechapel Gallery, 1956
design principles. This is the aesthetic difficulty about the idea of integration of the arts.\textsuperscript{120}

Hamilton's collage \textit{Just what is it that makes today's homes so different, so appealing (2.30)}, created to be reproduced as a poster and in the catalogue, has such iconic status in histories of Pop art that its association with \textit{This is Tomorrow} has somewhat overshadowed the variety of the exhibits and their responses to contemporary culture and design. Only a minority of them engaged with the mass media; the concerns of the majority were primarily with abstract art and formalist design.\textsuperscript{121} The group of Hamilton, John McHale and John Voelcker was one of those that did respond to popular culture. Their exhibit has been considered to be the final 'parting of the ways' within the British avant-garde between abstractionists and those who would explore commercial imagery.\textsuperscript{122} They constructed an installation out of popular arts material including a real juke box, a cardboard figure of a robot, an oversized Guinness bottle and a 'Cinemascope' billboard. These were mixed with Duchamp's \textit{Rotary Discs} and black and white designs creating optical effects (forerunners of Op art). In the exhibition catalogue, Hamilton explained the group's purpose:

\begin{quote}
We resist the kind of activity which is primarily concerned with the creation of style. We reject the notion that 'tomorrow' can be expressed through the presentation of rigid formal concepts. Tomorrow can only extend the range of the present body of visual experience.\textsuperscript{123}
\end{quote}

By displaying the material that they used in an art gallery, and using the spare, organised display techniques of modern art galleries, they attempted to create an environment in which the viewer could assess visual material that would be the stock from which the future would develop. In doing so they argued that art and design would come from all the surroundings of everyday life, not from excluding extraneous visual material from art and design.

\textsuperscript{120} Alloway, 'Introduction', \textit{This is Tomorrow} \\
\textsuperscript{121} Graham Whitham, 'This is Tomorrow: Genesis of an Exhibition', Alloway et. al. \textit{Modern Dreams}, pp. 34-39. \\
\textsuperscript{123} Richard Hamilton, 'Are they cultured?', catalogue statement, \textit{This is Tomorrow}; 1956
The IG and some of the contributors to *This is Tomorrow* embraced American mass culture, in opposition to the disdain with which British intellectuals in general regarded it. An expression of this is Richard Hoggart's *The Uses of Literacy* (1957):

> Most mass-entertainments... are full of a corrupt brightness, if improper appeals and moral evasions ... they tend towards a view of the world in which progress is conceived as a seeking of material possessions ... and freedom as the ground for endless irresponsible pleasure.\(^{124}\)

Hoggart argued that the established forms of entertainment that had evolved within the working class were in danger of being eroded by mass popular culture from the United States. Similarly, Read regarded the use of commercial imagery as tantamount to the death of art. It denied art as 'a mode of symbolic discourse' through which humanity defined itself and declared that 'if art dies, then the spirit of man becomes impotent and the world relapses into barbarism.'\(^{125}\) The IG's focus on the improvements possible through new technology contradicted Read's ideal form of immutable, universal beauty.\(^{126}\) The IG thus opposed both ends of the class hierarchy: that of the elite, who regarded popular culture as an insult to established taste, and those who championed authentic folk culture, such as Hoggart.

In a 1959 article, *The Long Front of Culture*, Alloway proposed that 'culture' was no longer the property of an elite, who discern the finest examples and bestow them on the next generation. Communications and the mass media were transforming this traditional understanding of culture to a more 'anthropological' one.

> Acceptance of the mass media entails a shift in our notion of what culture is. Instead of reserving the word for the highest artefacts and the noble thoughts of history's top ten, it needs to be used more widely as the description of "what a society does." Then, unique oil paintings and highly personal poems as well as mass-distributed films and group-aimed magazines can be place within a continuum rather than frozen layers in a pyramid.\(^{127}\)

Alloway proposed an inclusive approach to culture, that still drew distinctions between different forms but did not exclude on the basis of its perceived market.

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This opened out potential to consider the ‘fine’ arts as one part of a broader spectrum that included film, television, advertising, design and other aspects of the visual environment. There is a parallel between Alloway’s theory and Brown’s description of Imitation Realism when, as discussed in the previous chapter, the latter wrote:

Modern artists have always been concerned with an attempt to slow down and eventually halt the giant tidal wave of sick sentiment ... and corrupted vulgarianism that rushes through the 20th Century cultural scene with gathering speed. ... Perhaps our new direction in art was born with a quite sudden realization of the fact that we were powerless to stop it, that no power on earth could ever slow it down.\(^{128}\)

When the Imitation Realists bought themselves ‘the latest featherweight imitation-foam-plastic surf-boards and … joyfully [rode] the wave'\(^{129}\) of contemporary culture, they embraced what Alloway described as the ‘continuum’ between what was traditionally viewed as high and low culture.

Through the activities of those associated with the IG we can see a new understanding of art emerging, one which held the visual arts as one part of a spectrum of visual culture, rather than its pinnacle. The products of the mass media were worth the consideration of the artist as much as the contents of the museum. Alloway was significant in the development and articulation of these ideas. This understanding of culture would be central in the work of Pop artists and others employing what Alloway would term ‘junk culture’. Alloway moved to the United States in 1960 to take up a position as a curator at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York, where he was an early supporter of New York Pop artists, curating the first exhibition of their work, *Six Painters and the Object*, to be held at the Guggenheim.\(^{130}\) Alloway was first a Contributing Editor to *Art International* (1958-65) and then Advisory Editor (1966-67). He was attuned to Pop art’s uses of, and responses to, mass culture. He was central to early attempts to explain both English and American Pop art.\(^{131}\) His views represent those of a generation

\(^{129}\) Brown, ‘Zed to 3 in Subterrania’, p. 7
reconsidering the theories of Read and proposing a definition of art that was more encompassing of alternatives.

3. Assemblage and New York

Described as ‘Junksters’ by Elwyn Lynn, the Imitation Realists were pioneering in Australian art for their use of the cast-offs from everyday life to construct their works. As the editor of the CAS NSW Broadsheet Lynn was central in the promotion and discussion of their work. A dedicated reader of journals such as ArtNews, he was informed about contemporary art internationally and he interpreted the Imitation Realists as one part of the response by artists globally to contemporary urban life. In this section I will discuss the background of junk art in New York in the 1950s, the critical response to it as ‘Neo-Dada’ and how this practice made its way from the studios and Happenings of downtown, to the uptown galleries, and finally, to the MoMA via The Art of Assemblage exhibition in 1961. It charts the coverage given to assemblage artists in mainstream news magazines as well as art journals. This establishes that by 1961 assemblage was seen as a technique widely in use by the next generation of artists emerging in New York. The institutional consecration of assemblage via The Art of Assemblage exhibition was controversial amongst New York critics, but within Australia it established assemblage as vital to both modernism and the next phase of contemporary avant-garde art.

Between December 1961 and August 1962 the Imitation Realists were at least mentioned in almost every issue of the monthly CAS NSW Broadsheet: a level of interest that was unique for a debut exhibition in the entire period Lynn was editor. Most mentions were notices in the months before and during the exhibitions, to raise expectations and interest in the group, but in the February and March editions Lynn wrote whole articles about the group and their exhibitions. He justified the unprecedented level of attention:

133 Pinson, Elwyn Lynn, 2002, pp. 16, 53-4
134 The Broadsheet was not issued in January and there was no mention of the group in the July 1962 edition.
Why have we given so much space to the AIR? Because they are a new phenomenon in Australian painting, because they are part of the world-wide revival of dada tendencies, because they have definite affiliations with the New York Junk School and because, more importantly, if the term “Young Artists” is applied to Crothall, Lanceley and Brown, it can hardly be applied, as it so frequently is, to those timid practitioners of contemporary academism.135

Lynn thus largely set the framework for how the group was received in terms of contemporary art internationally, and positioned them in opposition to the ‘contemporary academism’ of the Charm School. In other words, their work was in line with the aims of the CAS as a whole, of furthering the acceptance of avant-garde contemporary art in opposition to what was considered merely decorative. In considering their ‘affiliations’ internationally Lynn did not discuss how their work related to the domestic context, other than as the urban environment that was the source of their materials. This is evident in the introduction he wrote to the catalogue for the *Annandale Imitation Realists* exhibition that situated the artists in this international context:

[Dada] had none of the “accidental” a-logical fetishistic and obsessive accumulation of the Junksters: the New York Branch of this school – Chamberlain, Stankiewicz, Mallary, Rauschenberg – is not concerned with manifestoes or the recreation of visual experiences as were the Dadaists. ... Junk Culture is the culture of cities and expropriates its environment: in Annandale for Crothall and Brown timber-off-cuts and waste metal were readily available; Lanceley (and later Brown) found Woolworth’s handy and cheap.136

The emergence of Alloway’s term ‘junk culture’ and the art it described is considered below, as it was a part of the attempts to survey and analyse contemporary assemblage work and situate such work within modernism historically. *The Art of Assemblage* catalogue and exhibition drew together a history and theory of assemblage that attempted to conceptualise and explain the use of collage by contemporary artists in Europe and the USA. The theory is examined here in order to consider how assemblage was perceived to function in works of art. This offers insight into how Australian artists also understood and used assemblage as a technique that challenged divisions between art and life, the gallery and the street.

135 Elwyn Lynn, ‘The Annandale Imitation Realists (AIR) and MOMA’, CAS NSW *Broadsheet*, March 1962, p. 3
136 Elwyn Lynn, ‘Words, Words, Words,’ February 1962
Assemblage, Neo-Dada and Junk Culture

Lynn's articles 'Calligraphy' and 'Neo-Dada' in the June and August 1959 editions of the Broadsheet demonstrate that he and others in the NSW CAS considered Neo-Dada to be an established direction amongst contemporary artists. Whitehouse argues that it was also demonstrated by the parodic *Muffled Drums* exhibition of October 1959.

'Muffled Drums' signalled the end of the avant-garde phase of abstract expressionism as the NSW CAS refocussed its energies introducing neo-dada and assemblage as the new strategies for aesthetic activism.137

Lynn saw Neo-Dada as 'evident throughout the Western world' in 'calligraphic, animistic tendencies and the desire to use discarded, debauched “inartistic” materials' motivated by an 'authentic and urgent honesty.'138

Robert Rauschenberg, Jasper Johns, Richard Stankiewicz and Claes Oldenburg were all discussed in *ArtNews* and the mainstream media from their earliest solo shows, and so were crucial to communicating 'junk art' beyond New York. The *Art of Assemblage* exhibition positioned these artists as the contemporary expression of an historical theme, of artists using assemblage as a technique to create juxtaposition throughout modern art. Although Abstract Expressionists such as Jackson Pollock, Lee Krasner and Willem de Kooning used collage at times, the movement was primarily preoccupied with painting that was associated with explorations of the personal subconscious articulated on large canvases through abstract gestures.139

From 1958 the term 'Neo-Dada' began to be used in relation to works by Rauschenberg, Johns, Stankiewicz and Oldenburg (amongst others, including Allan Kaprow, James Dine and Red Grooms).140 The term was often used pejoratively or without any precise or substantial meaning and so was disavowed by artists, who also did not like the association with a movement of forty years earlier.141 Dada had a newfound influence on American art during the 1950s through the publication of

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137 Whitehouse, *The Contemporary Art Society of NSW*, p. 318
138 Elwyn Lynn, 'Calligraphy', *CAS NSW Broadsheet*, June 1959, p. 5
139 Wescher, *Collages*, pp. 297-302
140 It was first used with reference to Jasper Johns' 'Target with Plaster Heads', which was the cover image for *ArtNews*, vol. 58, (January 1958)
Robert Motherwell’s *Dada painters and poets* and more specifically in New York, through the influence of Duchamp on John Cage. Barbara Rose argues that Cage transmitted Duchamp’s ideas to many in his circle, including Rauschenberg, Johns and Kaprow. Over forty works by Duchamp were installed as part of the Arensberg Collection in the Philadelphia Museum of Art, which New York artists including Rauschenberg, Johns and Stankiewicz travelled to see. Rose and others fiercely debated the relevance of Dada to these artists, largely because of the absence of the vehement political (or rather, anti-political) sentiments in their work. It was rather the Dada artists use of materials that was considered relevant to contemporary developments, such as Duchamp’s readymades and their association with the artist as selector, and Schwitters’ *Merz* collages made from assembled detritus. Dada provided an alternative from Surrealism, which had helped shape the explorations of the subconscious by the Abstract Expressionists.

Collage and assemblage aided the return to figuration of Rauschenberg, Johns, Stankiewicz and Oldenburg. It heralded a new interaction with their environment, and each made use of detritus of some sort, creating allusions to the urban environment and to obsolescence, the counterpart to mass consumption. Abstraction continued, of course, as a powerful form of expression, and ‘junk’ offered vital dimensions to this, particularly in sculpture, such as that by Stankiewicz. Many artists other than those mentioned here used assemblage but for reasons of brevity only Rauschenberg, Johns, Stankiewicz and Oldenburg will be discussed, in order to gain some understanding of the spectrum of activities in New York in the 1950s and early 1960s and the critical reception of them.

Rauschenberg’s work from the mid-fifties would prove to be a landmark transition between Abstract Expressionism and Pop art. His work received notice from the 1950s in New York. He was included in survey shows of younger artists who were identified as the next generation of leading artists. This attracted the attention of the press, who followed the developments of modern American art, and was important to

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142 Motherwell, *The dada painters and poets*
143 Barbara Rose, ‘Dada then and now’, *Art International*, vol. 7, no. 1 (January 1963), p. 23-8
146 Hapgood, *Neo-Dada*, p. 13
artists attracting a broader following. This ensured that readers of ArtNews in Australia were aware of his work and the recognition of it as the new direction for contemporary art. A critic for ArtNews, Nicolas Calas, compared the arrangement of collage to composing an abstract painting, and saw a continuation and development of Abstract Expressionism in Rauschenberg’s work.

With Robert Rauschenberg, painted surfaces fall into Abstract-Expressionist patterns emphasizing a sense of rawness akin to that which enabled de Kooning to tap beneath the skin of Fauvism.

Rauschenberg tested the limits of the visual arts. He incorporated all of his surroundings into (and onto, through or around) the surface of the work. They were a product of the urban environment Rauschenberg inhabited in New York, figuratively and literally. He began making what he called ‘combines’ in 1954. He incorporated objects, as well as paint and other traditional mediums, to sample a piece of everyday urban life. He attempted to recreate the sensation of being constantly exposed to visual stimuli in the everyday life of the metropolis, by combining them, up against one another, with no integration, hierarchy or narrative.

‘There is no more subject in a combine’, John Cage argued, ‘than there is in a page from a newspaper. Each thing that is there is a subject. It is a situation involving multiplicity.’ Collection (2.31) is assembled on three canvas panels layered with loosely applied paint and collage elements over patches of pure colour. The line of the top edge is broken up with pieces of wood; this takes the viewer’s eye out of the otherwise rectangular work and seems to imply that a connection is being invited between the work and its surrounds. Reservoir (2.32) documents its creation within the work itself: the clocks are set to the times at which Rauschenberg started and completed it. As with Collection, Reservoir refuses to be contained, the wooden shelf protrudes into the viewer’s space. The wheel embedded into the work both repeats the form of the clocks and interrupts the surface, revealing the wall behind it; the spokes create shadows that draw the eye into the space behind the painting.

Calas also included Jasper Johns in his study of younger artists’ relation to the Abstract Expressionists, when he compared the ‘ambiguity’ of Johns’ use of signs to that of Barnett Newman’s representation of colour planes. In his Flag series, Johns covered newspaper in encaustic and pigment that formed the American flag. They unsettle easy categorisation: are they an actual flag? Or a depiction of a flag? In an interview of 1965 Johns was asked why he had first used materials such as flags, targets and numbers. He replied that they ‘seemed to me pre-formed, conventional, depersonalized, factual exterior elements.’ His method was in opposition to the self-expression of the Abstract Expressionists. Instead, his work engages with forms of communication, by employing signs – objects that carry symbolic meaning – rather than individualistic mark-making. A connection with abstract art can be seen, as despite using recognizable content, Johns does not build a ‘scene’ in which the symbol is placed. The medium was significant to the meaning of the work for Johns; the process of making the work was made apparent in the work’s final form. By using encaustic, the beeswax built up and preserved the layers and brushstrokes. Strata of meaning were created, preserving the ephemeral newspaper but also obscuring its original content.

Johns’ Target with plaster casts used collage and encaustic on canvas to create the eponymous target, with a row of plaster casts of body parts in wooden boxes along the top edge of the canvas. These had hinged wooden doors that were intended to spring open and trigger sounds when touched. As with Rauschenberg, Johns pushes the boundaries of traditional mediums. The work seems like a fairground attraction, offering a prize for hitting a target, evoking the use of universally understood symbols by popular arts, such as circus decoration, that rely on ready recognition to communicate easily with the viewer. Target was the cover illustration of ArtNews for January 1958, the time of Johns’ first solo exhibition, at the Leo Castelli Gallery. Castelli described this exhibition as a ‘landmark’ in his own career for the response it received, ‘a tremendous flurry and enthusiasm’. Alfred Barr bought three works for the MoMA collection and spent ‘hours’ at the

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150 Calas, ‘ContiNuance’, p. 42
152 Francis (ed.) Pop, p. 53
153 Leo Castelli, ‘MoMA oral history project: interview with Leo Castelli conducted by Sharon Zane’, October, November 1991, January 1992, New York: MoMA Archives
exhibition.\textsuperscript{154} Johns described Barr’s interest as ‘flabbergasting’, and the exhibition as formative on his career.\textsuperscript{155} A year later an article on Johns appeared in \textit{Time} magazine, remarking on his rapid rise in the art world.

A year ago he was practically unknown; since then he has had a sellout show in Manhattan, has exhibited in Paris and Milan, was the only American to win a painting prize at the Carnegie International, and has seen three of his paintings bought for Manhattan’s Museum of Modern Art.\textsuperscript{156}

The word ‘junk’ was first, and most consistently, used in connection with Stankiewicz’s work, in both the arts and mainstream press. In December 1956 \textit{Time} published a profile on Stankiewicz, quoting his goal to ‘take material that is already degenerating, flaking and rusting and then try to make something beautiful out of it. It should hit people over the head and make them ask, ‘What is beauty?’\textsuperscript{157} \textit{ArtNews} consistently mentioned Stankiewicz in connection with junk, describing him as the ‘Audobon of the junkyards’ in a review of January 1958.\textsuperscript{158} Stankiewicz received mainstream press attention from his earliest exhibitions; he was described by \textit{Time} as the ‘hit of the show’ at the annual Stable Gallery group exhibition in 1955.\textsuperscript{159}

Stankiewicz had begun welding pieces of scrap metal together in the early 1950s (2.35), after he was inspired by the junk he unearthed as he dug a garden in the yard of his apartment building, because its ‘sense of presence, of life, was almost overpowering.’\textsuperscript{160} In employing such material, the previous life it contains is harnessed by the work to create an aura of strangeness. According to the artist and critic Fairfield Porter ‘the ambiguity gives it a mischievous life of its own, a resistance to classification, a stubborn humor, that comes from the form contradicting the function.’\textsuperscript{161} Stankiewicz called attention to the aesthetic

\textsuperscript{154} Castelli, interview with Zane, 1991, 1992
\textsuperscript{155} Jasper Johns, ‘MoMA oral history project: interview with Jasper Johns conducted by Sharon Zane’, 23 August 1994, MoMA Archives.
\textsuperscript{156} ‘His Heart Belongs to Dada’, \textit{Time}, 4 May 1959, online: http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,892526,00.html [accessed 4 Dec 2008]
\textsuperscript{158} ‘Richard Stankiewicz’, \textit{ArtNews}, vol. 56, January 1958, p. 18
\textsuperscript{160} Richard Stankiewicz, quoted in Janis & Blesh, \textit{Collage}, p.234, from an interview between Stankiewicz and the authors.
properties of industrial material, the abstract qualities of isolated and broken pieces of former machines. This invites a reconsideration of the material that surrounds the viewer in modern urban life, and asserts the possibility of making art out of anything, no matter how humble the source. He described how he saw sculpture as ‘a three dimensional drawing, or actually the articulation of spatial volumes, this regardless of whether there is a figure or a totally abstract representation.’ The assemblage nature of his work was ‘additive’ rather than ‘subtractive, like chipping away materials from blocks ... I take things that are presented to me ... something that had a fascinating shape, outline, sculptural form, and to civilise it by making it make a composition.’

Contrasting with Stankiewicz’s predominantly formal concerns, Claes Oldenburg was involved in the ‘Happenings’ in New York in the late 1950s, and would go on to become one of the most prominent Pop artists. Happenings were temporary spaces in which ‘environments’ were installed for performance art that attempted to immerse and involve the audience. The Imitation Realists explorations of different exhibition methods have some parallel with Happenings in their attempt to exhibit their work in a manner that broke with the formal constraints of an art gallery and evoked contemporary life. Oldenburg tried to capture the essence of city life in his work Snapshots from the City (1960, Judson Gallery, New York). The ‘set’ was an all-over installation in the gallery created from objects Oldenburg made from cardboard and burlap, roughly painted to represent everyday life on the street. Oldenburg developed these to create The Store in his Lower East Side studio; an exhibition of everyday consumables (cakes, clothes) that he created out of wire, plaster and enamel paint. The exhibition was both gallery and shop, playing with the similarities of commodity display and art exhibition.

Rauschenberg, Johns, Stankiewicz and Oldenburg each demonstrated different possibilities that artists found in the use of junk and assemblage. In their work we have seen different responses to the contemporary environment. Critics in both the

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162 Richard Stankiewicz, Conversation with Richard Stankiewicz, interviewed by Hazel de Berg, Oral History, NLA, 7 August 1969
163 Stankiewicz, interview by de Berg, 1969
164 ‘Happenings’ received their first significant published coverage in Allan Kaprow, ‘“Happenings” in the New York Scene’, ArtNews, vol. 60, (May 1961), pp. 36-9, 58-62
165 Francis, Pop, p. 63
mainstream press and art journals closely followed this interest, which resulted in such work being perceived as the leading direction amongst contemporary artists. Alloway saw Dada as distinct from the contemporary artists work because of the protest the Dadaists made against contemporary society, whereas the Neo-Dadaists were accepting of their surrounds. Although Dada was clearly relevant to the development of a different approach to their materials and art making, Neo-Dada was misleading and misapplied in several respects, and so never embraced by artists. In 1962 Lynn noted the distinction Alloway made between Dada and Neo-Dada in ‘The Collage Explosion’ in The Listener. An alternative proposed by Lawrence Alloway was ‘junk culture’, which he first used in the New Media – New Forms catalogue in 1960 for the Martha Jackson Gallery (New York). As already discussed, ‘junk’ was already frequently being used to describe the material being used by artists, especially Stankiewicz, but Alloway attached conceptual implications to its use.

Rauschenberg, Johns, Stankiewicz and Oldenburg were all included in the landmark exhibition New Media – New Form which is considered to have first made apparent the number of artists using junk. Thomas B. Hess reviewed the show in ArtNews and commented that

There is a kind of protest in many of these works, but it is not against the values of middle-class society as were the Dada manifestations. Rather the new protest is in favour of society – or for People in general – and against the invisible, crystal-hard barriers that an oil-on-canvas or a sculpture place between the witness and the finished object. ... You are invited to touch and move things ... be a participant.

The show generated such a response that a second exhibition was held later in the year and a catalogue produced. Twenty galleries were involved and over seventy different artists. The number and range of work using junk ‘greatly surprised’ the

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169 Martha Jackson Gallery, New Forms – New Media I, 1960
organisers. Alloway’s piece for the catalogue, ‘Junk Culture as a tradition’ gave the historical background of the use of collage in Futurism and Dada, ‘not to give junk culture an art history, only to link it to a common source, the city.’ He drew a distinction between the earlier and the contemporary artists in the attitude that they took towards their materials. ‘New York junk culture ... by rejecting the album and locket esthetic of Schwitters accepts the radical implications of using junk. ... Essential to junk culture is retention of the original status of the objects.’ Alloway expanded this into an article in 1961 for Architectural Design, ‘Junk Culture’, in which he traced the contemporary artist’s use of found material to construct assemblage work as a ‘continuation of themes of general validity in the body of modern art as a whole.’ He identified this technique as exaggerating the work’s connection with its context. ‘The space of an object is literal, not pictorial; the dimension of illusion, the means to many of art’s most valuable effects, is denied.’ He considered art out of ‘junk culture’ to be a direct response to its time, and the rapid changes in society brought by mass consumption.

The acceptance of mass-produced objects, just because they are what is around, not because they issue from idolatrised technology, is central to mid-century Junk Culture. ... Assemblages of such material come at the spectator as bits of life, bits of the environment. The urban environment is present, then, as the source of objects, whether transfigured or left alone. ... Proximity and participation replace distance and contemplation as the communicative style of the object.

An example of this ‘acceptance of mass produced objects’ can be seen in Brown’s The Bush Carpenter’s Girlfriend, (1.16) constructed out of bottle tops and timber off cuts. The title emphasises the home made, amateur quality of its construction, the wood is the roughly finished lumber of a building site rather than fine timber for carving. The decoration of bottle tops utilises accessible material, familiar to the viewer from everyday life. Alloway emphasises that ‘essential to junk culture is preservation of the original status and function of the objects in the new context of the work of art.’ This can be applied to Brown’s work as it relies on the familiarity of the bottle tops and their status as disposable objects, so that by

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171 Martha Jackson, New Forms – New Media I, 1960
172 Lawrence Alloway, ‘Junk Culture as a tradition’ in Martha Jackson Gallery, New Forms – New Media I, 1960
173 Alloway, ‘Junk Culture as a tradition’, 1960
175 Alloway, ‘Junk Culture’, 1961
resituating them in an artwork he creates a work that invites a reconsideration of what constitutes art. Alloway's background in London meant that he was able to draw together disparate practices of assemblage and sculpture. His attempts to analyse visual culture outside of what was termed 'art' and 'not-art' made him sympathetic to artists creating work out of their environment and attempting to embed it in everyday life. He provides an understanding of the shift in attitude by contemporary artists towards their materials and the role of their work in relation to the spectator that will be applied to the Imitation Realists. Lynn cited Alloway's work in relation to the Imitation Realists, positioning them in connection with the New York junk artists and the latest manifestation of contemporary avant-garde practice in the visual arts.

The Art of Assemblage exhibition

Alloway's articulation of these attitudes in contemporary art was to be one element in the theoretical construction of assemblage behind the exhibition *The Art of Assemblage*, curated by William C. Seitz at the MoMA in 1961. This exhibition is relevant to this thesis for two primary reasons. Firstly, it demonstrates the growing number of attempts by curators, art critics, art historians and art dealers to survey the development of collage in both contemporary art and throughout twentieth century modernism. Secondly it provides a theoretical explanation of the contemporary use of assemblage that is relevant to a consideration of Imitation Realism, for its attempt to explain artists' response to junk materials in the urban environment.

Seitz built assemblage into the context of twentieth century modern art by giving a theoretical explanation of its function and by historicizing its use in the exhibition, provisionally titled *Collage and the Object*. He argued that collage had not been sufficiently recognised as a distinct body of work in twentieth century art. The Museum would be the first major institution to stage a large exhibition of the medium. Seitz also intended the catalogue to be the first survey publication on the

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177 William C. Seitz, 'Problems of “New Directions” Exhibitions', *Artforum*, vol. 2 no. 3 (Sept 1963), pp. 23-5
medium. The exhibition traced the history of collage in twentieth century art, from Braque and Picasso to New York junk art in its various forms. It argued that assemblage encapsulated something intrinsic to the spirit of modern art. As the exhibition took shape, contemporary art gained greater prominence. Seitz knew that this would be a controversial aspect of the show, which he discussed in a letter to the Director of the Albright Art Gallery (Buffalo, NY), Gordon M Smith.

The collage and object theme ... is at once timely, exploratory and retrospective. The exhibition will be preceded by a group of analogous works from earlier periods, and introduced by a showing of Cubist and other early collage and construction ... it will culminate with as varied as possible a demonstration of the widespread current wave of collage-construction. Included will be work from the US, France, Germany, Italy, Poland and other centres where such work is being done. To place work of young artists in juxtaposition with that of recognised masters is inevitably to raise questions of precedence and historical development. Never the less, it is not my intention to be historically exhaustive, but rather to reveal the diversity, expressive power and beauty which has been achieved in these uniquely contemporary art forms.

As they are stated here, Seitz’s goals for the exhibition were ambitious: aiming to present an exhibition that canvassed the whole history of twentieth century collage practices, as well as contemporary developments internationally. He surveyed collections in America to gain a sense of what work was available and travelled through Europe in early 1961 visiting Frankfurt, Milan, London, Amsterdam and Paris. In Paris he met key figures in the history of collage, including Man Ray, Tristan Tzara and Jean Dubuffet, to discuss the concept and contents of the exhibition. The exhibition included works from MoMA’s own collection and from galleries, collectors, artists and dealers internationally. The exhibition

178 Letter from Seitz to Gordon M. Smith, Director, 7 Nov 1960, William C. Seitz Papers, [series II.3]. MoMA Archives, New York. Blesh and Janis, Collage, cited in Seitz, were ultimately the first to publish a survey of collage in the twentieth century.

179 Letter from Seitz to Smith, 7 Nov 1960, offering exhibition to Albright Art Gallery, Buffalo NY, (The Albright was unable to host exhibition due to refurbishment, reply 3 Feb 3 1961, Smith to Seitz), Exhibition File #695 ‘Art of Assemblage’, Department of Painting and Sculpture, MoMA, New York

180 July to October 1960, Letters from Seitz to American art museums and galleries asking them for details of collage work in their collections. Exhibition File #695 ‘Art of Assemblage’, Department of Painting and Sculpture, MoMA, New York


183 Seitz, Art of Assemblage, p. 153
brought together a survey of historical and contemporary work, including the first substantial survey of work by the French *Nouveau Réalistes*, including Raymond Hains, Daniel Spoerri, Niki de Saint Phalle, Jean Tinguely and Jacques de la Villeglé.

Seitz had been dissatisfied with the title *Collage and the Object* since the beginning of the project, ‘not only because collage was only one aspect of the theme, but also because the entire tradition of assembled art has involved three-dimensional objects.’ Junk and Neo-Dada defined only the recent changes in artists’ attitudes to materials in the twentieth century. As he wrote to Dubuffet, he desired to adopt the term ‘assemblage’ as it encompassed a wider variety of the practices he was examining and including in the exhibition and catalogue. He would later summarise the definition of ‘assemblage’ as ‘a work of art made by joining materials and objects not intended as art materials.’ After the exhibition, and indeed, during, if reviews are taken into account, ‘assemblage’ became a generally used term in visual arts discourse. In all, the exhibition consisted of 252 pieces: primarily twentieth century Western art, but with some examples of earlier collage (a 19th century British Valentine’s Day card), assemblage (a 15th or 16th century French Gargoyle made from lead pipes) and non-Western (a 19th century African assemblage sculpture of a two-headed dog). Of the 144 artists in the exhibition, most were represented by between one and three works, except for Duchamp, Schwitters and Cornell, who had nineteen, thirty-four and fourteen works included respectively. This indicates Seitz’s view of their status as masters of the form and illustrates the definition of assemblage he used to make connections between artists in a medium-specific exhibition. In the catalogue he situated the Cubists use of collage in the context of the ‘juxtaposition’ in literature by Stéphane Mallarmé, Guillaume Apollinaire, Filippo Tommaso Marinetti and André Gide. Later assemblage artists he placed in the ‘collage environment’ of 1950s America and its billboards, petrol stations, neon lights and the obsolescence that characterised the

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184 Seitz, letter to Jean Dubuffet, April 19 1961, Exhibition File #695 ‘Art of Assemblage’, Department of Painting and Sculpture, MoMA, New York
185 Seitz, letter to Jean Dubuffet, April 19 1961 and Seitz, *Art of Assemblage*, p. 150
187 Ruzicka (ed.), ‘The Art of Assemblage’, p. 159
188 Seitz, *The Art of Assemblage*, p. 153
juxtapositions of modern urban life.\textsuperscript{189} The juxtapositions created by assembling non-art materials were at the centre of Seitz’s belief in the technique’s importance.

The method of assemblage is inconceivable without dada’s negativism, for the precondition of juxtaposition is a state of total randomness and disassociation ... The type of unity that results from juxtaposition, however, can never be entirely preordained, for an assembled work grows by testing, rejection, and acceptance. The artist must cede a measure of his control, and hence of his ego, to the materials and what transpires between them, placing himself partially in the role of discoverer or spectator as well as that of originator.\textsuperscript{190}

Seitz here identifies the aesthetic power of assemblage lying in its ability to create juxtapositions that evoke the sense that the work has ‘grown’, with the artist in the ‘role of discoverer’. The Imitation Realists can be seen to harness this effect in their work; as in the group’s statement in the CAS VIC Broadsheet when Brown wrote that they embraced all the kitsch that modern life had to offer and ‘we pour it all into our paintings and sculptures until they seem to us to yawn, sit up, blink their eyes and start to be filled with a life of their own.’\textsuperscript{191} Lanceley described this sense of the works having their own agency, he remembered the group having a ‘ceremony’ to name some of the works:

we’d get together and say things in front of the work, and see how the work responded ... it to be full of its own personality but it had to look as it had grown, without much interference from us even though we were shaping and making it.\textsuperscript{192}

The sense of chance that shaped the works’ construction thus resulted in a sense that the works were not merely an expression of the artists’ own will, but in some way independent from them.

The literary scholar Roger Shattuck informed Seitz’s understanding of the importance of juxtaposition to modern art.\textsuperscript{193} Seitz grounded his history of

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item \textsuperscript{189} Seitz, The Art of Assemblage, pp. 13-20 and 72-80
\item \textsuperscript{190} Seitz, The Art of Assemblage, pp. 38-39
\item \textsuperscript{191} Brown, ‘Zed to three in Subterraria’, p. 7
\item \textsuperscript{192} Lanceley, interview with the author, 2006
\item \textsuperscript{193} Seitz, ‘Problems of “New Directions” Exhibitions’, 1963, p. 23. In The Banquet Years Shattuck identifies the defining characteristics of early modern art as that of juxtaposition, as contrasted with ‘earlier arts of transition’. Transition refers to those works that rely upon clear articulation of the relations between parts at the places they join. ... The arts have sought to duplicate these inner creative processes, to portray them without putting them through rigorous realignments of dramatic development, linear perspective, or tonality. Self-reflexiveness aims a work of art at itself, at its own development, as both subject and form. Juxtaposition, with its surprises and intimacy of form, brings the spectator closer than ever before to the abruptness of creative process.’ Roger Shattuck, The
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assemblage in the twentieth century within this broader tendency toward 'difficult, disconcerting, fragmented works whose disjunct sequence has neither beginning nor end.'\textsuperscript{194} He sought to give assemblage the freedom to 'follow its inherent principles with total freedom, and to represent the assemblage technique as diversely as possible'.\textsuperscript{195} Grounding his argument for the effects of collage and assemblage techniques in Shattuck's definition of 'juxtaposition' gave Seitz a basis on which to link diverse forms of collage and create an art historical narrative throughout Western art in the twentieth century.

Seitz cited Alloway as 'one of the most eloquent spokesmen for composite art'\textsuperscript{196} before quoting from 'Junk Culture' in support of the argument that the 'proper backdrop for recent assemblage is the multifarious fabric of the modern city.'\textsuperscript{197} Alloway and Seitz agreed that the stimulation for the changing nature of artists' interactions with their materials arose from the 'collage environment' of modern urban life.\textsuperscript{198} This environment was the contemporary context of, and inspiration for, the diverse uses of collage by contemporary artists in the exhibition. Alloway spoke about assemblage and popular culture at a symposium Seitz organised in conjunction with the exhibition in October 1961. Alloway contrasted the traditional 'purity' of media, that can be found in oil paintings by artists such as Rothko or Hofmann, with what he described as the 'border art' of assemblage, that was 'consistently problematical' because the viewer's recognition of the source material caused them to ask 'what happened to it that makes it art here?'\textsuperscript{199} Alloway argued that 'this common source seems to me what makes an assemblage different from any other kind of art'\textsuperscript{200} as it created a connection between the viewer and the work through their recognition of the materials' origins. The 'collage environment' of

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\textit{Banquet Years: The Origins of the Avant-Garde in France, 1885 to World War I}, London: Faber, 1958, p. 341

\textsuperscript{194} Shattuck, \textit{The Banquet Years}, p. 333

\textsuperscript{195} Seitz, 'Problems of “New Directions” Exhibitions', 1963, p. 23

\textsuperscript{196} Seitz, \textit{The Art of Assemblage}, p.73

\textsuperscript{197} Seitz, \textit{The Art of Assemblage}, p.73

\textsuperscript{198} Seitz, \textit{The Art of Assemblage}, pp. 72-4

\textsuperscript{199} Lawrence Alloway, (no title for Alloway's paper was given) in Ruzicka (ed.), 'The Art of Assemblage', pp. 139-40

\textsuperscript{200} Alloway, in Ruzicka (ed.), 'The Art of Assemblage', p. 139
urban life 'make an environment we all share, and the articles of this living-space environment I recognize in the works in the show'.

The symposium and the catalogue both demonstrate Seitz’s desire to build an historical context for the use of collage in modern art, one that progressed from the Cubists’ first *papier collés* to the junk assemblages of contemporary New York. Its historical use was further linked by the theoretical considerations of Shattuck, whose emphasis of juxtaposition as an expression of the experience of modern life was held to be an explanation for artists’ inclusion of fragments from this life in their work. Although not a particularly poetic term, the range of work encompassed by ‘junk culture’ encouraged and allowed for an appreciation of a diverse range of practices that drew on the urban environment. *The Art of Assemblage* brought together work internationally that engaged with urban and industrial cultures and was constructed out of its detritus. The understanding of the motivations for such work that Seitz developed from Shattuck and Alloway provides ideas that help explain the approach to and effects of the Imitation Realists’ work. The ‘multifarious fabric of the modern city’ was a key motivation for the artists, according to Lanceley.

We responded to the life of the street – we all lived in inner-Sydney in rented rooms, and each in our own way, started using the materials that were to hand. Inner Sydney, its lanes and back alleys, are a very rich source of discarded objects, interestingly formed objects – accidentally formed and broken things – and all of those things were very attractive to me. … The railway arches that I used to walk through to go to work were covered in fabulous posters, to a half inch thickness sometimes before they would come away from the wall and people would tear bits off and reveal bits coming through from behind – they were visually a huge stimulus – all these kinds of accidental findings went into the work.

Imitation Realism shared with ‘junk culture’, as Alloway defined it, the fascination with the aesthetic potential of the urban environment, where the discarded and decaying is part of day to day life. The problematical nature of assemblage, as a ‘border art’ was demonstrated by the exhibition review in *The Bulletin*:

No doubt there is a great deal of junk lying around under our noses by the time we’ve thrown out the plastics, the girlie magazines and the

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201 Alloway, in Ruzicka (ed.), ‘The Art of Assemblage’, p. 139
202 Colin Lanceley, interview with the author, 2006
The preservation of the ‘original status’ of the objects creates a difficulty in the definition of the art work, creating the ‘juxtaposition’ that Shattuck defined. As Robert Hughes’s noted, in his review of the Sydney exhibition, ‘the forms of Imitation Realism are grossly impure: they do not compel attention as formal elements, but as conflicting fragments of a disorderly mosaic.’

From The Art of Assemblage we can see how assemblage was being conceptualised and understood as highly significant to both modernism and to contemporary art. It offers an explanation as to why the Imitation Realists were so inspired by such material in Sydney and why their work was embraced by other artists as well as critics, art historians and dealers.

As Seitz had expected, both at the time of the exhibition and since, his attempt to historicise assemblage and present the range of contemporary practice was controversial. Hess censured the museum because ‘this collector-sanctifying bureaucracy latches on the past with relish, tidies it up, makes a package and covers it with neat gummed labels.’ He criticised the attempt to establish a history of collage, for the assumption ‘that there is a tradition in modern art ... from the first cubist application of wallpaper ... to the recent international efflorescence of what is usually called Neo-Dada.’ He also disagreed with the exhibition for its history being centred on Paris, ‘while it will take years to convince itself that an American artist is worth exhibition space.’ Hapgood argued that the inclusion of the Nouveau Realistes resulted in fruitful interchange between artists in Paris and New York. Hess also criticised the exhibition for not demonstrating the close relationship between junk artists and the Abstract Expressionists and for not investigating ‘Happenings’. He noted that American art had a greater emphasis in the catalogue, as Seitz’s ‘text, in fact, is more a reflection of this ideal situation than it is of his “Assemblage” exhibition itself.’ Brandon Taylor has more recently criticised the catalogue for this emphasis on American art. He argues that the

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204 Robert Hughes, ‘A Lot of Junk’, Nation, 16 June 1962, p. 20
206 Hess, ‘Collage as an Historical Method’, p. 32
207 Hess, ‘Collage as an Historical Method’, p.71
208 Hapgood, Neo-Dada, p.44ff
209 Hapgood, Neo-Dada, p.44ff
exhibition ‘competitively juxtaposed’ the work of contemporary European and American artists, and ‘even the elevation to superior status of American attitudes to happenstance and urban ruin’.\(^{210}\)

And language was being realigned too: the English-American word ‘assemblage’ would hereafter replace and extend the French words *assemblage* and *collage* as designations for a whole gamut of avant-garde mannerisms and techniques centred on composite material juxtaposition. It is in this sense that *The Art of Assemblage* might be read as a turning point – after which any politicized avant-garde driven by the disjunctive methods of collage, and under any name, would have to find dissemination techniques far away from the historicizing display spaces of the international museum of art.\(^{211}\)

Taylor regards *The Art of Assemblage* as but one example of the waning relevance of collage in the early 1960s to contemporary art.\(^{212}\) In *American Art Since 1945* Dore Ashton held *The Art of Assemblage* to be ‘one of the most significant’ exhibitions of the 1960s.\(^{213}\) She argued that this was because of Seitz’s presentation of assemblage in the context of modernism and contemporary art, bringing together the varied contemporary practices from across Europe and the US.\(^{214}\) Both Taylor and Ashton view *The Art of Assemblage* as a landmark exhibition in the art historical considerations of collage, for its array of art that engaged with material sources in innovative and challenging ways, and for doing so in a major museum. The different critical responses demonstrate the inherent pitfalls in historicising contemporary work, and the upheaval within the art world as New York contested European dominance of contemporary art. Within New York the diverse practices of the ‘junk’ artists were being increasingly incorporated into the mainstream art market, demonstrated by the success of solo exhibitions of Rauschenberg, Johns, Stankiewicz and Oldenburg and the increasing awareness of its practice, such as in the *New Media* exhibition.

*The Art of Assemblage* demonstrates the variety of practices that were being explored contemporaneously, and the history of collage and assemblage that was being explicated in New York at this time. It gave an international prominence to assemblage, understood in a broader context of junk, juxtaposition and as a response

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\(^{210}\) Taylor, *Collage*, p. 170

\(^{211}\) Taylor, *Collage*, p. 170-1

\(^{212}\) Taylor, *Collage*, pp. 165-71

\(^{213}\) Ashton, *American Art Since 1945*, p. 105

\(^{214}\) Ashton, *American Art Since 1945*, p. 105-07
to the urban environment, through both the exhibition and the catalogue and through sparking the debate in art journals such as *ArtNews* and *Art International*, and coverage in mainstream magazines such as *Time*. This was important in the critical reception of the Imitation Realists, in constructing a context for their work as a part of both recent developments of art internationally and the history of twentieth century collage. Lynn’s awareness of these debates meant that in his writing he could use the scene in New York to place the Imitation Realists at the forefront of international contemporary art.

**Conclusion**

In Australian art until 1960, collage had predominantly been used as either a technique to explore composition or to use collage material to achieve aims that were largely formal. It was the context of international art in the 1950s that shaped the response of the Australian art world to the Imitation Realists, which ensured that the focus would remain on their materials and their response to the urban environment, rather than how their work responded and contributed to art in Australia. By discussing the Imitation Realists in the context of international art from 1912 to 1962 we are able to see how collage developed through twentieth century modernism as a strategy to make relativity, rather than autonomy, characterise the art objects’ relation to its surrounds. Since the Second World War European artists sought new definitions and sources of creativity that were expressed in new approaches to materials, subject matter and the exhibition of their work. The development of ‘junk art’ in New York can be seen as a parallel to that of the Imitation Realists, as younger artists absorbed the impact of older artists such as Dubuffet, and responded to abstract art. Their interest in Dada and the surroundings of daily life can be seen as shaping the very different responses they made, that then challenged attempts to label them according to categories of ‘Neo-Dada’, ‘Pop’ or ‘junk’.

We can see how Imitation Realism was but one of the assemblage practices to emerge in contemporary art internationally during this period. Assemblage offered them a way through the divide between abstract and figurative painting, an alternative form to express primal connection of art and life. In using assemblage material the Imitation Realists were able to place fragments of daily life into their work. This made the origins of the work immediately apparent, the work was
constructed out of the environment in which both the artists and their audience lived. It can be seen from the art discussed in this chapter that they shared with artists internationally the desire to respond to the entirety of modern life by embedding material from it into their work. In Australia, however, their incorporation of 'junk' into art was a markedly new use of collage and assemblage. Their exhibitions presented something wholly different in the works and the manner in which they were installed. The following chapter thus closely considers the exhibitions, both how the galleries were situated within the Australian art world and how they presented the works.
Chapter three

The exhibitions of the Imitation Realists

There were two Imitation Realist exhibitions, both in 1962, the first was the Annandale Imitation Realist exhibition in February at the Museum of Modern Art of Australia (MOMAA) in Melbourne. The second was the Subterranean Imitation Realist exhibition in May at the Rudy Komon Gallery in Sydney. Both the art and its installation were completely different from what had previously been shown at either gallery. Through examining the works in the context of their display it will become clear in this chapter how the exhibitions were experienced by the public and how the artists conceived of their practice. It can be seen how their works were not stand alone pieces, but part of an integrated whole, and that this reflected the relationship the artists saw between art and life. In view of the previous chapters, it is immediately apparent how the Imitation Realists employed assemblage and the exhibition installation as subversive strategies through which to challenge existing visual arts practices in Australia. The use of assemblage asserted that art could be made from anything. Their work attempted to capture a sense of freedom, a deliberate ‘anything goes’ attitude in order to assert their belief that art was an intrinsic, basic instinct to humanity, that it was ‘organic’ and ‘primitive’ to use the terminology of the time. As Seitz observed concerning assemblage art, a work developed through the artist ceding control to chance, allowing the work to grow in response to the material that was available. It was this aspect of their art that John Reed enthusiastically endorsed.

By exhibiting in two of the leading galleries for contemporary art, the Imitation Realists ensured that their work would be noticed by critics, artists and the art world generally. The role of John Reed and the MOMAA is particularly important. Reed’s support and the exhibition at the Museum meant that the Imitation Realists were included in a pedigree that went back to the avant-garde art of Melbourne in the

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The Melbourne exhibition will be considered in detail followed by a briefer account of the Rudy Komon Gallery and how it placed the Imitation Realists within the Sydney art scene. The creation of the Café Balzac Mural and the Sydney exhibition catalogue will also be examined, as their last collaborative projects they provide insight into the disbanding of the group. This indicates the directions that Lanceley, Crothall and Brown would take in their subsequent art, which are considered in the following chapter.

The Melbourne exhibition is the primary subject of this chapter, as the photographs enable a more comprehensive analysis of it. These photographs make it possible to establish a more detailed record of the works exhibited and how they were displayed, which enables a deeper understanding of the Imitation Realists and their reception and legacy. Many of the more ephemeral works, which circumstances suggest are no longer extant, can only be seen in these photographs. Only a few of the photographs have been published and it is the same few images which keep recurring, most notably that of the only known photograph of the Sydney exhibition, of the three artists surrounding Byzantium, a press photograph that first appeared to accompany the exhibition review in the Sunday Mirror. This image is as close to iconic as a photograph of the Imitation Realists can aspire. Eight photographs of the Melbourne exhibition have been published, but only as small, usually black and white images accompanying discussion of the exhibition (see appendix III).

In order to examine the Melbourne exhibition in its context, it is necessary to first discuss the circumstances which made the exhibition possible, particularly the background to the MOMAA and the role of John and Sunday Reed. It was John Reed, as Museum director, who invited the Imitation Realists to exhibit at the MOMAA, after he saw the work in situ at the Annandale house where much of it had been created. The dates for the exhibition (the 13th February until the 1st March

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3 The photographs were taken by Magda Kohn and Gordon de Lyle and other unknown press photographers and kept in the collections of Magda Kohn and Mike Brown. They have subsequently accompanied an honours essay by Clive Evatt, The Imitation Realists and Australian pop art, unpublished research essay, Power Institute of Fine Arts, Sydney University, 1972. I thank Kendrah Morgan for the provision of copies of photographs in the collection of Heide.

4 Ian Moffitt, 'So this is bottle top art!', Sunday Mirror, 20 May 1962, p. 42

5 Since its 1962 publication it has reappeared in numerous survey texts of Australian art and relevant journal articles and exhibition catalogues, see appendix III.
1962), were the first dates available after Reed first saw the work in mid-1961. Reed visited Annandale after Elwyn Lynn had written to him about the work. Lynn was Reed’s contact in Sydney regarding up and coming artists. John Olsen and Lynn were seeking to arrange an exhibition for the artists, Reed responded faster than curators or dealers in Sydney and secured the first exhibition. Through these contacts the Imitation Realists first exhibited in the heart of modern Australian art practice and were championed by key figures in the avant-garde art world of Melbourne and Sydney. This context is vital to understand the reception that the artists received.

Background of The Museum of Modern Art of Australia

The interiors of the Museum conformed to the conventions for a modern art gallery of the 1950s, with a simple design that allowed the viewer’s eye to rest uninterruptedly on the works of art. The gallery first opened on 1 June 1956 by Dr H. V. Evatt, as the Gallery of the Contemporary Art (GCA) with the aim to establish a gallery that would exhibit modern Australian and international art. The gallery was in what had formerly been a warehouse, on the top floor of a three-storied bluestone building, in Tavistock Place, Melbourne, overlooking Flinders Street. It had been renovated into an art gallery to a design by the CAS VIC secretary, the architect and artist, Peter Burns. The Museum’s exhibition space was entered through a doorway in a wall made from a geometric design of coloured Perspex panels (3.01-5). This entry was at one end of the main gallery space, a long rectangular room carpeted with dark grey matting. The ceiling was painted dark blue and had fluorescent strip lighting as well as spotlights. The longer side walls were white painted stone. The short wall at the far end of the gallery was plaster painted white, with a double doorway in the centre. The stone walls were originally covered with a wire mesh on which works were hung, these were later also used as panels to divide the gallery space. In the Imitation Realists exhibition many of these panels were used to create the free-standing structures that were covered with art works and additional decorative material.

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Through a doorway on the right-hand wall (as the viewer entered the main gallery) was a smaller room with a wooden floor, and a timber ceiling painted white. The stone wall it shared with the main gallery was also painted white, with a white partition installed in front of it on which to hang works. Down either side of the room a section of the ceiling sloped at a forty-five degree angle (3.05.xvi). On the far wall, this sloped section of the ceiling had been obscured by an installed panel, behind which lights shone on the works hanging on the white plasterboard wall below. This created a kind of bay apart from the room that was further emphasised with a carpeted floor. Photographs of the Imitation Realist exhibition show a white curtain just to the left of the doorway, behind this was likely John Reed’s office, which Philip Jones described being in the second gallery.⁸

Although work in most exhibitions was to be for sale, profit was not the objective in opening the gallery. It was established by the CAS VIC ‘for the cultural advantage of the community … [to] be run on non-profit lines and as broadly as possible to embrace all schools and activities of contemporary art and design in Australia.’⁹ The program for the first year reflected these aims, including a retrospective exhibition of Nolan’s Kelly paintings, a CAS state exhibition, and solo exhibitions by artists including Charles Blackman, Ian Sime and Laurence Hope.¹⁰ The gallery attempted to develop an appreciation for older avant-garde work, such as that by Nolan, as well as for contemporary practice. It sought to serve the needs of the Society for group shows and of individual artists (both abstract and figurative) to have solo shows. It was hoped that unlike the NGV it could be dedicated to contemporary art. An example of the possibilities for it to play a complementary role to that of the NGV was the exhibition 22 Modern French Painters: Prints from the Collection of the National Gallery of Victoria, hosted by the GCA in 1958. NGV Director Eric Westbrook acknowledged in the catalogue that although the NGV sought to collect ‘the most vigorous artists of our own time’:

‘it is obvious, in spite of the increasing number of contemporary works which come, and will come, to the National Gallery, that the very nature of the institution precludes it from having a specialised interest in this field and it is therefore of the utmost value that Melbourne

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⁸ Jones, Art and Life, p. 105
⁹ From a notice announcing the opening of the GCA, in Architecture and Arts, no. 33 (May 1956), p. 51
¹⁰ The program is cited in Heathcote, A quiet revolution, pp. 230-31
should have the Gallery of Contemporary Art which can devote its whole programme to bringing such work before the public. ... and we look forward to the day when a Museum of Modern Art will rise upon the valuable foundations which have been laid in this city by the Contemporary Art Society.\textsuperscript{11}

The model for the gallery was seen in overseas institutions such as the Institute of Contemporary Art (London) and the Museum of Modern Art (New York): dedicated to contemporary and avant-garde art and supported through private donors rather than the state. The GCA was aligned more closely to the New York MoMA when it was re-named the Museum of Modern Art of Australia (MOMAA) in June 1958.\textsuperscript{12}

The model was referred to in the Museum’s Annual Report 1962-3:

\begin{quote}
We do refer often to the Museum of Modern Art in New York, which is the leading institution of its kind in the world, as well as one of the foremost tourist attractions in that city. It was initially endowed 30 years ago by wealthy and far-sighted patrons ... This year the financial committee raised $25,000,000 for extension of their building (about £7,000,000) from 10,000,000 people, which in terms of local population is about £1,000,000. When the Museum finally appeals for public and commercial assistance for the development of its new site we will be asking for only £100,000.\textsuperscript{13}
\end{quote}

In the same report, Warrender described the Museum’s financial status as ‘hand-to-mouth’, a constant limitation on the Museum’s ambitious program (and one that would lead to its demise in 1965).\textsuperscript{14}

The GCA had been relaunched as MOMAA with a permanent collection, donated by the Reeds, of 163 works of modern Australian art.\textsuperscript{15} MOMAA continued the GCA’s program of both solo and group shows of contemporary artists as well as retrospective exhibitions. It sought to exhibit a wide range of contemporary

\textsuperscript{11} Eric Westbrook, 22 Modern French Painters: Prints from the collection of the NGV, Melbourne: GCA, exhibition catalogue, 11 March – 11 April 1958. The exhibition was a selective survey of modern art since post-impressionism and included works by Pierre Bonnard, George Braque, Marc Chagall, Max Ernst, Wassily Kandinsky, Ferdinand Leger, Joan Miro, Francis Picabia and Pablo Picasso.


\textsuperscript{13} Pamela Warrender, 'Finance', Annual Report 1962-3, Melbourne: MOMADA


Australian art through group exhibitions. These included the CAS members' shows, exhibitions dedicated to young artists, and surveys of solo exhibitions around Australia (by including a single work from a range of solo exhibitions they attempted to present an idea of 'the total achievement in that year' in visual art.)\(^{16}\) It also exhibited commercial art, such as the 1960 show *Art Direction: An exhibition of Advertising Art.*\(^{17}\) This inclusion was more formally acknowledged by the renaming of the gallery 'The Museum of Modern Art and Design of Australia' in 1963.\(^{18}\) The Museum also imported, held and toured exhibitions of international contemporary art, such as *Contemporary Italian Paintings*, a joint project between the Museum and the Italian Government,\(^{19}\) and *Modern Japanese Calligraphic Paintings*.\(^{20}\)

Being invited to exhibit at MOMAA meant that the Imitation Realists were becoming a part of an increasingly established avant-garde; they received the blessing of those who had been fighting for the recognition of modern art since the 1930s. Reed's support was soon extended by others in the Melbourne art scene, such as Georges and Mirka Mora, who allowed the artists to stay in the upstairs quarters in the Café Balzac, in exchange for a mural for the restaurant. Ronald Greenaway, the editor of the CAS VIC *Broadsheet*, turned over the March 1962 edition to the artists on the basis of 'the interest shown in their work' by John Olsen and Elwyn Lynn in Sydney.\(^{21}\) In this way they were positioned as leading artists of the next generation by those who had historically proven themselves to be ahead of public opinion. This, to some extent, guaranteed that those who attended their exhibition would view them seriously, and, considering the challenging, or at least very different, nature of their work, they would at least not be dismissed out of hand as playing a youthful prank on the viewer. This may well have been the case had they exhibited in one of the venues Brown initially investigated for the possibility of holding an exhibition, as he recorded in his September 1961 diary.

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\(^{16}\) John Reed, 'Foreword', in Reid, *Modern Australian Art. An example of this is Survey 1963: Paintings from Galleries in all States*, 25 February – 12 March 1964, MOMADA

\(^{17}\) *Art Direction: an Exhibition of Advertising Art, 5\(^{th}\) - 22\(^{nd}\) July 1960*, Melbourne: MOMAA in Conjunction with the Art Directors Club of Melbourne


\(^{19}\) *Contemporary Italian Paintings* was exhibited at the Georges Art Gallery in Melbourne on behalf of the Museum in February 1963, before touring nationally until August 1963.

\(^{20}\) *Modern Japanese Calligraphic Paintings* was exhibited at the GCA 6 - 28 November 1963, and then toured nationally to September 1964.

\(^{21}\) Ronald Greenaway, CAS VIC *Broadsheet*, March 1962, p. 2
My business in town today was to find a gallery, hall, Town Hall, church hall, abandoned factory or half-submerged lighthouse in which to exhibit the artwork I talked of two chapters ago ... Is NOBODY interested in damaging the reputation of their building or establishment or whatever by housing a pile of hideous junk, some of it obscene, all of it absurd, and none of it a likely selling proposition? Today I interviewed representatives from such varied institution as the National Art Gallery of New South Wales, Gowings, the Bonza Bargain Store, and Belborfolds the Dream Home of Fine Furniture - and all I got was affable expressions of goodwill in keeping with the bewilderingly benevolent sunny day.  

John Reed ensured that the artists were able to bypass the less orthodox venues Brown had considered. Reed’s support was instrumental in giving the Imitation Realists the opportunity for their first exhibition. His support, particularly of Mike Brown, would continue long after the Imitation Realists ceased to exist as a joint entity. Reed’s role in the MOMAA and his aesthetic philosophy needs to be considered further to contextualise the exhibition and to understand how it was received both by those who mounted it and those who viewed it.

**John and Sunday Reed**

In the context of John and Sunday Reed’s philosophy of art Imitation Realism was embraced as a vital development in contemporary Australian art. The Reeds were appointed directors of the GCA somewhat controversially, as there were a number of members in the society who felt that the Reeds had too much power and influence.  

Reed described ‘the most frightful goings on in the CAS’ in a letter to Albert Tucker:

>This time I am supposed to be filching the Gallery from the CAS because we offered to save them £20 a week by running it for nothing!, and stopping them from turning it into a club and general doss-house, as one group want[ed] to. We have had to fight to hold the original concept which has wonderful possibilities, and which, I am sure, is the only way we can hope to hold the Gallery at all.  

Reed’s words reveal both their commitment to the project, but also a confidence in their judgement that could be unyielding. Although it was the first time they had run a gallery it was a continuation of their involvement with contemporary art, which

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had been ongoing since the 1930s. The Reeds’ role in Melbourne art circles is still debated. They offered unfailing support to artists they believed in but, in some cases at least, they demanded an equally unfailing loyalty in return, which could be oppressive for the recipients of their patronage. At the centre of their understanding and definition of art was a concept of art as an ‘organic’ expression of the artist’s whole life. This was the cause of their distaste for being described as ‘patrons’ and for some of the conflict with others in the art world: visual art was an expression of the artist’s whole being and creativity was expressed through every part of one’s life. This included (intense) relationships, art, food, gardening and conversation, around which life at Heide revolved. This concept was evident when John Reed described Joy Hester’s ‘remarkable quality of being able to distil some essence of herself in all that she does.’ In 1966 Reed commented about Mike Brown’s *Lonely Days* that ‘I believe he painted [it] out of some organic necessity’ to find the ‘innate creative potential’ amidst the ‘ghastly blatancy of the mass media’.

Their theory of the ‘organic’ nature of art was one that was best articulated by Herbert Read, whose works, as John Reed wrote to Lady Read on the occasion of her husband’s death, had ‘been a continuing influence on us for nearly 40 years. His book, *Art Now*, reached us at a critical moment in our development.’ Reed had earlier written to Sir Herbert that *The Form of Things Unknown* ‘meant a tremendous lot to me: it reached down to, and beautifully articulated my own deepest feelings about art and the sources of art, and I gratefully thank you for it.’ The influence of Read is apparent when John Reed wrote to Pamela Warrender, that

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\text{art owes its final values to sources which are deeply buried in all of us and which is something we inherit from our common prehistoric ancestry ... [the artist] is able to tap these sources and it is the degree}
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27 John Reed to Albert Tucker, 23 July 1953, in Reid & Underhill, *Letters of John Reed*, p. 490
28 John Reed, *Painting of the Week: Gloom* script for a pilot for a proposed ABC television programme, 19/4/66, Box 18/18, PA 1168, MS 13186, Reed Papers, SLV
29 John Reed to Sir Herbert Read, 22 February 1962, in Reid & Underhill, *Letters of John Reed*, p. 712
30 John Reed to Lady Read, 19 August 1968, in Reid & Underhill, *Letters of John Reed*, p. 556
of our pleasure in recognising them that largely determines the importance of the work.\textsuperscript{31}

The Imitation Realists were radically different from anything else shown at the GCA or MOMAA and from artists the Reeds' had previously supported. Their appeal, to John Reed at least, is understood when they are considered in the context of the Reeds' understanding of art. When Reed visited the Annandale house and encountered art that was consuming the surroundings of the artists, it would have appealed to his appreciation for an 'organic' quality in art, a sense that the work was an expression of their whole self, which was the primary measure by which he evaluated works of art.

\textbf{The Arrival of Imitation Realism in Melbourne}

The Imitation Realists approached the arrangement and display of their works in much the same manner as their creation. They were never going to exhibit in the established mode of MOMAA exhibitions, where works were exhibited in a clean, simple arrangement that did not detract attention from the art. Reed recalled in 1977 that he was concerned about the Imitation Realists' exhibition as he could not for the life of me see how all this material could be presented as an 'exhibition', and as none of the artists had had any experience in this field, I made it a condition that another artist, namely Ian Sime, who I was confident could do the job and who I knew would be completely sympathetic, should be in charge of the actual presentation.\textsuperscript{32}

Reed had invited the artists to exhibit in Melbourne because he responded to what he described as 'a quite powerful creative factor [that] was involved in this collection of material and that it had a potential significance far beyond what might superficially appear'.\textsuperscript{33} Reed was prepared to take a considerable risk by putting faith in these artists, given both their lack of experience and his own inability to foresee how the exhibition would be presented.

Brown and Lanceley built makeshift crates at the house of Brown's parents on Sydney's North Shore, which they fashioned from packing material they scrounged

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\textsuperscript{31} John Reed to Pamela Warrender, 31 August 1962, in Reid \& Underhill, \textit{Letters of John Reed}, p. 563


\textsuperscript{33} Reed, 'Mike Brown and the Annandale Imitation Realists', 1977
off the streets. They drove the work to Melbourne, where John Reed met them and ‘handed them over to Ian Sime at the Museum’. Differing accounts have been recorded of the installation of the exhibition. Reed recalled:

Twenty four hours later a somewhat harassed Ian came to me and asked to be relieved of his assignment as he just could not get anywhere with the others. I reminded him of the agreement we had all made and he said he understood this but his ideas of presentation and theirs seemed to be incompatible, and that as they had a clear concept of what they wanted to do he thought it best to let them go ahead on their own.

Lanceley’s account differs with this in that he described the relationship with Sime as more tempestuous, resulting in Sime leaving the exhibition in anger. Brown recalled a more amicable agreement to disagree. Lanceley also remembered the exhibition being installed overnight, whereas Reed and Brown both described the process taking between several days and a week. All agree that the process required frantic activity right up until the opening of the exhibition.

A catalogue was prepared for the exhibition, with the introduction written by Lynn (see chapter two). The words ‘Annandale Imitation Realists’ adorned the front cover amidst a scrawling illustration. It appears to be a shared drawing between the artists as there are three distinct styles from top to bottom of the sheet. On the inside was Lynn’s statement, followed by a short statement by each of three artists. After this was a list of the works, divided into the collaborative works, then lists of the individual works of Lanceley, Brown and Crothall. Their statements appear to be deliberately ambiguous, providing little specific detail regarding their art. Brown wrote ‘Art always comes in by the back door. As long as it leaves the way it came ... then I will be left free to continue making whatever comes into my head to make.’ Lanceley explicitly stated that he had ‘been asked to give my version of an Imitation Realist manifesto ... but I have no patience with such things, as I only think in terms of individual paintings.’ Crothall followed Lanceley with the somewhat cryptic ‘I

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34 Colin Lanceley, taped interview with the author, Surry Hills, Sydney, 5 July 2006
35 Reed, ‘Mike Brown and the Annandale Imitation Realists’, 1977
36 Reed, ‘Mike Brown and the Annandale Imitation Realists’, 1977
38 From Mike Brown’s description of the installation process in his ‘Kite II: Part 1:What on earth are you saying, Colin’?, Art Monthly Australia, no. 73 (Sept 1994), p. 6
40 Colin Lanceley, Annandale Imitation Realists, 1962
am the sort of person who might paint with hens-teeth, if only a hen with teeth were left lying around the place. Thus I am an Imitation Realist.\textsuperscript{41} When contrasted with the statement they wrote for the CAS VIC Broadsheet (see chapter one), it appears that the group were attempting to be deliberately obscure with these short statements, not saying anything that would detract from the viewer’s own experience of the exhibition and the works.

\textbf{‘Here in Byzantium’: A walk through The Annandale Imitation Realist Exhibition}

A close reading of the exhibition photographs will allow the works of Lanceley, Brown, Crothall and their collaborators to be understood in the context in which they were displayed. This context is vital to the understanding of the group and the impression the exhibitions made on viewers and critics. The works were installed suspended from the ceiling, resting on the floor, hanging from walls and from wire-mesh screens that were freestanding in the exhibition space, in an attempt to create a ‘fairground’\textsuperscript{42} arrangement. The artists exhibited 211 works,\textsuperscript{43} of which thirty were collaborations. Of these, nineteen were collaborations between Mike Brown and Ross Crothall; only three involved Brown, Crothall and Lanceley. The other eight were collaborations between different combinations of Brown, Crothall, Magda Kohn, and Leonora Howlett. The remaining 181 works were created individually: one by Peggy Gale, one by Kohn, 32 by Lanceley, 62 by Brown and 85 by Crothall.

The photographs depict the appearance of the exhibition and the works it contained. Throughout the photographs works can be seen that have not been captured in sufficient detail for them to be identifiable and there are works that are known to have been exhibited that cannot be seen in these images (3.56-63). Some works are photographed grouped according to artist, to record some of their individual contribution to the exhibition. Not all of these works can then be located in their position within the exhibition. Some pieces are shown in two or three different locations in the gallery. Thus the photographs do not provide an absolutely exhaustive account of the final installation, but enough information has been

\textsuperscript{41} Crothall, \textit{Annandale Imitation Realists}, 1962

\textsuperscript{42} Brown, ‘Kite II: Part 1’, 1994, p. 6

\textsuperscript{43} The catalogue lists 212, but omits the number seventy-three.
recorded to enable a reasonably precise sense of the exhibition to be conveyed. The accompanying sketch of the exhibition (3.05) has been compiled from the photographs and gives an overview of how the exhibition fitted together.

The exhibition was immediately startling, starting at the downstairs entrance to the gallery and proceeding up the stairs. Barrett Reid described his experience of the exhibition:

As a member of the Council of the Museum I heard, of course, that a very unusual show was getting under way. I hurried down to Tavistock Place with some excitement. As I pushed open the downstairs door all visual hell broke loose. The show began right there and rioted, with increasing pandemonium, up the stairs. My God, I thought, John has really done for us this time. The precious few supporters that we had won with such hard work would be scared away for sure. I admit to a moment of panic and, indeed, of a wavering in my up to then one-eyed and unstinting support of John. But as I wandered, dazed, through the main gallery a kind of magic took over.44

Unfortunately no photographs were taken of the staircase; one of the images of the entrance to the museum captures a small detail of a banner that appears to wend its way around the staircase and into the exhibition (3.06). The tiny glimpse recorded of it shows a colourful melange of painted figures and an aircraft on white paper.

The first gallery

As one turned into the museum at the top of the stairs the ‘pandemonium’ that Reid described was fully revealed (3.06). The Museum’s doors were held open with doorstops, and a temporary archway installed. This was constructed from three pieces of white board, across the top of which Brown had painted:

Since the time I came here none of us can think what happened. All I can see now is what we did, still not knowing why we made the journey.

The wide-open doors welcomed visitors to the exhibition and the archway with Brown’s message inviting them to share the results of this ‘journey’, invoking the idea that the exhibition was not the results from an articulated aesthetic philosophy but artefacts from their explorations. This emphasises the sense, also expressed in

their piece for the CAS VIC Broadsheet, that Imitation Realism was a process, an experience, rather than a movement. It reinforces the ambiguity of the group’s name and the sense from their catalogue statements that viewers should interpret their work for themselves. The left-hand door was covered with works, with a painted bottle upside down on the top edge and a large painting on board with something that appears to be a pipe emerging on its right-hand side. Along the right-hand wall of the first gallery hung a row of drawings and paintings at different distances from the wall so that some of the panels project and disrupt the surface of the wall and the distance between the viewer and the works. Along the left-hand wall, beside a ladder covered with sculptures and small paintings, was a series of screens that jutted out from the wall at angles, as well as shelves of varying heights, with works resting on top of them, hanging from them, and resting against them, both on the shelves and sitting on the floor. The overall effect was one of an overabundance of layered imagery; inviting the viewer into the exhibition space to explore this unconventional display of works on the ceiling, walls and floor.

Directly in the path of the viewer as they entered the exhibition was Brown’s construction *The Horrible Lousy Chicken Coop* (3.07-8, 3.19). This installation’s three walls and roof were constructed out of wire mesh and corrugated cardboard, supported on wooden legs. It was covered inside and out with artworks by each of the three main artists, as well as additional material that Brown used to decorate almost all of the exposed mesh. *Coop* faced into the exhibition space, away from the viewer as they entered, and occupied roughly half of the width of the gallery, forcing viewers to choose a path into and amongst the works. It was the first in a series of mesh screens installed as either constructions or folding screens down the centre of the main gallery. *Coop* demonstrates that although the majority of the works in the exhibition were individual pieces, they were installed as part of a collaborative whole. The works that were installed in the *Coop* were surrounded by additional decorative material – torn fabric tied into bows, cardboard, painted details and slogans - but were numbered individually. They were still identified and for sale individually; the *Coop* was a temporary installation piece that did not subsume the works’ individual status. Most of the works are identifiable in the photographs where the catalogue numbers, or text on the work itself, can be deciphered. The
photographs also captured most of the interior and exterior of the installation. Thus a particularly detailed examination can be made of Coop.

Brown's *Hoop-de-lah* (3.07.1) was hung on the larger outside wall of Coop and appears to be house paint on board. It is constructed, as were several of Brown’s paintings in the exhibition, as two layers, with a smaller board mounted in front of a larger one, using pieces of scrap timber to project the smaller layer forward. This inverts the usual depth created by a conventional frame that surrounds the surface of the work. Brown and Crothall used both used sheets of cheap hardboard (such as Masonite) as a mount for many works in the exhibition as an alternative to conventional framing. The larger sheet acted as a frame to separate the work from its surroundings, but both layers were painted, so the frame itself was part of the work. As Brown recalled,

> It was important concern of Imitation Realism that if any form of framing was used it should be fully integrated artistically with the painting. It seemed to us that most conventional framing merely de-humanised paintings and made them more remote from the viewer. I remember many conversations, particularly with Ross Crothall, on the finer points of this concern.45

Brown painted the phrases ‘Hoop de lah’ and ‘Hoop de loop’ in a decorative script on the lower edge of the larger panel, making the text and the title part of the work itself, another device used in many Imitation Realist works. The larger panel contrasts with the smaller; they are unified by the similar palette of white, red, blue and pink and by some of the content, especially the small faces that dot the surface of both planes. The central panel is painted in a loose, expressionist style, recalling the work of the CoBrA artists and evoking the freedom of Art Brut. It is framed by the more restrained style of painting on the larger panel, which is reminiscent of commercial art. A range of motifs is combined on a pale blue background; *koru*-like shapes gambol up the sides of the work, to a row of stars across the top of the panel. Stars would become a recurring motif in Brown’s work, as decorative elements they emphasise the flatness of the picture plane. They act as a formal, abstract device while bearing allusions to comic books, advertising and flags rather than ‘fine art’. Their banality, as ubiquitous symbols in everyday life, provides a way for Brown to

45 Mike Brown, letter to John Jones, ANG, 14 June 1985, NGA Mike Brown Curatorial files ref. 68/2429
include the ordinary and accessible in visual art. Their combination, with patterning that is apparently inspired by Maori art, suggests that this piece is one in which Brown is feeling his way toward a synthesis of the visual culture he was surrounded by: both the traditional cultures of the Pacific and the urban environment of contemporary Sydney.

The photograph of the back and right-hand side of *Coop* was taken while the exhibition installation was still in progress and numbers had yet to be attached to the works. This makes it difficult to determine which works were for sale and which were merely decorative elements. Thin rope criss-crossed the back wall, it appears to have held the roof in place, but it created lines in the overall composition of the wall, echoed by painted arrows, text and the patches of yellow paint in the upper right hand corner of the wall. The rope ended above *Hoop-de-lah* and draws the eye to it. Pound signs and arrows were used repeatedly on the wall. The arrows create a sense of movement as the eye follows them and the pound symbol can be interpreted as a light hearted reference to the fact that the art objects were for sale, not merely for contemplation, a detail usually only delicately referred to in the catalogue. It is also, perhaps, an indication of the ongoing difficulty that Brown would have in reconciling the creation of art with the demands of the art market (this will be further discussed in the next chapter). Such symbols were prevalent in a number of works in the exhibition and would be particularly significant for Crothall and Brown in their subsequent work. They seemed to be interested in them for the layered meanings that symbols and letters can convey: they can be employed both as forms and language, as purely formal elements in a composition or as carriers of meaning. Examples of this were two thin parallel panels on the right-hand side of *Coop* (3.19). One panel reads ‘The lousy horrible bloody chicken coop doth wrench my heart and gripe my gut.’ This titles the *Coop* in humorous, faux-Shakespearlean terms. Alongside this panel is an illegible strip of text, which appears to be a strip cut from a wider sheet, frustrating attempts to decipher the fragments of words, it serves to emphasise the decorative quality of the letters on both panels.

Photographs of the inside of walls of *Coop* have been taken after the catalogue numbers were added and where these can be made out they aid identification of the works. On the inner right wall hung Brown and Crothall’s collaboration *Festive*
cavalier personage with robot bodyguards and lipstick (1.29) above Crothall’s Face only. Both are works on paper, mounted on board. The two distinct styles of Festive cavalier personage suggest that one artist started a watercolour sketch of a girl surrounded by abstract geometric shapes. The other artist then finished it with gouache and lipstick, adding robots and obscuring the original face with a quite alarming visage, complete with bloodshot eyes and grimacing, tooth-filled smile. Where the watercolour seems to have been a simple, linear drawing, the gouache layer adopts a naïve style and is closer to a work of Art Brut. Face only shares the same naivety; the simply drawn head and shoulders of a figure with spiky hair and large earrings in black, scribbled over in red that emphasises the child-like quality of the drawing. The mounts for both drawings separate them from their surroundings, so that they do not get lost amongst the detritus from which Coop was constructed.

The large inner wall of Coop was covered in smaller works by each of the three artists (3.08). In the top left was Crothall’s Buzzah Yang, a cartoon-like pen and ink drawing on paper mounted on board. It depicts a figure whose head appears to have sunken into a solid black neck and whose face is dominated by an oversize unshaven chin. The work has handwritten text down the left hand side, which cannot be made out in the photograph. The work itself is almost obscured by another work hanging in front of it, a white geometric design on board. This work remains unidentified, but is similar to the works Brown made after his return from New Zealand in 1959 (1.07). Beside these is Crothall’s Over the peaches and under the corn, a collage mounted on board with a printed text caption. The caption is indecipherable in the photograph, but the illustration appears to be cut from an advertisement for breakfast cereal or tinned fruit, depicting milk being poured from jug onto a bowl of peaches and corn flakes. Crothall mounted the image sideways, obscuring for a moment what the image depicts. In the top right of this wall was Crothall’s Portrait of moi même, a painting on board depicting a child-like face melting into the black background. It is partially obscured by Crothall’s Suitcase, a small painting on board, hanging from the roof of Coop, the entire surface of the board represents the top of a patterned cardboard suitcase, complete with handle and clasps. Below Moi Même is Brown’s The fabulous wacko beaut, the words ‘FAB WACKO YOU BEAUT’ painted on a white background. The style of lettering for ‘Fab’ used that of the logo for the Fab laundry powder. By surrounding it with ‘Wacko you Beaut’
Brown returned the commercial logo to its slang origins. The work purposefully takes common colloquial speech and makes it the subject of a work of art, rejecting the distinction between what the Imitation Realists saw exhibited in Sydney art galleries and the life they experienced on its streets. The inclusion of commercial imagery such as the 'Fab' logo made it inevitable that Imitation Realism would be viewed in light of Pop art internationally.

To the left hung Brown’s *Woman bedazed*, a cartoon-like pen drawing on light blue paper mounted on board which depicts a nude woman with red breasts. Above this, below *Over the peaches*, was Lanceley’s *Green grub*, a painting on a paint tin lid of its smiling eponymous subject on a bright pink backdrop. To the left of these hung Brown’s *The little king* (3.09), an assemblage on board that was a more complex work than most of the others hanging in and on *Coop*. Found objects have been used to create a head and shoulders portrait of an imaginary petty despot, named after the newspaper comic strip of that name. On a black background, Brown used enamel and acrylic paint to delineate and emphasise the forms of the scrap timber, wooden pegs, assorted plastic buttons, broken spectacle frames, safety pins, rope, costume jewellery, badges, red plastic lips and the large paintbrush which serves as the beard and the bridge of the nose. *The little king* is now found in the Heide collection and is one of the few pieces from *Coop* known to be extant.

The work to the left of *The little king* is unidentified, but the style suggests that it is a work by Crothall, as it is a simple black and white ink drawing mounted on board of a cat’s head. Below it is a work tentatively identified – when the catalogue number was magnified – as *Saint*, a painting on board of a figure in red, outlined in white, of a four-breasted figure with whiskers. The figure has been continued off the board and onto the decorative cardboard edging of *Coop*, with a long undulating body and legs. The style of the extension suggests that this it was painted by Brown. After the red figure, along the bottom edge is a painted black outline of a nude man with wings, with a speech bubble extending up to *The fabulous wacko beaut*. The speech bubble and the extension of *Saint* serve to embed the works more completely into the installation of *Coop*. Above these figures is Crothall’s *Probably an enemy spy* a child-like drawing in ink and watercolour of the head and shoulders of a man with

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46 Brown, ‘Kite II: part 2’, 1994, p. 16
oversized ears and an undersized bowler hat in front of a shore scene with helicopters flying overhead. The drawing was mounted on board with the title painted underneath.

On the inner left wall of Coop are three unidentified works; the upper one stylistically suggests Brown as the artist. It is a series of faces in enamel or acrylic on board, the faces are presented in a grid structure and numbered one to twelve. The cartoon-like, linear depiction of the faces and the composition both recall Brown's *Quiet people* (3.10). Smaller faces are worked into every part of the work and reveal the beginnings of the play with the surface plane and depth that Brown would develop in his later work. The lower work is an assemblage with collage of paper and card on a heart-shaped piece of corrugated cardboard, with a collar made from a pair of painted, well worn shoes and legs made from cardboard. Underneath this piece another work is visible between the corrugated cardboard on the outside of layer of Coop and the wire mesh of the inner wall. All that can be discerned of this work is that it is a brightly coloured painting of a figure against a plain dark background on board.

Along the top front edge of Coop was a piece of board on which was painted in red 'The Horrible Lousy Chicken Coop', along the top and bottom edges of the board were rolls of cardboard, painted yellow, positioned so as to make the whole board look like a partially unfurled scroll (3.13). Barely any part of Coop was left unadorned; the surface was built up by the works and decorations. The photograph from the rear of Coop reveals other works in the exhibition that have yet to be positioned, suggesting that Coop was constructed early in the installation period and thus Brown had a greater amount of time for such an elaborate construction. Layers were created by enabling decorative material, as well as one of the works, to be seen through the screen, and for the screen itself to serve as a grid for a checkerboard pattern painted on some parts of it. The depth of the structure was further emphasised by hanging works at angles, such as Suitcase and Wacko. The techniques were ones that were repeated through the exhibition, although the other constructions were not as elaborate.

The space surrounding Coop was dense with objects and imagery, running down the left hand side of the room, on the angled part of the ceiling, ran a paper banner,
which appears to be at least three metres long and is covered with cartoon-like drawings and words. Unfortunately only glimpses of it are visible in the background of some of the photographs, so it is not possible to identify whether it was catalogued and for sale or whether it was intended only as a decoration for the exhibition. The inclusion of slang along the bottom edge of the work suggests that Brown was at least one of the artists, as the words ‘yippee’, ‘snike’ and ‘cockadoodle’ are discernable and Brown made repeated use of such slang and nonsense words, both in his Imitation Realist and subsequent work.

Underneath the banner, on the wall to the left as the viewer entered the exhibition hung Crothall’s Portrait of three artists in Cadbury’s chocolate (3.11, 3.13). The work appears to have started as a cartoon-like drawing of, from left to right, Brown, Lanceley and Crothall with collage from pieces of chocolate bar wrappers. It was then cut in half horizontally and attached with metal tacks to two planks of wood. The wood is attached in the centre so that there is a gap between the two pieces and the potential for movement within the work. The surfaces of the paper and the worn timber are not overtaken by the assemblage material, it has been employed with restraint and the overall composition is balanced. As in Hoop-de-lah stars have been used to decorate the work and again their ambiguous character between commercial art, symbolism and fine art is employed. Its depiction of the three artists out of household detritus emphasised that art could be made from anything, it did not need to be made from specialist materials or techniques, which is stressed by the title of the work. The cartoon style of the self-portrait emphasises that they did not take themselves or the role of the artist too seriously.

To the right of Portrait of three artists was a freestanding installation, a wooden ladder used to display numerous works on the rungs and on the side (3.12-13). Resting against the lower part of the ladder was an assemblage that appears to be made from the side of a wooden crate (3.12). Like a number of Crothall’s works in the exhibition, the surface plane is interrupted, either by missing or uneven pieces of timber. This work uses a missing section to suggest the body of the figure, crossed with a fragment of timber to suggest an arm. Paint is used to suggest the basic forms of the head and shoulders, which are then outlined in metal bottle tops held in place with a nail in the centre. Eyes and nose are formed by bottle caps and a scrap of
timber respectively. The work is deliberately naïve, yet with restraint, allowing the materials to be easily identified as junk but still assuming a form that serves the work. On the rung above was Crothall's *Mask of a sociable fellow*, painted silver with decoration in gold and black, it appears to be a pipe with carved wooden pieces for the facial features. To the right of *Mask* is a sculpture attributed to Lanceley, as it appears in a photograph showcasing some of Lanceley's works in the exhibition. (3.51). The name of the work remains elusive, 'Rowan' is painted along the leg but this does not seem to be the title. The presence of some traces of lettering on other parts of the sculpture suggests that this may have been already present on the scrap timber from which it was assembled. It resembles a child's drawing of a stick figure, with a long piece of timber for the body and smaller pieces for legs and arms, and a paint tin lid for the head. It has been left unpainted and the face is a light green-grey, perhaps the colour of the contents of the original tin. Paper and card have been stuck on to decorate the body. Lanceley here seems to be purposefully ignoring his art school training in an attempt to capture as unaffected a spirit of creativity as possible. Directly above *Mask of an unsociable fellow* is another unidentified work, a painting on a round dish of a snake's head. To the right of this, and partially obscured by Lanceley's sculpture, is *Men of doomy destiny*, a collaboration between Crothall, Kohn and Brown. Two thirds of the surface is a colourful painting that depicts a group of figures against a rainbow-striped background. The remaining third appears to be pure white in the photograph, although perhaps there was a drawing or text that the camera failed to capture. Above this is *Mad woman*, identified by the catalogue number and title on the surface of the work, a painting by Crothall on a rectangular piece of board with a jagged edge on the left-hand side. The bald smiling woman is painted with heavy black lines, in a simple naïve style. The figure is depicted with her hands held aloft and artificial roses have been stuck to the surface of the work, of which three seem to emanate from her head, perhaps embodying her thoughts. Next to *Mad woman* is *Ignoble spirit*, identified by the catalogue number, a small sculpture of a figure assembled from wood scraps. A face and dress buttons have been painted on the figure in white. Beneath *Ignoble spirit*, also alongside *Mad woman* is what appears to be a small carved and painted mask, reminiscent of those from PNG, the catalogue number is illegible and so it cannot be identified. On the top rung of the ladder is an unidentified square painting on board, a naïve rendering of a face. Hanging freely
from the ceiling, beside *Mad woman*, was Crothall’s *Happy astronaut*, an assemblage constructed on a rectangle of plywood, with three wooden circles of worn timber to form the eyes and mouth and another piece of wood for the nose, on a white circle that forms the face, on which is painted three red circles. The work is an example of the more restrained use of materials that gives some of Crothall’s work elegance, by contrast with the deliberate naivety of pieces such as *Mad woman*.

Resting on the side of the ladder was a large assemblage, which stylistically suggests that it was created by Lanceley (3.13). A figure constructed from timber planks with a round dish for a head, covered dots and undulating lines of red and yellow paint that suggested the influence of Australian Aboriginal art on the group. It was adorned with a metal chain representing jewellery and what appears to be a shoe for its exaggerated genitalia. Half of its face was taken up by an oversize toothy grin, that is suggestive of the direction Lanceley’s work would take with *Love me stripper* (4.05).

On the wall to the right of the ladder was Brown’s painting *Suddenly last summer* (3.13, 3.13.1), one of the more substantial pieces in the exhibition. The picture plane was uneven, as the entire work was constructed from timber pieces, of varying sizes and depths. This allowed for spaces to be left between some of the pieces to see through to the wall behind it. A carved decorative piece, which was most likely originally intended as embellishment for a piece of furniture, was centred on the top edge, breaking up the line of the conventional rectangular format. Found objects were attached to the surface, including a paint can lid and a range of plastic objects. The words ‘Suddenly Last Summer’ arched across the top centre of the painting, echoing the flowing lines of the pieces of shaped timber and of the swirling lines and motifs that covered the surface of the work. It is one of the pieces in the exhibition which most clearly demonstrates the influence of Maori art on the Imitation Realists, as the forms Brown uses recall the *koru* of Maori *whare runanga* (meeting houses), and show Brown attempting to develop his own language of pattern and form.

Brown also used a limited palette, of predominantly black and white, that suggests that used in Maori and PNG art. The title refers to the Tennessee Williams play of that name, but Brown also used the phrase to title a piece he had written in his diary in which he described Crothall and himself becoming close friends again at the end of 1960 and ‘considering plans to re-organise, revolutionise and overthrow the world
order, to smash down the walls of the Labyrinth. This suggests that the work perhaps also referred to the development of Imitation Realism and the period in which he and Crothall were fervently articulating their ideas to combine all the elements of the cultural and physical environment in their works.

To the right of Suddenly last summer was Crothall’s Psychopath in search of his umbrella and his soul (3.13), a drawing mounted on board on timber. The text ‘PSYCHO / PATH / IN SEARCH OF HIS UMBRELLA’ ran along the top of the plank and the top edge of the board, with ‘AND HIS SOUL’ along the lower edge. The drawing was in a naïve style, of two large heads on the left-hand side, and a figure on the right. On a shelf constructed underneath Suddenly last summer and Psychopath in search was a display of some of the smaller sculptural pieces in the exhibition. The shelf presented numerous pieces arranged without apparent order, as though along a mantelpiece in a home, rather than in an art gallery (3.13.2). The first of these was Self portrait by R Crothall with a pot by Theo Schoon my teacher. This was a ceramic pot made by Schoon that Crothall had brought with him from New Zealand, to which he had added collage to suggest a face. His inclusion of the pot, and the specific identification of it in the catalogue, indicate the significance of Schoon’s work to Crothall. Howlett recalls this pot being very important to Crothall, being carefully looked after throughout Crothall’s many changes of address. To the right of this was a small sculpture barely visible in the photograph. Beside it is the first of three trinket boxes on the shelf, they were made from drawings and illustrations Crothall had found, cut to size and sent to his mother who crocheted them together to form the boxes. Next to this was an unidentified sculpture made from a bottle with objects attached. To the right of this was Brown’s Motor scooter moll (1.16) an assemblage sculpture made from wooden off-cuts. As discussed in chapter one, this work shows Brown applying the lessons he had learnt in PNG – using material from his surroundings to construct his work, as the young men he had witnessed in Port Moresby had used buttons for the eyes of their sculptures.

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48 Leonora Howlett, taped interview with the author, Sydney, 9 February 2006
49 Brown, ‘Kite II: Part 2’, 1994, p. 15
Sitting next to it was the smaller of the two trinket boxes, which was next to Crothall’s *Suntanned Queenslander ETA hotdog* (3.14) which presented a model or toy ETA brand hotdog in the neck of an empty bottle of Resch’s Dinner Ale. The neck of the bottle was adorned with strings threaded through buttons, possibly intended as a necklace, or perhaps an illusion to corks swinging from a hat to keep away flies. The work was an example of the Imitation Realist aesthetic of not discriminating against either material or subject matter on the basis of traditional ideas of what was fitting for art. Alongside this were another small unidentifiable work and then a sculpture by Lanceley. The title of this is unknown, but it can be attributed to the artist as it can be seen in the photograph showcasing his work (3.51). The work used a pipe for a stand, on which rests a painted object, whose original purpose is obscured and seems to be bent out of shape. The creature thus shaped had bottle-top eyes on top, and the round staring eyes and gaping mouth suggested it was frightened. Beside it was the third trinket box, and then two works on paper or board lay flat on the shelf.

On the floor between the ladder and the shelf is Lanceley’s small freestanding sculpture, *Big smile*, an assemblage from paint tin lids, cork, bottle top eyes and a wooden base, ‘Big Smile’ is painted in red letters on the lower circle. Beside this, underneath the shelf, was a row of paintings, displayed thus they would have been easy to overlook. Particularly the work that was displayed between the two layers of wire mesh that appear to be supporting the shelf, a garishly coloured painting on board. Above it is another painting on board of the text ‘£123456789’ in white against a dark background surrounded by text and illustrations that cannot be deciphered. Next to this is a collage on board with a paint tin lid as a head, next to it is a work which only the top can be made out, unfortunately, as it demonstrates the influence of Capogrossi on the artists, with a similar ‘claw’ pattern that is repeated along the top edge of the painting on board. Leaning against the shelf, on the floor, is a small work on board that is barely visible in photographs, but because of the colour and marks that can be seen it is identifiable as Crothall’s *This is Tom* (3.15). The work was a collage of official printed forms with a stick figure drawing, which contrasted institutional paperwork with childish drawing. On, under, above and behind the shelf, as much as possible of the available surface area is covered;
disregarding the usual careful arrangements that allowed for each work to inhabit its own discrete space as was usually the case at MOMAA (3.01-4).

To the right of the shelf a wire screen was angled against the wall, on which was hung Lanceley’s *The green footballer playing the field* (3.12, 3.16). The screen emerged at an angle from the wall, so that it faced the entrance, and was one of the most prominent pieces that the viewer would have seen as they entered the exhibition (3.06). The work is a dense mass of collage and paint. The ‘field’ of the title dominates almost the entire surface plane, and is surrounded by a picket fence of black dash marks. Such marks suggest Olsen’s influence on Lanceley’s work during the period, along with the colour and gesture reminiscent of the CoBrA painters. These influences are combined with collage (pieces of a torn up painting on paper by Brown)\(^50\) and the linear patterning that for Lanceley was inspired by carvings and sculptures from the Sepik peoples of PNG.\(^51\) Instead of the picture being a window into a scene there was a lack of depth, the patterning created an even surface plane, similar to that of indigenous arts. The exaggerated genitalia also demonstrate this influence, as the Imitation Realists sought to express sexuality with the frank attitude that they discerned in PNG art.\(^52\) The imagery, combined with the phrase ‘playing the field’, suggests the double meaning of the title: describing the actions of both football and a promiscuous young man. The work demonstrates the basic elements of Imitation Realist practice: the combination of prosaic materials, influences from traditional Pacific as well as contemporary European art and the colloquial urban slang of Australia.

On the screen underneath *The green footballer* hung Brown’s double sided painting *Mr Hodge, with Hodge-Podge on reverse side* (3.06, 3.17). An enamel and gouache on board, *Mr Hodge* presents a three-quarter profile view of a head with a crazed expression. The entire surface is covered with a scribbled patterning, a painted version of Sepik carving. The lines of the face and particularly the nose are reminiscent of Maori tattooing. The work again represents the adaptation of such work to Brown’s environment, adapting the patterning to his style of painting and to the materials available to him. *Hodge-Podge* presents a similar combination, but in a

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\(^{50}\) And used with his permission, see Brown, ‘Kite II: Part 1’ 1994, p. 5

\(^{51}\) Lanceley recalled the availability in Sydney of art from the Sepik region of PNG, and the influence it had on his work at this time, in a taped interview with the author, Sydney, 5 July 2006

\(^{52}\) Mike Brown, ‘Kite II: Part 1’, 1994, p. 6
far more restrained, linear composition. Here, a repetitive geometric pattern incorporates cartoon-like animals. The textured side of the board has been incorporated to provide a textured ground for the work. On the floor underneath Mr Hodge, leaning against the screen, was a small square work, either a painting on board, or on paper mounted on board, *Personified Organization Man* (3.06.1). The details cannot be made out but 'Personified' can be seen inscribed on upper edge in paint and 'Organization Man' along the lower. It depicts a figure in the centre of the work in purple and green surrounded by more text. The title is surely a reference to William H Whyte’s *Organization Man*, a best selling in the late 1950s that observed the changing culture of work in modern life.\(^{53}\)

Numerous works were hung from the ceiling in this part of the gallery. An unidentified, round, colourful painting was appended against the ceiling near the centre of the room (3.12, 3.19). Above the *Coop* was a painting on board by Colin Lanceley, painted in bright reds and yellows it bears an obvious debt to PNG masks, with a nod to CoBrA via Olsen (3.19). The neighbouring piece appears to be a sculpture intended to be hung from a ceiling, an assemblage titled *Shower of rain drops and clothes pegs*. Crothall made the work from curved pieces of timber, spaced so that they made concentric curves and used wooden clothes pegs to hold them in place. These were then decorated with small foil pie cases and tin can lids. Despite its very simple construction and humble materials, it conveys a sense of movement that creates the ‘shower’ of the title. Behind *Shower of rain drops*, above *The green footballer*, hung Lanceley’s painting ‘with a tail’ (3.06.1, 3.18). This was likely the one he described in the catalogue when he wrote that ‘a woman once asked me why a painting of mine had a tail, but, why has a cat got a tail? ... It is just because they were made with one.’\(^{54}\) It is a small work on board with a range of brightly coloured objects – which appear to be bottle caps and jar lids – arranged in a pattern against a white and blue background. Hanging from the base is a curved, painted metal tail. From the photographs it appears that the work was free to rotate as it can be seen from the front in images from different points of view. Further along the left hand wall, behind the screen on which *The green footballer* was hung, was another large painting by Lanceley, a dense scrawl of paint and assemblage


\(^{54}\) Lanceley, *Annandale Imitation Realists*, 1962
titled *In the bush beside the water* (3.18) which again shows the influence of CoBrA and Olsen on Lanceley's work at this time. The composition is of a jumble of faces that are difficult to make out, and although impressive in its size, is perhaps one of Lanceley's less successful works in the exhibition. It sits in a bay formed by two of the wire screens that are angled from the wall, under Lanceley's 'tail' painting.

In the centre of the gallery, in front of these works, was the next of the freestanding installations made from wire screens (3.19). Like *Coop* it was covered with small works and extra decorative material, but it did not seem to have been given its own title. It was one of the installations that Brown described arranged like a 'fairground' in the gallery. This part of the exhibition was poorly photographed and only a few of the works can be identified. The screens were installed at varying heights, supported by what appear to be cement blocks or suspended from the main installation. Some of the wire screens were installed horizontally, to create longer panels at varying levels. One panel was installed vertically but inclined away from the viewer. This disturbed the exhibition norm of displaying works perpendicular to the floor. At the top of that panel was a figure constructed from oddments, on the other side of which can be seen the reverse of Crothall's *Toothpaste filler on the rampage* (3.20) which makes the assemblage figure appear to have small arms. Underneath the figure is a drawing mounted on board and then Brown's *The fabulous patriot and his wife* (3.21). At the base of the panel is painting on wood, covered in text that cannot be completely made out, but appears to be a narrative about 'Griddy the Grid-Iron Bunyip'.

*The fabulous patriot and his wife* was a painting on a panel created from timber pieces braced with narrower slats. One would expect these to be on the back of the work but Brown has used them to break up the surface plane and create levels and depth across it. The entire work is covered with dense patterning that surrounds and incorporates the central figures referred to in the title. It rewards time spent examining it to decipher it. Some of the patterning reveals itself to be lettering or parts of the figures. On the left is the 'wife' figure beside whom is her husband and to the right of them is written in red, sinuous lettering 'the fabulous patriot' surrounding his arm that holds a Union Jack. Down the brace on the right-hand side,
under a series of flag-like geometric shapes the letters read ‘Master of elegant irrelevancy’.

The wife figure, proportionately smaller, appears to be in the background of her husband, and the stylistic patterning which covers her face and body is more overtly Pacific. That of her face echoes the carved figures of PNG, her dress is a piece of patterned linoleum, overlaid with a painted stylised geometric pattern, with tin can lids and a patterned plastic coaster representing flowers in her hair. The combined effect suggests that she may be intended to be the locally born wife of an English civil servant sent to ‘the colonies’: he who maintains his flag-waving ‘elegant irrelevancy’ of loyalty to the ‘mother country’ while being surrounded by an entirely different culture that he refuses to acknowledge. This is perhaps also represented by the figure underfoot and those painted on the tin can lids along the top and down the left hand side of the work, and their expressions of fear and concern. The woollen crotchet squares that form the body of the man were made by Brown’s mother,56 and apart from echoing the geometric patterning used in other parts of the work, they may also be intended to indicate the wearing of unsuitable English clothing rather than that more suited to a tropical climate.

To the right of this screen, little of this installation can be made out, apart from Crothall’s Clown at large on a windy day (3.13, 3.22), which hung on the screen to the right of Brown’s Fabulous patriot. This was a child-like drawing of a figure against a scribbled background in ballpoint, paint and pencil on paper, which is mounted on board that is covered in painted pink dashes – providing both decorative frame and an indication of the wind in the title. On the left-hand side of the Fabulous patriot one screen can be made out, but only one of the works can be identified, a collage in the top right-hand corner, a collaboration between Brown, Crothall and Kohn. This was Girl of the midnight sun (3.23), a large, naively-drawn figure above a house, with a smiling sun in the upper right. The work is adorned with coloured paper circles, Philip Morris cigarette packets and tin foil, many of which are over painted with scrawling decorative marks. The work was kept by Crothall and reappeared in his only solo show, in Auckland in 1966 (discussed in chapter four). Below this work is a small colourful work on paper on board and to

56 Brown, ‘Kite II: part 2’, 1994, p. 15
the left is large colourful mask-like painting. On the lower half of the screen is another drawing on paper mounted on board and several pieces that cannot be made out in the photograph. On the other side of this screen is a collaborative piece between Kohn and Brown, *Before & After (3.52)*, two works on paper that have been mounted vertically on board. They appear to be ink or paint that has been applied to one sheet and then pressed onto the other, in a rudimentary monoprint, which has then been drawn into to depict a face. Each drawing has then been labelled, 'Before' for the top one and 'After' the lower. Underneath this is what appears to be an ink drawing on paper by Crothall, judging from the cartoon-like style, which was ripped in two and mounted on board, leaving a space between the two sections.

The next installation in the gallery is constructed from a series of wire screens arranged to form a concertina-like screen (*3.12, 3.19, 3.35*). This screen was not covered with the same density of works and decoration as those already described. Again, not all of the works have been photographed or can be identified. On the first panel of the screen is a large colourful painting of a figure, with two smaller people on either side. The cartoon style of the painting suggests it might be a piece by Crothall, although the lack of detail makes any degree of certainty impossible. Underneath this hangs a yellow and blue sculpture which appears to be made from stuffed cloth – an intriguing piece as no such example of the Imitation Realists work in cloth is known to survive. The back of this panel cannot be seen. The next has only a few works, none of which can be identified – two more of the stuffed textile pieces on one side, and on the other, a small painting of two figures on board. On the next panel is a painting on wood by Brown. The surface has been created from timber planks but with both cracks between the boards and geometric shapes cut into the timber. Parts of the surface have been raised through additional pieces of timber being attached. On a white ground, the upper half of which is covered with red patterning, is painted a colour figure. The head is formed by extra pieces of timber, with what appears to be some form of decorative scalloping used for ears and pieces of plastic for eyes. The work is cannot be conclusively identified but the small plastic toy soldiers in the mouth suggest that it may be the work listed in the catalogue as *The people eater (3.24)*. This is also a reference to the *Purple People*
Eater, a novelty song hit from 1958.\textsuperscript{57} Thus as a whole the work combines American popular culture, the materials from Brown’s physical surrounds and a stylistic reference to PNG art.

Underneath The people eater hung another painting but only the top edge of this is visible, which shows a pair of eyes. On the other side of the screen hangs Crothall’s Very elegant woman (3.25), an assemblage of timber off-cuts and metal heads of paper binders. The burred edge of some of the timber pieces is effectively used in this piece to vary the texture of the work. Crothall’s timber sculptures, such as Very elegant woman and Madly petrified soul expecting disaster (3.26) stand out in the exhibition as they are some of the only works, along with some of the drawings, that are not brightly coloured. Crothall uses the different colour and grain of the timber – sometimes, as in this example, with additional pieces of metal or plastic assemblage – to unite the composition. They are suggestive of the influence of Crothall’s family and their practice of craft, as discussed in chapter one.\textsuperscript{58}

On the left-hand wall of the gallery, beside Lanceley’s In the bush and parallel to this series of screens, is firstly, another screen erected perpendicular to the wall, on which hangs Brown’s Headlights Orpheus on Stilts (3.06.1). This was an assemblage of a figure made from a half-sphere shaped plastic container, painted to represent the head, and timber off-cuts. The legs are formed by a circular shape that has been cut out of the bottom of the piece of timber that forms the body. The title has been painted in a decorative script on the reverse, visible in the photos of Scow (3.64-5). On the wall to the right of this screen hung two large paintings, one above the other, which cannot be identified in the photographs. To the right of these hung another unidentifiable work, which appears to be an assemblage on board. Further along to the right the feet of Crothall’s Gross debutante can just be glimpsed (3.27, 3.35.1). Assembled from scrap timber, some of which has been carved to form the shape of the body, it recalls the carved shields of PNG, but the figure, her adornments (buttons, bottle tops and costume jewellery) and the title are all drawn from Australian colloquial culture.

\textsuperscript{57} Sheb Wooley wrote and performed Purple People Eater
\textsuperscript{58} Edna Skinner, taped interview with the author, Auckland, 12 June 2006
A photograph of the back the left-hand corner of the gallery shows a sculpture suspended from the ceiling by Brown, Lanceley’s *Self portrait*, *Stink pipe Orpheus* and *Glad family picnic*, a work believed to be *Angel face* by Peggy Purple and one unknown: a large painting on curved wood with carving (3.28). The *Self portrait* by Lanceley is on the left-hand wall, and believed to be hanging to the immediate right of *Gross debutante*. The backing was the underside of a coffee table with the legs sawn off, onto which Lanceley attached pieces of timber for the neck, head and facial features. The head is covered with a spidery red scrawl, which Lanceley recalled he had used to disguise the letters of a ‘rude poem about the way Paul Cézanne painted’ he had penned in response to the form of post-impressionist painting that dominated the teaching at the NAS (as discussed in chapter one).59 His use of the table top creates a ready made frame and a timber background for the figure. The work is an interesting precursor to those he would make for his solo exhibitions after Imitation Realism, particularly those discussed in the following chapter, such as *Temple of Earthly Delights* (4.09), in which he uses parts of furniture to structure and frame the works. This photograph makes this connection possible, as at some point after the exhibition the table top and neck piece were removed, leaving just the head and facial features, as it has appeared in subsequent catalogues,60 making the work more difficult to read as representing a figure (1.04).

To the right of *Self portrait* was *Angel face* by Peggy Gale,61 who was a friend from Brown and Lanceley’s days at NAS and a co-conspirator in discussing the ideas that formed Imitation Realism. The identification of the work has been made from of Brown’s description of it:

> The perforated lid of a burnt out chip heater became a face, its handle forming the mouth. For eyes, turquoise plastic hemispheres (possibly buttons) were sewn on with string or coloured wool. Then she added a magazine cut-out nose and rosy colour was given to the cheeks with liberal applications of ‘Angel Face’ powder.62

Her only contribution to the exhibition, the work encapsulated the Imitation Realists interest in using whatever was to hand as materials. Mundane domestic objects – buttons, chip heaters – were given a folksy charm and made a broader point about

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61 She was later known as Peggy Purple.
the possibility for art to incorporate everyday, unsophisticated materials and content. A description which equally applies Lanceley's sculpture by Lanceley adjacent to Angel Face: Stink Pipe Orpheus. Standing almost in the corner of the gallery, it was made from an actual pipe, attaching pipes as legs, using the kinks as knees, adding further assemblage material as arms and face, adding cement for a base, utilising the existing top as a hat and painting a repetitive pattern of spots in browns and oranges on a white ground. A tentative connection can be made between this and patterns used in Aboriginal art, and the shape of a burial pole, then only recently exhibited in the Aboriginal Painting exhibition at the AGNSW. If the homage was deliberate, it would now be considered inappropriate, given the cultural and spiritual significance of such poles in Aboriginal societies, but at the time such understanding of Aboriginal art was not widespread.63

Hanging from the ceiling, next to Stink Pipe, was a hanging sculpture by Brown, title unknown. It is unclear what this piece is made out of – the regular pattern of the holes suggests that it might be a piece of pegboard, or perhaps a metal grill of some sort. Attached to it are curving pieces of what appears to be plastic, and a woollen fringe tied through some of the holes. Painted geometric patterns and faces adorn the piece, in a style that shows the influence of Maori art on Brown, particularly the repeated lines of the face on the lower left. Nearby, another work that cannot be attributed, again demonstrates this influence of indigenous Pacific art, and in this example both Maori and PNG influence can be detected. Hanging on the back wall of the gallery, the work was made from curved timber, which has been carved into, painted and adorned with assemblage objects to form a large figure wearing an ornate headdress, the hatband of which is made from an egg carton.

To the right of this work was Lanceley's Glad family picnic (1.17), one of the larger and better known survivors of the Imitation Realist works, now in the collection of the AGNSW. Relative to the majority of Imitation Realist pieces, at 122 by 183 centimetres it was a large piece, and dominated the back wall of the gallery. It presented a multitude of figures, against a purple ground and yellow sky, constructed from paint can lids, squashed metal tins and corrugated cardboard, all painted brown.

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63 Such pieces were increasingly becoming known outside of Aboriginal society, through exhibitions and texts such as Charles P. Mountford, The Tiwi: their art, myth and ceremony, London: Phoenix House, 1958, plates 34-9
and delineated with colourful, decorative lines and patterns. Again, this work bears witness to the influence of CoBrA, Olsen and Dubuffet on the artists. The personages of Dubuffet are particularly relevant here (2.15-16). The palette and materials used for the figures recall his work combined with the brighter tones used by CoBrA artists, especially Asger Jorn. After the exhibition the work was purchased by Lucy Swanton, of the Macquarie Galleries in Sydney, a significant recognition and encouragement for a young artist.64

In the back right corner of this first gallery was Brown’s Mary-Lou, one of the largest and most elaborate pieces in the exhibition and the most complex piece that Brown had created to date (3.29). Its importance to the artist was partly signified by the construction of an archway the viewer had to walk through in order to access it, a tongue-in-cheek version of a holy temple, befitting the tone of the pseudo-sacred references on the work (3.30). The archway was constructed out of wire screens and wooden boards and formed a high shelf that supported other artworks. Down the left hand side Brown painted ‘PASS beneath / this ARCH / and visit / MARY-LOU / the lovely’ underneath a Sepik-inspired pattern. Over this hung a small work on paper mounted on board that cannot be made out and above this was Lanceley’s Coming over cloudy. This was a naively painted face on board, with two paint can lids installed above it (presumably as clouds.) On the top of the archway sat a small unidentified sculpture made from a piece of scrap metal and painted to resemble a face. Beside this was a larger assemblage of Brown’s, Winged Orpheus, a whimsical creature made from tin cans, metal and timber pieces – the back legs appear to be from a piece of carved furniture – and painted yellow. On the underside of the archway appears to be a round work on paper mounted on card and on the right hand side was hung a colourful painting of a figure on board. It cannot be conclusively identified, but the style strongly resembles that of Brown. Childish drawings of figures also adorn the wood of the archway.

Through the archway, Mary-Lou was placed at an angle to the corner of the room (the work forming the base of a triangle with the two walls forming the apex) installed on legs that raised it off the floor. After the Imitation Realist exhibitions,

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64 The work was exhibited in both the Melbourne and Sydney Imitation Realist exhibitions, and then in the Anniversary art exhibition, Farmer’s Blaxland Gallery, Sydney, (opened 12 Sep 1962, The Glad Family Picnic was cat. no. 55; price: 120 gns.) from where Swanton presumably purchased it. She later bequeathed the work to the AGNSW.
the work was reworked by Brown as *Mary-Lou as Miss Universe* (4.06, see chapter four for that incarnation of the work, and the notoriety it attracted) and then destroyed by the artist some years later. Although the work has been reproduced before, it has been as a black and white image and so the colour photographs are not well known. The bright colours of the work are striking, and vital to the work as it was first created. Still a work in progress, *Mary-Lou* was photographed with Crothall and Lanceley on either side, each holding one of the rubber ducks that Brown had attached as the central figure’s breasts, and with Brown lying on his back, half underneath the work, continuing to paint. Seeing the work in colour makes the apparent similarities between Imitation Realism and Pop art clear: the bright poster colours, advertising and media images are immediately obvious.

Brown’s use of text is significant. Song lyrics start in the upper left corner, follow a semi-circle around the figure’s head and then continue on the right-hand side, starting in a mixture of popular songs, then via the traditional Christian song *Jesus Loves Me* turns into gibberish (3.29.1). The title *Mary-Lou* was likely a reference to the popular song *Hello, Mary Lou* which combined with the religious reference of *Jesus Loves Me* seems to refer to the manner in which popular culture borrowed from religious ritual in its worship of chosen figures. The composition of the work was dominated by the central figure of Mary-Lou herself, constructed out of an array of assemblage material. Her legs were fashioned from two ukuleles, attached face down to the surface. The torso was painted in a pale colour and then red-headed nails were added, along with the two rubber ducks for breasts. The arms are two plastic doll arms. The face is similarly painted and nailed, with a seashell for lips, round pieces of red plastic for rouge on her cheeks and plastic toys for her forehead and nose: cars for her eyes and what may be green army figurines for her nose. Small pink plastic babies adorn her forehead and form a line from the left side of her head, which may be an allusion to Mary-Lou as a fertility goddess. She sports a head-piece akin to that of a showgirl, a scalloped mirror behind a painted wooden heart with a plumage-like shape emerging out of the top. Her face is surrounded by radiating red lines and dots on white that emphasise her head.

Another large figure reclines along the bottom edge of the work, gesturing towards Mary-Lou with a red-painted hand with long, tine-like, wooden fingers. The body is largely made from small red pencils with white cowry shells emphasising her breasts and navel, a plastic dagger handle serving as her vagina. The head appears to be a large flat object that has been attached to the surface, then painted blue with red lines delineating the facial features. A speech bubble emerges from the mouth, with the words "ORACULAR / DIVINE BE / HOLD THESE / ROSY / LIPS". The mask-like face of the figure, the arm gesturing toward Mary-Lou and the words all suggest the reading that Mary-Lou was deliberately intended to evoke the qualities of an icon. Between her legs was a painted scene of an island paradise – an allusion somewhat lacking in sophistication – in the style that would characterise several of Brown’s later ‘unnatural primitive’ works (see chapter four.) On each side of Mary-Lou was a dense melange of imagery, of assemblage, papier collé and painted images. As much as it can be seen from the photographs, the quality of this varies, but particularly on the left-hand side of the work, the imagery coheres so that the painted and the glued is balanced and seems to flow in a unified composition around Mary-Lou.

Brown described the process of creating Mary-Lou and the ideas that emerged from it in an interview in 1969:

There were a number of solid objects attached to the surface, some of them were more or less thrown on accidentally, or appeared there almost by accident. Others were things that became necessary to find. I can remember search through Woolworths for the ideal set of plastic ducks; and a couple of old ukuleles, I think I had one and then I had to find another to match it.

I had a very ambiguous attitude towards my environment at the time – the city environment – I almost hated the city and yet at the same time fully accepted it just because it did exist. I recognised it as more or less being just a heap of unnecessary rubbish, but at the same time it was a reality that I knew I had to face and even somehow, I had to learn to love it, just because it is part of real existence. The figure of Mary-Lou herself is, I suppose, a personification of everything that this civilisation is – she’s synthetic, vulgar and bawdy, but at the same time, if you can bear to look at her for long enough, I think there is a weird sort of beauty that does come through.

I think somehow she relates to a figure such as Marilyn Monroe who was the ultimate synthetic product of this civilisation and yet at the same time she did manage to be genuinely a beautiful woman and also very human. After this picture had been painted I was, in a way,
dissatisfied, or perhaps not so much dissatisfied as just conscious that it was an image which had to move, and I kept on reconstructing it afterwards, and finally it assumed a second form which I exhibited a couple of years later. In its original form it was more relevant to civilisation as a whole – in its later form it was a much more specific painting, concerned with the extraordinary extent of deification of womanhood that is found in this society.67

Brown’s recollections reveal how significant the work was to both the method and ideas that were evolving in his practice during this period. Brown’s description of how he created *Mary-Lou* and how the work related to his environment is relevant to an understanding of Imitation Realism as a whole. *Mary-Lou* is an example of how Brown sought to embed the ideas he had learnt from indigenous Pacific arts into his own cultural context in urban Sydney. He tried to create art that connected mundane items from everyday life with the ideas and aesthetics of ‘fine art’. He echoes here the ideas he expressed in his statement in the CAS VIC *Broadsheet* that in his practice he attempted to reconcile the materiality of daily life with the art he created. Instead of dismissing the kitsch and the ordinary as being too banal for artistic contemplation, he sought to respond to them as they were what was real and immediate.

To the right of the arch leading to *Mary-Lou* and the wall was Brown’s *Interior view of where we’re up to* (3.31). Like *Hoop-de-lah* it was created from two pieces of board, a smaller one mounted on wood off-cuts in the centre of the larger one. It was covered in painted and carved patterning with assemblage material including upholstery tacks, milk bottle tops and assorted small pieces of plastic. The title would lead one to expect an organised depiction of the artists’ aesthetic philosophy – but the work denies this, instead providing a densely layered and patterned surface. Along the top of the centre panel is a painted text, made impossible to decipher by subsequent layers of spots and patterns as well as dribbles of paint. The surface is densely worked with Maori- and Sepik-influenced patterns, cartoon-like figures and geometric designs: Brown’s view of the interior was as a confused space, where influences were potentially going to mesh or cancel each other out in the confusion. The work acknowledged the plethora of influences that were shaping the Imitation Realists’ work and emphasised the lack of resolution in the way that they engaged

67 Mike Brown, interview with Hazel de Berg, Sydney, 9th December, 1969, tape 447, De Berg Tapes, Oral History Collection, NLA
with the ideas and inspiration that surrounded them. This echoed the confusion that Brown expressed across the entrance to the exhibition, that 'none of us can think what happened. All I can see now is what we did'. It stresses the idea of their work as a process of exploration and the quality of the exhibition as a whole as artefacts from their 'journey'. This sense of openness and multiplicity would later characterise the work of artists associated with postmodernism in the 1980s (Imants Tillers, for example) and what was in the Imitation Realists seen as youthful exuberance would come to be understood as a more complex approach to cultural influence and exchange. ⁶⁸

Standing on a home-made timber plinth near Interior view was The bush carpenter's girlfriend (1.16). The title alluded to the rudimentary construction methods Brown used to assemble the figure out of scrap timber, with adornments of bottle tops and a carved face. Above it, installed so that it leaned out at an angle from the wall, was a painting by Lanceley. This was an unidentified painting on a board that was shaped so that it appeared to have legs, recalling the shape of some PNG shields that allow them to be carried under the owner's arm. Around the edges were pieces of painted paper or card to resemble feathers or flames. It was painted with a red scrawling pattern; along the top edge were eyes and a beak, so that the work resembles an owl. To the right of this was another work by Lanceley, Welcome J (3.32), a wall-mounted assemblage in the shape of a figure, with a plank of timber for a body, a plate for a head, and arms and legs made from furniture off-cuts. It was painted red and then over painted with decorative marks. A small green figure is modelled onto the plank - as though the larger figure were pregnant - in a raised substance, recalling one of Dubuffet's figurative constructions.

The purposefully naïve construction of Welcome J complemented the sinuous forms and clean lines of Brown's Mug Lair, which stood beside it on a home-made wooden stand. As described in chapter one, Mug Lair was one of Brown's first Imitation Realist pieces, the stylistic inspiration of the carved timber was found in PNG

⁶⁸ An example of this with regard to Imants Tiller is from the NGA exhibition catalogue of 2006, where Howard Morphy writes that: 'Tillers' work has opened up in his mind, and potentially in the mind of the viewer, relationships across Australian art that have the effect of eliding categorical differences and emphasizing synergies.' Howard Morphy, 'Impossible to Ignore: Imants Tillers’ Response to Aboriginal Art,' in Deborah Hart (ed.) Imants Tillers: One World Many Visions, Canberra: NGA, 2006, p. 92
sculpture, but adapted to Brown’s own environment through the use of the colloquial title and bright synthetic paint. It was a key piece in the development of his thinking about art and particularly how making art as an non-indigenous Australian could be informed by, but not derivative of, indigenous Pacific art forms.

On the plinth that Mug Lair resided on was mounted a small collage on board by Crothall. Titled Grandma Moses, it featured a photograph of that artist, with additional material that cannot be made out in this photograph. The inclusion of the illustration and titling of the work indicates the interest of the group in naïve or folk artists such as Grandma Moses. The plinth was placed to the left of the doorway through to the second gallery to the right of which hung Brown’s Shangri-La Corroboree (3.33). A piece of recycled timber formed both surface and frame: a central panel was carved out to create a rectangle for the main part of the work with additional carved shapes on either side for further detail. On the top right corner of the panel (on the raised surface) has been painted in a decorative script ‘SHANGRI-LA / CORROBOREE’. The style of the text is reminiscent of the Art Nouveau font used for shopfront windows, alluding to the artist’s everyday surroundings. The title combines the reference to Australian indigenous culture with that from an English-language novel about a paradise to be found in Asia.69 World cultures are synthesised, perhaps with the inference that in their combination could be found the ideal. The painting depicts people and creatures in a linear style in which can be detected allusions to a variety of stylistic inspirations. These were most obviously that of Maori and Sepik painting, but also the x-ray style of Australian Aboriginal art (in the lower right) and the symbols used in flags and the Western media (lower left). The canoe in the lower right may also be a reference to those in Maori art, as in Sailing to Byzantium (see chapter one). The paint is in bright synthetic shades that contrast with the worn, unadorned timber.

On the wall to the right hung Crothall’s Bus Stop, a painting on paper mounted on board, which was hung at a distance from the wall. The painting appears to depict two figures, with ‘Halt the bus’ written above, but is otherwise indecipherable – as is a small drawing mounted on board hanging on the right hand side in the doorway through to the second room of the gallery. In the left-hand side of the doorway hung

69 Such as in the novel by James Hilton, Lost Horizon, London: Macmillan, 1933
Crothall's *The Archeopologist* (3.34), a figure made from scrap pieces of board and decorated with curved lines and dotted patterns. These are reminiscent of Aboriginal paintings which entertains the speculation that perhaps the work is meant to represent one of the archaeologists and anthropologists who studied Aboriginal cultures and artefacts, and delivered *apologia* explaining indigenous cultures to a broader audience.70

The second gallery

The second gallery was a much smaller space than the first, less than half the size, as to the viewer’s immediate left as they went through the doorway into the second room of the gallery was a white curtain that blocked off one end of the room. At either end the gallery was dominated by a large work: the freestanding *The big barb* (3.34) near the doorway and *Byzantium* on the end wall. This gallery was too small to allow for installations like the first gallery, so other than *The big barb* the works were confined to the walls and the carpeted bay along the left wall.

To the viewer’s immediate left as they entered this gallery was a narrow space before the wall was intersected by the curtain. A small abstract painting on board hung on this wall, with added circles of timber (3.34-5). It was a geometric abstract consisting of a main panel of intersecting shapes in black, white and yellow with red details, surrounded by a frame of blue with additional patterning. The overall format and the style of the painting suggest that the work was one of Brown’s. In front of this stood another unidentified work, a standing floor piece made from timber that appears to have weathered and cracked with age and was carved in a style reminiscent of the sculptures on the fence posts of Maori *whare runanga* (meeting...
houses). It is brightly painted in pink and blue, presumably in an attempt to locate it within the artists' own context; as Brown had done with Mug Lair, which suggests that this was also one of his works.

Next to this stood Crothall's largest solo piece in the exhibition, The big barb (3.34-6). Standing at least three metres tall, The big barb was constructed out of half a recycled wooden gate, covered with paint, collage and assemblage. With his use of advertising – for 'Fab' detergent and 'Bushells Iced Instant Coffee' – and posters – of Frank Sinatra et al and the movie World by night – this was one of the works that made inevitable the comparisons between the Imitation Realists and Pop art (see chapter four). Yet such an association limits the understanding of the Imitation Realists. Although their interest in using popular culture was one they shared with their contemporaries throughout the West, it was shaped by their individual, local contexts. This can be seen in the way that Crothall has used both global popular culture (Sinatra, World by night, the Rinso and Fab advertisements) with other objects from what surrounded him everyday: the timber gate, small wooden assemblages made from scrap timber, plastic toys, paint tin lids, bits of chain and wire mesh. Crothall's piece seems an explosion of contemporary life, intended to give a dense sample from his immediate visual culture. It recalls Alloway's cultural continuum, discussed in the previous chapter: rather than a vertical, hierarchical distinction between cultural forms, the artist responded to all aspects of his surroundings.71

The sculpture The Transtasmanian is standing beside The big barb in one of the exhibition photographs (3.34) and as it appears in photographs of other parts of the gallery (3.07-8) its location for the exhibition is not known (or it may have changed locations throughout the exhibition.) The work was a collaborative piece between Brown and Crothall. It reappeared in the Sydney exhibition as The Transtasmanian Wendigo Mark II and listed as being by Crothall 'with a sculptural basis by Brown'72 indicating that Crothall changed the work between the two exhibitions. There were other works similarly titled in the exhibition but its identification has been possible as the work was again made over for Crothall's solo exhibition in 1966 and it was

identified in the catalogue. The work was a figurative sculpture constructed out of timber and decorated with paint and collage. The title indicates that it represents Crothall’s identity as ‘transtasmanian’ between Sydney and Auckland, but the photographs do not give many clues as to what constituted this identity, particularly as the sculpture appears to be a female figure, suggesting that it was not to be taken as a representative portrait.

If the viewer then turned their back to *The big barb* and the *Transtasmanian* and faced the length of the room they would have been confronted with the two side walls densely hung with artworks leading up the smaller back wall, dominated by *Byzantium* (3.37): the largest collaborative piece in the exhibition and installed so that it acted as a summation of the show. As described above, the left hand side of the room created a distinct bay in which to display works. The Imitation Realists hung works all over the bay – along the wall, leaning against the columns that supported the panel, on the panel itself, and on wire mesh hanging screens, which they installed in places between the floor and the panel so as to create an additional layer on which to hang works.

The lights in the bay meant that in some of the photographs the works hanging there were overexposed and cannot be discerned – as is the case with at least three works hanging behind Lanceley’s *Here we come on the double decker*, which stood in front of the bay, leaning against the panel. This painting was a tall narrow piece of timber on the bottom of which were two wheels, making the painting as a whole into the bus of the title. The work unfortunately cannot be made out with any great detail from the available images, but does clearly depict a range of figures at varying scales, some appearing to float around on the inside of the bus. Again, the influence of Olsen and Dubuffet can be seen on Lanceley during this period. The next work that can be made out along the left hand wall was a large painting by Lanceley on a round piece of board, echoing the *tondo* of the European painting tradition but here used as the ground for an abstract dominated by vibrant impasto surrounding what appears to be assemblage objects representing a clock face. This work hung on a screen, obscuring the two works hanging behind it. Above it was Crothall’s *The Young Aesthetick Cow* (3.38), an assemblage piece on an unadorned board. Crothall used cardboard egg cartons and metal paper fasteners to form the body of the cow,
with rubber sink plugs with metal rings to create the quizzically expressive eyes. The title was painted in the lower right in large decorative painted lettering. Large painted titles are a recurring theme amongst the Imitation Realist works, such as Brown's *Shangri-La Corroboree*. They indicate the interest that they had in lettering itself – as Crothall would continue to pursue in his later attempts to train as a sign writer (see chapter four) – as well as the use of text to emphasise the created, constructed nature of the works themselves. It acted as a form of commentary within the works, a denial of the idea of the work of art as autonomous and a purely aesthetic, contemplative experience.

To the right of the *Aesthetick Cow* hung a painting on paper on board that it is not possible to attribute or identify, of abstract layers of coloured spots surrounding a black and white painting of what appears to be a small child. Hanging underneath this, on the back wall of the bay, was Lanceley’s painting *Countdown’s memories of the Great War* (3.53). An abstract work, the white surface is divided by a black line that wanders over the surface of the work; red spiky lines, edged with greenish-blue, almost like stick figures or runic symbols, cover the work. There is a greater restraint in this work, compared to others of Lanceley’s such as *In the bush*, which indicate the direction he would take with the composition of his works in the later 1960s. In front of this, affixed to the pole supporting the panel above the bay was an unidentified piece, depicting a figure on two pieces of timber, it was reminiscent of two PNG spirit boards placed end to end, with one for the head and the other for the body. The figure was depicted in bright reds and yellows and was slightly raised from the surface, perhaps through carving the board itself or affixing plaster. Next to this was Brown’s and Crothall’s *Symbolic diseases of the body politic* (3.34.1), the torso and head of a figure, which sat on a home-made timber plinth in the corner of the gallery. It resembles the figurative sculptures Dubuffet made from concrete and plaster. *Symbolic diseases* seems to be made from polystyrene or plaster with cardboard from an egg carton that was then shaped and painted. The title is likely a phrase Crothall came across in his study of the history of philosophy, as it echoes the metaphor in ancient Greek philosophy which equates ‘disorder in the state with a
sickness of the body politic.' The title is painted around the wooden base of the work in a decorative script, another example of the Imitation Realists use of lettering on their works.

Two of Crothall’s smaller works were also on the floor of the bay – a sculpture, *Woman driver* (3.39) made from a set of rusty metal scales, upended so that by painting the two trays they form the face and body of a female figure hunched over a steering wheel. *Captain Orpheus* (3.40) was also on the floor, as though it may scurry about when no one was looking. The sculpture resembled a small creature fashioned out of scrap pieces of timber, with a spindle, metal and plastic bottle tops and sections of cardboard egg cartons. The title was painted along one side. Between the two sculptures two works on paper on board can be seen but lying face up on the carpet they cannot be made out in the photographs. The final works in the bay were those on what was the back wall of the gallery (the right hand wall of the bay) that cannot be identified or discerned in any detail. The top one appears to be one of Crothall’s collages made from magazine pages, mounted on board, hanging above a painting of a cat against a yellow background that hangs over a monochrome drawing on paper on board. To the right of these, on the back wall, was Lanceley’s *Mask of a stupid fellow* (3.37), a painting on a large inverted metal wok, with colourful patterning echoing the circular edge and the title inscribed around the rim. Underneath this was a naively painted figure by Crothall on pieces of timber joined together, with smaller pieces extending either side for arms.

The right hand wall of this gallery was dominated by Crothall’s works (3.43, 3.44). The first, above the light switches beside the doorway was *Valiant Captain Krushev-Orph* (3.35) a small sculpture made from timber pieces, with round metal objects for the eyes and a particularly striking wooden moustache. The two round switches echo the shape of the eyes, a small indication of how the exhibition created a whole environment. It is an example of how the artists regarded their work as one more part of the surroundings, in contrast with normal exhibition practice that sought to minimize the intrusion of mundane elements such as electrical switches. This hangs

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above two black and white drawings on paper that are mounted on board, with what appears to be a strip of text in between, that are not able to be seen in detail.

The next piece was by Lanceley, his *Antipodean snow woman* (3.51), a painting with mixed media that created an uneven surface familiar from the work of Dubuffet or Elwyn Lynn; but here in bright colours, the blues of the figure contrasting with the reds around it. The work creates the impression that Lanceley was applying the media to the surface and then allowing chance to shape the work, determining the subject from what was suggested by the result and then delineating the forms. To the left of *Antipodean snow woman* hung *Sailing to Byzantium* (1.10, 3.44). This was Brown and Crothall’s first collaborative painting, and one of the first in which the ideas that motivated the creation of Imitation Realism can be clearly seen. As already discussed in chapter one, the work referenced English literature, Australian slang and Maori imagery. The hands across the middle of the work suggest Australian Aboriginal art, but whereas they are typically a stencilled negative, here the drawn outlines have been filled in, with one wearing a wristwatch, and one marked as ‘Mirgs foot’. The work was obviously very important to Brown, in 1980 he was able to sketch the work and identify which sections were painted by each artist and, in 1985, explain the process and rationale behind a recreation of the original frame to a curator at the ANG, as quoted above. The sketch indicates that their collaboration was a deliberate process; the contribution by each artist was carefully balanced with the other but distinct. The work integrated their local and European cultural heritage, literary and visual, an expression of life as they experienced it, living in New Zealand and Australia. The piece expressed an attitude of humorous irreverence toward so-called ‘high culture’ that they rarely saw in Australian art but experienced in daily life.

On the wall above *Sailing to Byzantium*, to the right, hung *Mr Unpredictable*, a joint work by Magda Kohn, Crothall and Brown. It is identifiable as the catalogue number is visible in the photographs, but only the bottom left of the work is

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74 The use of hands like this by Aboriginal artists had been included in a recent exhibition at the AGNSW, for example the work *Pigmy goose, barramundi and hands, Oenpelli*, (unknown artist), collected before 1914, natural earth pigments on bark, NGV, in Tuckson *op. cit.*, 1960, catalogue no. 8, plate 20

75 Mike Brown to John Jones, Curator, Australian Painting and Sculpture, ANG, 28 October 1980, 7th October 1985, NGA file ref. 68/2429
preserved in the photograph. It appears to be a figure with black arms and legs and a colourful torso, possibly made from collage pieces, on a white background. To its left hung another drawing on paper mounted on board, a triptych, but the drawing cannot be made out or identified. Above it hung a work by Crothall, a drawing of three figures in pen on paper mounted on board. The title is unknown but it has been attributed to Crothall from the photograph presenting a group of his works (3.55). It has been hung next to the skylight, on the sloping part of the ceiling. Underneath the skylight hangs a round painting of a colourful face that also cannot be identified.

On the wall underneath this was Brown’s *Migr's Migration into Heaven-Heaven* (3.45), a painting on newspaper and board. This work made considerable use of text; a panel down the right hand side reading:

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This Migr, / EM I planty / gutpela tru. / TRANSLATED / FROM THE SECRET / LANGUAGE OF / THE/ ASTRAL / PLANE, / this seems to INDICATE / to those “in the KNOW” / that MIRG, / IN SPITE OF HIS / VULNERABLE / HEEL, WAS / A GOOD SPORT / AND A REGULAR / BRICK.
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The text demonstrates how the work is a combination of material from Australian slang, Pidgin English, comic book narrative and (superficially) PNG religious beliefs. To the left of the text is a sheet of newspaper on which the figure of Migr is ‘streaking by’ towards heaven. The figure seems to have been influenced by bark and rock paintings in Arnhem Land of spirits, particularly the halo of radiating lines around the head,76 and this abuts comic book and graffiti-style imagery and writing. Examples of such Aboriginal art was increasingly being illustrated and exhibited, in anthropological texts and more recently in a fine art context, notably the *Australian Aboriginal Art* exhibition at the AGNSW in 1960.

It hung above another unidentifiable drawing on paper on board, and to the right of Crothall’s *Cigarette mural* (3.55), which Brown identified as the first Imitation Realist piece, in the CAS VIC *Broadsheet* statement. Made from cigarettes pinned onto board, it was perhaps one of the most labour-intensive works in the exhibition. Despite this, the available photographs suggest that the work itself was aesthetically

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76 *Australian Aboriginal Art* was exhibited in Sydney at the AGNSW 17 August – 18 September 1960; the catalogue illustrated paintings that depicted such figures, for example, *Two Spirits, Oenpelli*, artist unknown, natural earth pigments on bark, collected Western Arnhem Land, 1912, National Museum of Victoria, in Tuckson, *op. cit.*, 1960, catalogue no. 1, plate 21
one of the less successful pieces in the show. As one of Crothall’s earliest and largest pieces, that has presumably not survived, the photographs of the exhibition are a vital source in understanding how Imitation Realism began for Crothall, and then for Brown in the house at Annandale. The horizontal bands in the middle of the work create a juxtaposition of the mundane cigarettes with the aesthetic effect of their arrangement as an abstraction. Above and beneath this the patterns are less consistent; the lines are uneven and fractured. This was perhaps a reflection of the nicotine addicts state in withdrawal as, according to Brown, to create the work meant Crothall had to forgo smoking.\footnote{Mike Brown, ‘Kite II: Part I’, 1994, p. 6}

From the left of Cigarette mural to the end of the wall, all of the works on display were Crothall’s. Unfortunately not all can be identified, such as that on the lower left of the Cigarette mural, one of Crothall’s cartoon-like pen drawings on paper that has been mounted on board. It appears very similar to the work hanging above it, Woman without a stitch on (3.46), which is also a crudely drawn group of nude figures in pen. The immediate difference between the two works is that the latter has a painted pattern around the edge of the mount board in thick white lines. Next to these was I do I do I do do do (1.28, 3.43), a collage and drawing mounted on board. Hanging above that was Van Gogh today, which can just barely made out in the photographs: a layered collage of a newspaper article with an image of Van Gogh from a magazine collaged with other images. Next to these are two unidentifiable works – one a drawing of two figures in yellow on collaged paper on board and underneath it a collage of black and white drawing and newspaper headlines and images on board. Beside these are another two unidentifiable works – in the upper left a very Schoon-like painting in brown on a pale blue background. Underneath this is a colourful work that appears to be a painting and assemblage on board. To the left of these is the final work on this wall, but can only be glimpsed, as it is hanging in the recessed corner, on the stone wall of the gallery, in front of which a wooden partition had been constructed on which to hang works.

On the adjoining wall hung Wooden curtain (3.37), an assemblage piece by Crothall, made from triangles of timber assembled in a geometric pattern on a board backing. The colours of the timber and the uneven sizes of the timber give the piece the
appearance of a deliberate naivety. To the left of this was Timothy loves Sonya, a painting by Brown on two pieces of board, the smaller one mounted in front of the larger to create the frame, which is covered with a linear pattern in a thick white line. The painting is in a deliberately child-like style, with the title text intertwined with the imagery. It hung above a monochrome drawing on paper on board, which cannot be identified or attributed.

These two works are somewhat overshadowed by the presence of Byzantium (2.14, 3.37, 3.41), which was the focal point of the room and a climax to the exhibition as a whole. It was installed on the last wall the viewer was likely to see as they went through the gallery. The work itself formed the torso of a figure: it sat on legs made from concrete bricks, with cardboard arms flung wide to encompass the gallery. There was a black panel installed above it, on which Brown's The Happy Cat was hung (3.41). This work was made from a can, the sides of which had been split, so that they radiated away from the base in strips to form a flat surface, on which was a brightly coloured painting of a cat. It formed the face for Byzantium in the installation of the exhibition; from it extended lines like a speech bubble, connecting it with the text 'HERE IN BYZANTiUM' that extended in large black letters down the sloped part of the ceiling on the right. A reference to Yeats' Byzantium, the source of the work's title, the phrase is significant to understanding the group's work. Aesthetically, the hand-painted text on the wall of the gallery served to bring street graffiti into the gallery – breaking any rules for the refined elegance of an art gallery that may have survived to this point in the installation – and confronted the viewer as they turned upon entering the room from the first gallery. The poem Byzantium contrasts the immortality of works of art with the fleeting nature of mortal lives:

A starlit or a moonlit dome disdains
All that man is,
All mere complexities,
The fury and the mire of human veins.

... I hail the superhuman;

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78 This work does not appear under that name in the Annandale Imitation Realists catalogue, either because it is not in the catalogue at all or it is under a different title. The text and the image can be made out under magnification. It is listed as Timothy loves Sonya in the Subterranean Imitation Realists catalogue.
I call it death-in-life and life in death.

Miracle, bird or golden handiwork,
More miracle than bird or handiwork,
Planted on the star-lit golden bough,
Can like the cocks of Hades crow,
Or, by the moon embittered, scorn aloud
In glory of changeless metal
Common bird or petal
And all complexities of mire or blood.79

Announcing the reference along one wall of the gallery was no doubt at least partly tongue-in-cheek; an ironic declaration that their exhibition could offer a self-proclaimed experience of the eternal nature of art such as that Yeats describes. But they recognised in Yeats, especially in the poems Byzantium and Sailing to Byzantium, a shared belief in the vital importance of art to life, even in the midst of the ephemerality of many of their works. The proclamation of it was also an assertion that their particular form of art and its medium and content – with Australian slang, kitsch tat and references to Indigenous arts from the region – could all be included in this eternal sense of art.

Byzantium was the largest collaboration between Crothall, Brown and Lanceley, made specifically for the exhibitions as they felt that there needed to be a large joint piece on which they had all worked.80 The three had taken turns to add to the piece without obscuring the work of the others without communal consent to do so. They created the assemblage on board using paint, off-cuts of wood, cheap plastic items, and refuse, such as squashed paint tin lids, egg cartons and bottle tops. Viewing the work from the side reveals the extent to which they had built up the surface using assemblage (3.47). The work depicts a crowd of figures that reflect the diverse influences on the artists such as Art Brut, Jean Dubuffet, CoBrA, PNG and Maori art (3.48-50). The totem-like figures are represented in a variety of styles, depicted out of proportion to one another, in a picture plane lacking any depth, reflecting the impenetrable layers of the urban environment. The surface is intricately built up, with both collage and dense patterning. The painted patterns transform the collaged objects into faces and figures. They are worked into every crevice of the surface,

80 Brown, 'Kite II: part 1', 1994, p. 5
leading the eye to discover more and more. The linear patterning is derived from Maori art amalgamated with refuse and supermarket trinkets.

In addition to *Byzantium* being the only large collaboration of the three artists, the work was positioned in the logical endpoint of the path through the exhibition, which justifies seeing it as a kind of summary for Imitation Realism as a whole. This is emphasised by its flamboyant installation, as a figure embracing the whole of the gallery, proclaiming 'Here in Byzantium'. It represents the ideas that the artists were trying to share for the possibilities of Australian art to be made both of, and about, its surroundings. Its stylistic references to both contemporary European art as well as traditional indigenous art combine the key points of reference for their work. They sought to capture the idea of creativity as fundamental to human life through a form of 'raw' expression, as in the work of Dubuffet. But they did not want to emulate contemporary art from elsewhere; their work had to arise from their own experience, to be intrinsically a part of their local surroundings. References to Maori and PNG art placed their work as a product of the Pacific region and the plastic toys and baubles created an immediate connection between the work and the reality of urban Australia.

Close consideration of the exhibition as a whole reveals how the Imitation Realists sought to exhibit their works as part of a total environment. They restructured the conventional exhibition space through the use of freestanding installations that could be viewed in the round and interrupting the surface plane of the walls with angled screens. They displayed their works on the floor, walls, on the installations, at angles to the wall and hanging from the ceiling to create an overwhelming total visual environment. Decorations and text were used to create additional visual and conceptual layers. The Melbourne exhibition itself was perhaps the highpoint of collaborative work between the three artists and the fullest demonstration of the group's ambitions.

Subsequently they increasingly worked independently of one another and by late in 1962 the group had disbanded. Their increasing independence from one another can be seen in the *Café Balzac mural*; although it was a collaborative triptych, each artist created and signed their own panel. The Sydney exhibition, although as unconventional in appearance does not seem to have been installed with the same
level of effort that they had expended in Melbourne. There is no mention of the freestanding structures and there are no new collaborative pieces involving Brown, Crothall and Lanceley that would suggest that they were still working closely together as a group.

*Café Balzac Mural*

Their final collaborative work of art was the *Café Balzac mural*, commissioned by the owner of the Café Balzac, Georges Mora. A notable difference with the mural is the approach the artists took to collaboration; instead of working in turns on the one panel, as they had with *Byzantium*, each took a section of the triptych (3.67). After the exhibition closed Brown stayed on to complete his section of the mural, which explains the density and detail of the imagery in his section in contrast to the other two. Each of the wooden panels was the same height, but otherwise the only similarity is the blue, pink and white face that swoops in from the right. The face is the largest, and was painted the earliest, in Crothall's panel (3.68) so it is surmised that he painted the face and that it was then decided amongst the artists that it should be repeated across the three panels to create some connection between them. The blue face can be seen to have been sourced from Picasso's *Guernica* (although with the addition of purple wings); perhaps the café environment inspired Crothall to create a kind of homage to Picasso. Emerging from behind the blue face is a drawing of a 'Journal' dated Melbourne, March 1962, and much of the collage are labels from wine, gin and vinegar bottles, along with tobacco, liquorice and mixed peel. The reference to the Parisian café scene that inspired Picasso and the Cubists is perhaps also in deference to Georges Mora; the French migrant to Australia who was so supportive of the Imitation Realists and of contemporary Australian art. Inscribed lower right in green ink is 'Dear George / often you think things about art and / I suppose you know that this / work which is presented here is / part of a hidden / underground / movement.' Picasso’s Paris meets Imitation Realist Melbourne with the addition of a punctured floral tin tea tray, a plastic dish rack with toy tools attached (and partly melted), along with collaged references to the Australian art scene – a newspaper article about a boxer modelling for an art class.

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82 Haese, "Put it Anywhere!", 1998, p. 289
and press photograph of 'Mrs Morris West standing at the left hand side of Elwyn
Lynn’s 200 guinea Elegy'. The work encompasses both its immediate surroundings
and nods to European modernism, the Mora’s background and the broader context of
Australian contemporary art and kitsch.

Beside Brown’s panel (3.69), Crothall’s looks decidedly restrained. Brown created a
dense surface of imagery, which verges on the psychedelic poster art of late 1960s
London and San Francisco. The blue face, almost in the centre of the work, is
almost absorbed into the overwhelming detail, it is only that it is one of the least
adorned parts of the work that sets it apart. The surface is flat, compared to the other
panels and to Brown’s assemblage pieces in the exhibition. He used collage across
the work, mostly from newspapers, with corrugated cardboard on the top left corner,
but does not use other objects. This is an indication of the direction his work was to
take in the next few years when he would concentrate on painting more than
assemblage. Against a black background almost the entire surface is covered with
intricate detail in vibrant colours. A panoply of heads covers most of the work, some
bearing the influence of Maori and Sepik art, but these influences have been further
absorbed into Brown’s own style, a synthesis of all of his surroundings. Intricate
abstract patterning fills the spaces between the figures, as well as text, both collaged
and hand written. It creates an elaborate surface across the work rather than a sense
of depth or space within it. On the upper right he painted ‘THERE COMES A TIME
WHEN ALL THESE MINOR DETAILS SEEM TO BE MADE IRRELEVANT BY
CIRCUMSTANCES’ - perhaps a reflection on the impossibility of ever finishing
such a detailed work to his satisfaction in the circumstances – living away from
home with little money, at work in a busy restaurant. In the lower left he painted a
small suburban house, in the style of illustration used in newspaper advertisements
for new house and land packages. The work records the then contemporary style of
housing that several decades later Howard Arkley painted with nostalgia.84

The blue face is the smallest on Lanceley’s panel (3.70), and appears to have been
painted after the rest of the work was finished, as it has clearly been painted over the
impasto, textured surface, and the colours of the face do not correspond to the palette
of the work overall. Lanceley continued to use the debris and oddments of his

84 See for example, Chris McAuliffe, Art and Suburbia, Sydney: Craftsman House, 1996, pp. 105-6
Imitation Realist assemblages, but here with more restraint. The figures he has created out of paint tin lids, timber fragments, metal sink strainers, toy fans, bottle tops, plastic flowers, nails, wire mesh and paint have more room to breathe amidst the plaster-like surface of the work. They seem to float and swirl about the undefined space of the background. The space of the surface plane is interrupted, with one figure protruding over the top of the work and another’s mouth is formed by a hole in the work, recessed behind the surface layer. For Lanceley, as for each of the others, the work would indicate what was to come after Imitation Realism, with the ‘poetry’ of the used and worn materials coming to the fore in his practice.

Their final collaborative piece the mural demonstrates each artist’s personal realisation of Imitation Realism. Crothall records a slice of the life around him, through imagery and text as well as using assemblage to incorporate parts of his surroundings into the work. He creates allusions both to his immediate surroundings as well as the broader cultural context, through references to Picasso and local art. Addressed to Georges Mora, the work is a personal piece, a testament to the support Mora had given the artists and their friendship. Brown’s panel demonstrates his interest in dense, patterned surfaces – stylistically similar to patterns found in traditional Pacific art forms but here worked in vibrant synthetic paints. He combined this with imagery from different sources including comic book-like illustration, text and collaged mass media images to create intricate layered imagery. For Lanceley, the textured Dubuffet-like figures are released from the near impenetrable surfaces of some of his earlier Imitation Realist paintings and allowed to float. The assemblage and textured material create a sense of the worn, accreted surface of an urban environment. Found materials bring an element of chance to the work, their forms determining the resulting piece. Each artist signals in the mural, particularly in contrast to Byzantium, the independent direction that they would take in their work, something which is explored in the next chapter. Their increasing disenchantment with Imitation Realism is apparent in the catalogue for the Subterranean Imitation Realists exhibition that they produced after their return to Sydney, for the exhibition in May 1962.
**Subterranean Imitation Realists exhibition**

The bulk of the works in the Sydney Imitation Realists exhibition were the same as those of the Melbourne show and there is also a lack of photographic documentation, so this section focuses on the artists' statements in the catalogue to explore the disillusionment that led to the disbanding of the group. The *Subterranean Imitation Realists* exhibition was held at the Rudy Komon Gallery of Woollahra, in Sydney's eastern suburbs. The Gallery was founded in 1959, by Rudy Komon, a Czechoslovakian immigrant who had worked as a journalist, resistance fighter and black market art dealer during World War II.\(^{85}\) Dealing in Australian art emerged out of his antique and wine businesses that he established in Sydney after his arrival in 1950. By all accounts he relied on the judgement of others in the art world as to the artists he should show, but once he supported them, he was unfailingly loyal, one of the first dealers in Australia to support a stable of artists with regular payments in exchange for exclusive representation.\(^{86}\) By 1961 he was representing Robert Dickerson, Jon Molvig, Charles Blackman, Leonard French, Clifton Pugh, Percival and Olsen, some of Australia's best known contemporary artists. Olsen or perhaps Lynn had taken Komon to see the house at Annandale, and, likely on their recommendation, he had offered the artists a show.

The Imitation Realists were a distinct change for Komon's gallery. Unlike MOMAA where profit was not the motive, he ran a commercial gallery, where, even if not for a long time, the work he showed was intended to ultimately turn a profit. It is perhaps not surprising then that he did not offer to represent the artists, either collectively or individually. Lanceley recalled that Komon

> would have like to have had the exhibition first, but he agreed to have the Sydney showing ... when the works came back from Melbourne. ... Even though we left some key pieces in Melbourne ... we were able to spread the show throughout Rudy's building, including the rooms upstairs. I think we were probably the first artists to make use of the upstairs rooms, which hadn't been renovated. Our exhibition sprawled throughout, encrusting every surface, and since many of the works were themselves encrustations the effect was amazing.\(^{87}\)

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\(^{85}\) The details of Komon's life vary as he gave varying accounts, see Robert Raymond (ed.) *52 views of Rudy Komon*, Sydney: AGNSW & The Beagle Press, 1999


\(^{87}\) Lanceley, in Raymond, *52 views*, p. 79
The exhibition was smaller than the previous one, with 177 works to Melbourne's 211, as some of the works had been sold or constructed into the Scow, the installation the artists made out of a number of the works and left as a permanent installation at the MOMAA (it is unknown what happened to it, or how long it lasted after the exhibition). A number of works were added, such as Crothall's *The Bomb* and *Pop Music*, Brown's *The Holy City of Byzantium* and Lanceley's *Loving couple in the bath* and *Demoiselles d'Kings Cross*. Unfortunately no images, and none of these works, are known to survive.

In addition to those by the three main artists, there were a few works that had been created with Melbourne artists, presumably while they were there for the MOMAA exhibition. These were a collaboration between Mirka Mora, John Perceval, Lawrence Hope, Brown and Lanceley titled *Aspendale Fricassee* and another between Brown, Lanceley and Mora, *Balzac Fricassee*. Peter Burns contributed *Space Vehicle* and Wim van Uden *Three Barrel Slats*. The involvement of the Melbourne artists in the exhibition indicates the interest that other artists had in Imitation Realism, and the openness of the group to involvement with other artists. That there were no new joint works by Lanceley, Crothall and Brown after their return from Melbourne signifies that the group was nearing its end.

The catalogue cover was designed by the three artists, and attributed the lettering to Crothall, central drawing to Lanceley and 'motifs above and below' to Brown. This careful crediting also suggests that the group was no longer as happy working together as a unified co-operative. Each are of the artists’ statements are on their own page with a small illustration. The first statement was by Crothall who opened 'Ladies and Gentlemen / At this point of revising some blurb to put in this catalogue, / let me tell you that I don't believe in catalogues’, instead, he suggested the proprietor could put a list of 'on a billboard by the door'. But he concluded that the catalogue might be of use in promoting the exhibition, and so ended with the exhortation 'It is terrific, honestly is, so come along and see for yourselves / whilst you still have a chance. / It is avant-garde.' Underneath he has written 'BLURB' surrounded by a decorative border. His tone overall is one of cynicism towards the strategies of promotion that accompanied exhibiting art. Over the page is Lanceley’s

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89 Ross Crothall, ‘Ladies and Gentleman’, *Subterranean Imitation Realists*, (his emphasis)
short statement, underneath a drawing of arrows. The first part of his statement describes these: 'Arrows are the most amazing symbols / they always give the impression that they are going somewhere...’ until abruptly changing his subject to art. ‘There is no conscious revolution / There is no conscious bad taste, there is no Anti-Art / There is no Junk or incongruous materials that are / not / part of the creative transformation / I insist there is only poetry.’ The statement echoes that of the CAS VIC Broadsheet, as well as the article he would write for the NAS student newspaper, the ary wild oat, discussed in the next chapter. It again indicates his interest in Vance Packard at this time, and what would increasingly be his prevailing engagement with the form of the poetic in his work. Brown’s piece, alongside an ink drawing of a despairing face, suggests that he was also moving away from the group project.

Imitation Realism, as far as I am concerned is a collection of about 200 paintings and sculptures now on display at the Rudy Komon Gallery. Any further information about what it is can be gained by looking at the works themselves.

At different times the work has been called Fine-Art, and Anti-Art, and irresponsible Nihilism, and Junk Culture, and mere junk, and modern Totemism, and modern Reliquary, and satirical goonery, and inspired and/or uninspired doodling, and Sheer Corn, and Dada and Neo-Dada and Post-Dada and Lah-de-dah and what-you-will.

It has also been said to comprise a new Art Movement. God Forbid.

All I can say in praise or defence of our work is that it is not particularly any of these things except maybe what-you-will.

All I can say about the future, or about the direction of the work is I-don't-know, and I-don't-care, just as from the start I have never known or cared.

Despite support by important figures in the art world, such as Reed, Lynn, Olsen, Komon and the artists who had supported them in Melbourne, the group seem to have felt that their work was not truly understood by either the critical or popular audience and their tone is one of some disillusionment.

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90 Colin Lanceley, ‘Where I am up to’, Subterranean Imitation Realists
91 Brown, ‘Where I am up to’, Subterranean Imitation Realists
Conclusion

The Imitation Realists attempted to break the conventions of display associated with modern art exhibitions and to express the freedom they believed was vital to creativity. This reflected the ideas that they developed both from Herbert Read and from their understanding of traditional Pacific art forms. As I discussed in chapter two, the idea of creativity as intrinsic to human nature had been an interest and impetus to many Western artists since the Second World War. This was frequently explored through the use of purposefully naïve 'raw' techniques, as we saw in the art of Dubuffet and the Imitation Realists. Assemblage was a technique through which it seemed possible to connect the materiality of art with that of daily life. The Imitation Realists found an authentic realisation of this when they looked to indigenous art forms of the Pacific, where whatever was to hand was used to create works of art and art was an integral part of community life. They attempted to develop their own form of work that would reflect their experience of their daily surroundings. By presenting an all-encompassing environment they surrounded the viewer with an 'imitation reality', one fashioned from the scraps of daily life that celebrated the tawdry and colloquial rather than banishing it from the sphere of art. The photographs of the Melbourne exhibition demonstrate how they exhibited their larger more durable works along with ephemeral pieces and decorative material, which formed part of a larger environment that presented artefacts of the group's artistic journey.

By considering the galleries in which the exhibition took place it can be seen how their work was positively received by older figures in the art world, especially John Reed, Elwyn Lynn and Rudy Komon, for its 'organic' approach to art and life. This placed them in a context of avant-garde art that had been ongoing since the 1930s. Although the exhibition was enthusiastically received, it is argued that their broader challenge to how Australian artists were failing to represent the whole of Australian society and culture, was not widely perceived. This led to disillusionment for the artists and the disbanding of the group. This allowed each of the artists to take their individual directions forward. The brief, intense period of the group's practice was perhaps a strength as it fuelled each of them in their subsequent work. The group involvement did not settle into expectations that restricted their subsequent work.
Chapter four

‘An exciting future looms ominously’: after Imitation Realism

In the years following the 1962 exhibitions, the ideas of Imitation Realism continued to inform the art of Brown, Crothall and Lanceley. For young artists, they had had an enviably large audience for their debut exhibitions. As we saw in chapter three, they had exhibited in leading contemporary art galleries and were thus well placed to build on their successful entry into the art scene. However, this success did nothing to change the dissatisfaction with the Australian art world that had provided the impetus for Imitation Realism. Lanceley followed the not uncommon path to London and established a career as an artist there. Crothall, for several years, was uncertain as to whether he would continue as a visual artist. It took a sudden move back to New Zealand in 1965 to instigate the creation of another major body of work. Brown lived in Sydney and the Blue Mountains until 1968, and was consistently involved in art world scandals: the banishment of the refurbished Mary Lou from the Australian Painting Today exhibition at the Art Gallery of NSW (AGNSW) in December 1963, the provocative Kite of 1964 and, most notoriously, criminal prosecution for indecency for his solo exhibition Paintin’ a go go in 1965.

In this chapter I examine the years immediately after Imitation Realism, analysing how each artist developed from that common foundation. The larger bodies of work Brown and Lanceley created after the late 1960s are not considered in this chapter. This allows for a closer analysis of earlier works that establish how Imitation Realism shaped their development as artists. Each concentrated on different aspects of Imitation Realism in their later work and by contrasting these developments we gain a sense of how each matured as an artist and the impetus Imitation Realism provided. Before considering their independent work, I first discuss how the group was received in Australia, particularly in view of Pop art and the influence they had on younger artists, as this had a bearing on the group members deciding to work independently.
The influence of Imitation Realism on other, usually younger, artists was predominantly a result of their materials and installation practices. They were seen as a local example of broader tendencies in art internationally, which obscured their attempt to propose possibilities for Australian art that responded specifically to the regional environment. The use of mass media imagery in Pop art made for a ready comparison to that of the Imitation Realists. Pop art was first mentioned in connection with their work by Daniel Thomas in his review of their May 1962 exhibition, possibly the first use of the term in Australian art writing:

The Imitation Realists ... are in line with current trends in international art for neo-Dada has only recently become widespread. In the past couple of years Pop Art has found official recognition in England [and] assemblage has had a major survey at the Museum of Modern Art, New York.¹

However, almost as often their work has been compared to Pop art it has been noted that Imitation Realism was different in appearance, intention and meaning.² When they exhibited in 1962 Pop art was only starting to achieve a definition that was distinct from the junk artists of the 1950s. In 1962 New York saw the first solo exhibitions by James Rosenquist, Roy Lichtenstein, Andy Warhol and Robert Indiana, as well as Oldenburg’s soft sculptures and the landmark International Exhibition of the New Realists at the Sidney Janis Gallery.³ The use of alternate media and pop culture subjects made comparisons inevitable.

Lucy R Lippard considered the term Pop art to extend to ‘only five hard-core Pop artists in New York, and a few more on the West Coast and in England.’⁴ The works identified by Alloway as ‘junk culture’ were to some extent lost amidst the popularity, or at least attention, gained by the Pop art of artists such as Warhol and Lichtenstein. Their sophisticated, slick use of commercial imagery easily translated to mass-media reproduction and rapidly became iconic. Her narrower definition of

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¹ Daniel Thomas, ‘Art is upon the town’, Sunday Telegraph, 27 May 1962.
⁴ Lucy R. Lippard (ed.), Pop Art, New York: Thames and Hudson, 1966, p. 69. Lippard’s five were Andy Warhol, Claes Oldenburg, James Rosenquist, Tom Wesselman and Roy Lichtenstein
Pop can be found in later texts, such as Madoff’s *Pop Art: a critical history*, where four of Lippard’s five are considered as the ‘Major Artists’, and other artists associated with Pop such as Allan D’Arcangelo, Robert Indiana, Tom Wesselman and Edward Ruscha are on the periphery. In a review of Alloway’s 1974 exhibition *American Pop Art* at the Whitney Museum of American Art, Werner Spies argued that this ‘contraction’ of Pop art, according to the purity of the image, was in order to endow it with autonomy from Abstract Expressionism. Spies commended the exhibition for presenting a broader understanding of Pop, as

fundamentally Pop does not manage to have a recognizable group style: what is recognizably shared is the personal fascination with visual and consumer clichés ... [it is] the supremacy of a way of seeing in art that is no longer articulated by culture.

Lippard considered *The Art of Assemblage* to have been ‘received as the beginning of a trend when in fact it was the end.’ She noted that by 1961:

The perceptive observer began to notice a gradual shift from the rusty, peeling, aged, and mellowed surface to a cleaner cut, simpler, more blaring, ordered, and ‘cool’ expression within the Assemblage trend.

Comparison with the Imitation Realists did not stand up to scrutiny once Pop art became more sharply defined in Lippard’s terms, as a ‘cool’ expression, rather than the aged, scuffed surfaces of junk art in both New York and Annandale. The Imitation Realists have consistently objected to the connection of their work to Pop art. In his 1963 article ‘Pop goes the Easel’ Lynn initially seemed to define the Imitation Realists as Pop artists, but he also emphasised the distinction in subject, depiction and materials that existed within the range of contemporary art that responded to popular culture. In the same issue of *Art and Australia* Hughes denied the connection between Pop art and Imitation Realism. His essay situated the

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7 Spies, ‘Avant-garde Tightrope Act, Or Whatever Happened to Pop Art?’, p. 265-6
8 Lippard, *Pop Art*, p. 72
9 Lippard, *Pop Art*, p. 77
10 Colin Lanceley, taped interview with the author, Surry Hills, Sydney, 5 July 2006; Mike Brown, ‘Kite II: Part 2 The heart of things’, *Art Monthly Australia*, no. 75, November 1994, p. 17
11 Lynn, ‘Pop goes the Easel’, pp. 166-72
work of the Imitation Realists in the broader theme of ‘irrational’ subject matter. Hughes emphasises ‘the magical efficacy’ their work sought to capture of the ‘primitive fetish carver’ in their use of objects. He traced the heritage of Imitation Realism from European art, especially of Dubuffet, but most especially in the local context of the indigenous arts of the Pacific. He denied the connection that had been made by some art critics between Imitation Realism and New York Pop.

It is difficult to assess the nature or extent of the influence of the Imitation Realists on the work of other artists. Although they were undoubtedly significant to some artists, the extent of assemblage and Pop techniques can also be seen as a result of the increasing awareness of these practices internationally. Additionally, British artists influenced by Pop, Richard Larter and Michael Shaw, arrived in Sydney in 1962 and 1963 respectively. In *The Development of Australian Sculpture 1788-1975* Graeme Sturgeon considered that the Imitation Realists:

> having preempted the field of Pop ... the group then abandoned it, to some degree closing the options for other artists who might have developed in this area. Certainly there has been no Wesselmann or Oldenburg in the Australian context.

Sturgeon does not specify exactly how or what the Imitation Realists stopped other artists from doing immediately after the exhibitions. It seems that he considers the group to have somehow prevented the development of the ‘cool’ expression of New York Pop. He appears to draw a distinction between their works as a group and the ‘quasi-Pop’ that Brown and Lanceley created independently, as he considers this far more influential:

> The activities of the Annandale Imitation Realists as a group were very short-lived, with each of the three protagonists soon going his own way, but the quasi-Pop stream which they initiated in Australia

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12 Hughes, ‘Irrational Imagery in Australian Painting’, pp. 150-59
13 Hughes, ‘Irrational Imagery in Australian Painting’, p. 159
14 Hughes, ‘Irrational Imagery in Australian Painting’, p. 153
15 Gareth Sansom for example, who was studying fine art at the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology from 1959 to 1964, describes the increasing influence of English Pop artists such as Derek Boshier and Peter Blake as well as older artists such as Alan Davie, Jean Dubuffet and Francis Bacon, at RMIT during the period. Robert Rooney, ‘On the prowl’, in Frances Lindsay (ed.), *Gareth Sansom: paintings 1956-1986*, Melbourne: University Art Gallery, University of Melbourne, 1986, p.14
has assumed a permanent position as a source of ideas capable of stimulating fresh and individual work in much the same way as Cubism or Surrealism.\textsuperscript{18}

Like Sturgeon, Daniel Thomas considered some aspects of Imitation Realism to be widely influential. He observed in his survey of 1960s art in Australia, the Imitation Realists started the use of assemblage material and references to popular culture that was characteristic of emerging artists’ work in the 1960s.\textsuperscript{19} Younger artists found something new in Imitation Realism. It bypassed the conventions of older artists, such as their teachers at the NAS, and responded to the popular culture of their generation.

The editors of the student newspaper at the NAS, the \textit{arty wild oat} (awo), Garry Shead and Martin Sharp, clearly thought the group’s work was of interest to their readership and invited the artists to write an article about their work. The influence of the Imitation Realists can be seen in Shead’s and Sharp’s own work from the 1960s. Sharp recalled the Komon gallery exhibition as ‘an illumination’, as ‘this extraordinary garden had grown\textsuperscript{20} in the formal white-walled gallery. In 1963 Sharp left the NAS, having finished three years of the five year course, and began attending the Mary White Art School. He was taught there by Robert Klippel, John Olsen and Lanceley. He got to know Lanceley in particular and his influence was important to Sharp, who described him as ‘a bit of a mentor to me’.\textsuperscript{21} This relationship was significant, inspiring Sharp to make assemblage sculptures. One of these is reproduced in a \textit{Sunday Mirror} article from 1964 which pictures Sharp with his entry to the CAS Young Contemporaries exhibition \textit{The Key to Natural Beauty}.\textsuperscript{22}

The work shows the influence of Lanceley and the other Imitation Realists in its construction from everyday materials, including a shop display cabinet, rubber gloves and a dressmaker’s model. Sharp became a cartoonist and the art director for \textit{OZ} magazine, first in Sydney (1963-66) and then in London (1966- 69). The graphics he created fed into his art works; he moved between producing commercial work and art pieces with a freedom that was partly inspired by that of the Imitation Realists. For Garry Shead, it was the freedom of the Imitation Realists that provided

\textsuperscript{18} Sturgeon, \textit{The Development of Australian Sculpture}, p. 215
\textsuperscript{20} Martin Sharp, taped interview with the author, 8 February 2006, Sydney
\textsuperscript{21} Sharp, interview with the author, 2006
\textsuperscript{22} ‘Angry wizard of Oz’, \textit{Sunday Mirror}, 19 April 1964, p. 23
welcome inspiration, a change from the training provided at the NAS. It was ‘a new irreverence in art and a sense of sexual liberation’ that made the Imitation Realists important to the development of his own work. ‘The mixing of systems of representation and unexpected encounters of objects and surroundings was a characteristic feature of Shead’s paintings, films and cartoons of the early 1960s.’

This description can be applied to his oil painting *Wahroonga Lady in her naked lunch* (4.01), which incorporates lacy fabric (presumably to represent underwear) referencing a supposed seamier side to a doyenne’s life in the wealthy Sydney suburb Wahroonga, in a literal depiction of the title of the William S. Burroughs novel. For both Shead and Sharp the Imitation Realists provided an alternative to what was otherwise available in the Sydney art world of the time and a new sense of the possibilities of art. This sense of discovery is echoed in Peter Carey’s recollection of seeing the exhibition:

> It really did have a huge, huge effect on me ... I remember being in Melbourne in 1961 and seeing the exhibition of the Annandale Imitation Realists, which was Colin Lanceley and Ross Crothall and Mike Brown, an amazing, amazing show. I hadn’t known that this could even be.

Carey further described it as ‘probably the first real art exhibition I saw in my life. It blew my socks off. I did not dare hope that art be like this. It was different from everything I knew.’ Vivienne Binns, a painter two years behind Lanceley and Brown at the NAS, also remembered the unique possibilities the Imitation Realists presented:

> I’d seen the work at the Subterranean Imitation Realists at Rudy Komon. It was the most vital, immediate, real and dynamic thing. ... I remember the bringing together of things that related to the work of native cultures, New Guinea and so on, and the built structures. The amazing humour and irreverence and written text that was all part of the work which was wonderful. It was what young people would get now from the text of pop songs, it was local: it was happening with us, not something in a book that was from overseas. It had such energy and wit and vibrancy, it was so fresh, there was nothing like it. It was

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24 Grishin, *Garry Shead and the erotic muse*, 2001
27 Peter Carey, email to the author, 14 March 2008
of the moment and you recognised it, it was electric. You can still see
that in the work. From these examples it can be seen that the group’s influence was primarily through
their use of material and the freedom that they took with their subject matter,
materials and the installation of their exhibitions. The ideas that had motivated their
work and their attempts to present an alternative, more collaborative, approach to
making art did not have as much resonance. This contributed to the group
disintegrating, with each artist seeking an independent identity. Some discussion is
necessary of the ‘break-up’ of the group before I consider in turn the work of
Lanceley, Crothall and Brown after Imitation Realism, to see how they continued to
respond, adapt and contribute to the art world of Australia.

Artistic differences

The response of the Imitation Realists to the request from editors of the awo for a
statement regarding their work demonstrates increasing differences between the
three. There was no joint statement; Lanceley responded with an article, Crothall
with a letter to the editors and Brown did not answer at all. The contrast between the
two pieces offers insight into the different reasons why Imitation Realism was
important to the authors. Both were published in the second (of the two) editions of
the awo in July 1962. In his letter Crothall offers one of the only direct statements
he ever made about his work and his disappointment and frustration with the
reception of the Imitation Realist exhibitions is clear. It reveals his preoccupation
with the ambiguities and contradictions of an authentic cultural identity for settler
nations, described by him as ‘the fact we perform in a cultural context which is a
dog’s breakfast.’ He opened by explaining why he had responded in the more
personal form of a letter, rather than article:

I cast this article for the arty wild oat in the form of an open letter to
[the editor] … My reason is that in order to arrive at something
personal, I thereby escape the distinction of writing personally to an
abstract public world – which would be a feat which I am not capable
of, for fear that a public which I do not claim in advance would
disrespect my gesture.

28 Vivienne Binns, taped interview with the author, 4 September 2008, Canberra
29 Ross Crothall, letter, arty wild oat, no.2 July 1962, p. 2
30 Crothall, arty wild oat, July 1962
This refusal to take up the authority of the abstract authorial voice indicates Crothall’s philosophy of art being one that was personal and specific rather than universal and absolute. His fear of disrespect was perhaps justified as he goes on to dismiss both Imitation Realism and most Australian painting.

Forget our exhibition at the Komon Gallery – that is, Crothall, Brown, and Lanceley, the Subterranean Imitation Realists. I have to say this in order to survive. In time our exhibition at the Komon Gallery will settle into the uneventful past. There has never been a tremendous artistic event in Sydney – excepting for the consolidated academic thoroughness of Dobell. Tom Roberts turned Australiana into art – since then, on the deepest critical level, Australian artists, aspiring to be indigenous, have only turned art into Australiana.31

‘I have to say this in order to survive.’ It is unclear whether Crothall meant his survival as an artist or in life, but either way, the depth of the feeling he had about art and Imitation Realism in particular is apparent. The failure of the exhibitions’ serious intent meant Crothall would prefer them to be forgotten. He goes on to castigate the ‘big names’32 of contemporary Australian painting – ‘Nolan, Boyd, Drysdale, Tucker, Olsen, Dickerson’ – as ‘conjur[ing] up precarious images to fill the gaps which they do not understand.’33 He dismisses the Imitation Realist exhibitions, as the work of ‘young upstarts’; as critics ‘by their soft pedalling approval – invite us to the band wagon of Art Australiana, to leap thereon.’34 Crothall would prefer to deny Imitation Realism, than to be co-opted into the world of what he felt was inauthentic as ‘Australian’ art. The art world had applauded the entertaining aspects of their work, but failed to perceive their attempt to create work that engaged with the entirety of their cultural context.

Let me say this – let me say that our work is merely the product of school boys filled with their own enthusiasm, not that the enthusiasm is questionable mind you, but rather that it does not turn up anything excepting one’s own lack of solidity. We are not solid – we are like droplets of oil on the surface of water. I know of nothing solid. We slide and slip and swim. We cannot even mix with the ocean of a great tradition. We look abroad in order to see the Great Ones of art – there is nothing in Australia, only confused little pieces of blotting

31 Crothall,arty wild oat, July 1962
32 Crothall,arty wild oat, July 1962
33 Crothall,arty wild oat, July 1962
34 Crothall,arty wild oat, July 1962
paper here, no Picasso, no Miro, no Dubuffet, and from abroad we can only borrow artistic habits. \(^{35}\)

In Crothall’s view, the ‘precarious images’ created by the established names in Australian art did not truly engage with all elements of local culture, rather they were an attempt to continue the European tradition of art. They represented scenes that were remarkable to the European gaze, the landscape strange to European eyes rather than the ordinary experience of the local inhabitants (demonstrated by *Recent Australian Painting 1961.* \(^{36}\)) Crothall’s frustration with the absence of a ‘great tradition’ in Australia and New Zealand provided the framework for his art for the remainder of his life, as he endeavoured to find the ‘solidity’ he felt was lacking in the Imitation Realists’ work.

Lanceley, in contrast, was not as focused on the cultural landscape on either side of the Tasman. He began his article for the *owo*, ‘The Imitation Realists: Realism not anti-art’, \(^{37}\) by rebutting critics who looked ‘for the antecedents to what is confronting them. It is the safe road of reassurance’. Instead, he proclaimed that ‘Imitation Realism is not Anti-Art although many champions of art may be Anti-Imitation Realism’. He described the central concerns of his art at that time: his preoccupation with the urban environment in which he lived, and with the individuality that objects acquire through use.

I have no bias as far as the orthodoxy of materials is concerned. I take from the world in which I live, the materials which I encounter in living. Much of this is junk, objects discarded by our society as it lives itself out; most objects bear the scars of living, their usefulness seemingly having been exhausted and they possess a strange sense of personality and character. ... I owe no responsibility to ideas of art, aesthetics or tradition and my creative attitude is thus free, and deeply rooted in my environment as I experience it in living. \(^{38}\)

Unlike Crothall, he does not discuss the broader context of Australian art. His interest in place is shaped by the material environment of the city rather than the geographical and cultural context of Australia. He sought to escape the burden of art historical tradition and instead respond solely to his surroundings. He shared the questioning of mass-consumption that emerged in the 1950s and 60s, such as that by

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\(^{35}\) Crothall, *arty wild oat*, July 1962

\(^{36}\) Curated by Bryan Robertson, the exhibition was shown at the Whitechapel Gallery in London in 1961, see chapter one.

\(^{37}\) Colin Lanceley, ‘The Imitation Realists: Realism not anti-art’, *arty wild oat*, no.2 July 1962, p. 2

\(^{38}\) Lanceley, ‘The Imitation Realists: Realism not anti-art’, 1962
Vance Packard, whom Lanceley later described as an influence during this period. Packard had likely shaped Lanceley’s words in the catalogue for the *Subterranean Imitation Realists* exhibition, when he wrote that ‘perhaps Imitation Realism is an Eloquent Testament to the absurdity of an economic order based on chaos, waste, ugliness, and misery, and an ultra-modern display at that.’ He reveals the influence of Herbert Read in the description of ‘free’ creativity, echoed again in the quote from his artist’s statement in the Melbourne CAS Broadsheet that ‘creative work must obey the primitive impulse, and there is life, only when this impulse is contained within the work.’ Lanceley’s work in the period after Imitation Realism until the late 1960s would be motivated by this interest in materials that bore their history of use. He first strove for the naïve quality that was evident in his Imitation Realist work, which then evolved into a desire to obtain a sense of the ‘poetic’ in his art. The article articulates the divergence with Crothall and Brown that would become apparent in his subsequent work, especially in London from 1965 onwards.

The differences between the three artists would become public in 1964, with Lanceley’s controversial award of the Helena Rubinstein travelling scholarship. The front page headline announcing Lanceley’s win read ‘Assembled junk wins £1,300 travelling grant’, indicating the journalist’s lack of familiarity with non-

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39 Packard’s books, such as *The Hidden Persuaders* (1957), *The Status Seekers* (1959), and *The Waste Makers* (1960) critiqued the advertising industry and the culture of mass-consumption that was emerging in the post war economic boom.


42 Colin Lanceley, ‘The Imitation Realists: Realism not anti-art’, July 1962

43 Controversy surrounded the win because the Rubinstein was a prize for painting, and Lanceley’s works were very sculptural. James Gleeson, writing in the Sydney Morning Herald summed up the issue that concerned the critics as: ‘I would have been tempted to question the validity of at least four of Lanceley’s entries. It would be a neat exercise in double-think to accept them as paintings – and the scholarship was for painting, not sculpture – although it would be possible to argue that Lanceley’s approach to sculpture was basically more painterly than sculptural.’ James Gleeson, ‘The holy of holies prize’, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 20 Sept 1964, p. 88. cf. James Gleeson, ‘He’s done his best work’, *Sun*, 18 Sept 1964, John Henshaw, ‘Lanceley’s Award’, *The Bulletin*, 26 Sept 1964. Similarly, John Reed, writing to Elwyn Lynn, who was then in New York, described a ‘general hardening of feeling that Colin should not have got the prize.’ John Reed to Elwyn Lynn, 25 Nov 1964, Box 12/18, File 33, Reed Papers, SLV, MS 13186. As Lynn was an entrant in the Rubinstein for that year it is possible that Reed was exaggerating this sentiment to console Lynn for what was considered to be a close competition (see the reviews cited).

44 author unknown, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 18 Sept 1964, p. 1
traditional materials in art. The accompanying article angered Crothall and Brown. Giving an overview of Lanceley's background, it said that 'He began making assemblages when he formed an "imitation realist" group in 1960.' The inference that Lanceley was responsible for the formation of the group provoked Crothall to respond with a letter to the editor.

At the close of 1960 there were no more than five 'imitation realist' works in existence, all of which happened to be my own work. Early in 1961 Michael Brown and myself started working together. This work later formed the greater number of imitation realist exhibits. However, during this same period, Colin Lanceley was working in oils in a thoroughly academic "abstract-expressionist" style. Michael Brown and myself invited Colin Lanceley to join the group later in '61. I do not wish to discredit Mr. Lanceley's prize by mentioning a few facts concerning his artistic past.45

Crothall's letter to the editor was not published by the Herald, however, he sent a copy of it to Elwyn Lynn, who published it along with excerpts of a letter from Crothall to Lynn in the CAS NSW Broadsheet:

Brown and myself ... envisaged an unorthodox approach to art which could – at any point of development – include the work of others. However, Lanceley was the person with Brown and myself, to become fully committed to working in an 'imitation realist' manner. The history of imitation realism was a complex one, and it would be a big task for anyone to uncover all the facts ... It is no easy task to piece together a history in which no one cared to maintain a consistent record. ... I strongly have the conviction that false facts should not gain ground ... Local art has an insubstantial enough heritage as it is – and false legends only do damage to the general cultural scene.46

This second letter offers an explanation as to why he reacted so strongly to one line in an article that was background information rather than a quote from the artist. It could also perhaps have been explained as a miscommunication between Lanceley and the journalist, rather than implying an attempt by Lanceley to claim credit for the formation of Imitation Realism.47 These letters belie the tone of that to the awo, revealing his ongoing belief in the importance of Imitation Realism. For Brown,

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45 Ross Crothall, quoted in 'Closer to home', CAS NSW Broadsheet, Oct 1964, p. 6
46 Crothall, 'Closer to home', Oct 1964, p. 6-7
47 Crothall's letter to the SMH that appeared in the CAS NSW Broadsheet seems to have been referred to when Lanceley was interviewed in 1970 by Other voices, who asked 'Ross Crothall claims in a letter that the idea of operating as a group was his?', to which Lanceley responded, 'Yes, that's true, he set the group going and he coined the name as well.' (Lanceley interviewed by Smith et al., 1970, p. 36). Lanceley's acknowledgement that Crothall was the founder of Imitation Realism in subsequent sources, such as this, indicates that the SMH article was a misunderstanding rather than Lanceley being misleading.
who ‘fully endorse[d] Crothall’s statement’, the heart of the Imitation Realist ethos was the attempt to deny the individual ego and to subsume it to the collective purpose and identity of the group. Thus the article was understood as a denial of this belief, an attempt to take sole credit for what was a group achievement. He had already publicly expressed his disapproval of Lanceley’s work subsequent to Imitation Realism through his work *Kite* (4.41) – which will be discussed below – when he wrote in March 1964:

> Colin Lanceley is there, having over the preceding two years refined a number of “Imitation Realist” clichés (such as plastic dolls, visual puns, gaping toothy mouths, and cutely naughty erotic references) and plugged them till [sic] they have become fashionably acceptable.

The differences between the artists were not only the expected consequence of any intense group project, but also resulted from differences over what Imitation Realism had meant in the first place. Vivienne Binns, then in a relationship with Brown, recalled that Crothall and Brown saw it as a betrayal that Lanceley had apparently taken credit for what was a shared achievement. Brown and Crothall still worked together in some way up until April 1963, although no collaborations are known from this period. It seemed that they had discussed exhibiting together but decided against it as they had ‘both reached a stage where our work seems self-sufficient’.

When asked about the meaning of the name ‘Annandale Imitation Realism’ Lanceley replied ‘no, it had no special meaning’ but that ‘the others may have thought it did’. This indicates the extent to which they each had their own personal interpretation of the group, especially Lanceley as the last to join, after it had already been named. Later, in the interview, he discusses how while the group was together ‘there were differences of emphasis within the same framework'.

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48 Michael Brown, letter to the editor, CAS NSW Broadsheet, November 1964
50 Mike Brown, *Kite*, 1964, gouache and collage on paper and wood, 149 x 155.3 cm irreg. Heide Museum of Modern Art
51 Vivienne Binns, taped interview with the author, 4 September 2008, Canberra
52 Mike Brown to John Reed, 13 May 1963, Box 2A/18, File 16/Part 2 of 2, Mike Brown Correspondence, Reed Papers, MS 13186, SLV
53 Colin Lanceley, in Lanceley interviewed by Terry Smith, 1970, p. 36
54 Mike Brown, ‘Kite II: Part I: What on earth are you saying, Colin?’, *Art Monthly Australia*, no. 73, (September 1994), p. 4
differences began to come out after the break-up." He recalled that during the period after the exhibitions 'A chasm developed between the work we were doing, we saw little of each other, we wanted to kill the Imitation Realist bit. We emphasised differences.' Since he had moved to London, Lanceley found that 'I don’t think about Australia very much. The Australian roots aren’t important in this sense. I don’t draw inspiration from a place.' This indicates a fundamental difference between the work of Crothall and Lanceley. Crothall was preoccupied by place and by New Zealand and Australia in particular, whereas Lanceley, at least during the 1960s and early 1970s, explored subjects that were common to Western modernism, rather than specific to a particular place. Examining the work of Lanceley, Crothall and Brown from the years after Imitation Realism reveals what they each gained from Imitation Realism and their relationship to the Australian art world. In the mid-1960s they were living in three different countries, but each drew on the heritage of Imitation Realist work, each questioning in their own way what was acceptable for the materials and forms of art.

Lanceley after Imitation Realism
Analysis of the development of Lanceley’s work from 1962-65 demonstrates that while Imitation Realism defined the beginnings of his aesthetic philosophy, he used it to pursue a very path to that of Brown and Crothall. After the exhibitions, Lanceley built on the interest Imitation Realism had attracted in the art world. He won first prize at the 1963 Contemporary Art Society Young Painters exhibition and had solo exhibitions at Sydney’s Hungry Horse Gallery in 1963 and Melbourne’s South Yarra Gallery in 1964. He was invited to enter the Helena Rubinstein Travelling Art Scholarship in 1963 and again in 1964, being awarded the scholarship on the second attempt. The win enabled him to move to London, where he lived until he returned to Sydney in 1981. The move assisted the continued development of his work as a response to the concern with form found in European modernism. I discuss Lanceley’s work from 1963 until his arrival in London in this section and document the changes in his aesthetic philosophy and how it differed from that of Crothall and Brown.

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55 Colin Lanceley, in Lanceley interviewed by Smith et al., 1970 p. 39
56 Colin Lanceley, in Lanceley interviewed by Smith et al., 1970 p. 39
57 Colin Lanceley, in Lanceley interviewed by Smith et al., 1970 p. 39
After Imitation Realism, Lanceley continued to experiment with the use of assemblage: to harness associations triggered by including familiar objects and to build up accreted surfaces that created juxtapositions. As his approach to collage and assemblage developed independently from the group, he began to seek a greater sense of cohesion in his work, aspiring to a sense of the ‘poetic’. His Imitation Realist works such as *Countdown’s memories of the Great War* (3.53) and *The green footballer playing the field* (3.16) delight in densely worked surfaces. In subsequent work Lanceley had a more controlled approach, subsuming assemblage to the works’ subject matter. This process can be seen in the more restrained use of imagery on Lanceley’s panel on the *Café Balzac mural* (3.70), where figures can be more readily distinguished. This continues in works made after the break-up of the Imitation Realists. *The Royal Family lairo suite* (4.02-4) of three paintings, demonstrates this emerging restraint, as well as a continuation of his Imitation Realist work in the use of ‘Mug Lair’ a reference to a specifically Australian colloquial character. Lanceley would increasingly turn away from such identifiably Australian content in order to pursue broader themes and concerns of modernism in general, rather than of a particular place.

*Love me stripper* (4.05) demonstrates this more restrained use of assemblage, as well as a return to an emphasis on the painted surface. The work shows Lanceley absorbing the influences of Imitation Realism and of John Olsen, and developing his combination of painting and assemblage. The female figures recall abstract expressionism, especially de Kooning, while the forms are delineated by plastic jewellery, beads, cloth, toys, buttons and watches and evoke the tawdry glamour of a cheap strip club (4.05.1). Robert Hughes observed these changes in Lanceley’s work:

*Love Me Stripper* descended, in some respects, straight from Imitation Realism. Its title was pop-cultural, twice: first, in being taken from a trash paperback bestseller, and second, in denoting the honky-tonk world of King’s Cross nudie joints. (Lanceley had never been inside one: he was too shy and poor.) ... Lanceley was trying to stabilise his visual language, to find a formal system controlled more by the hand and the mind, and less by the street’s palette of objects.  

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The subject matter prompts a comparison with Brown’s *Mary Lou as Miss Universe* (4.06). After the Imitation Realist exhibitions, Brown had virtually remade the original *Mary-Lou*. He stripped back most of the collage and assemblage elements surrounding the central figure, removing the song lyrics and references to Mary Lou as a divinity, and the figure along the bottom of the panel that presented her, ‘Oracular divine’. Now Mary Lou wears a sash proclaiming her ‘Miss Universe’ and is surrounded with images of women from magazines – fashion models and film stars along with nude pin-ups – which grounded Mary Lou in the local context of how women were perceived and portrayed by the media. At the time of its rejection from the exhibition *Australian Painting Today*, in late 1963 Brown wrote in a letter to the *SMH* that

"Mary Lou" is not an attack or a satire any more than it is merely a peep-show. It is a simple documentation, without comment, of Sydney’s trash magazine consciousness, and, I believe myself, a true document.  

Like Lanceley, Brown refined his use of collage to suit the subject matter of the work. The pin-ups he added to the work remain pin-ups, their function in the work is to direct attention to Mary Lou, as ‘the prettiest of all’, and this relied on their recognisability as models and starlets. Despite Brown’s claim that it was ‘documentation, without comment’, he portrays women’s role in the ‘trash magazine consciousness’ as a superficial one, competing to be the prettiest. This was not a surprising conclusion perhaps, but in making the work he made apparent this limited role and objected to the unquestioning acceptance of it. The speech bubbles gave some of these figures, which in their original context were intended as passive objects, a voice, albeit one limited to admiration for ‘Miss Universe’. The work is an example of the way that Brown’s socio-political concerns would motivate and shape his work.

*Love me stripper* similarly challenges the then narrow confines for acceptable depictions of nudity, but without the element of social commentary or documentation of *Mary Lou as Miss Universe*. The dynamic brushstrokes and absence of recognisable faces suggests aggression between the viewer and subject. The painting recalls Albert Tucker’s *Images of modern evil* (1943-47), the works

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59 Mike Brown, letter to the editor, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 8 January 1964, p. 2
share an ambivalent attitude towards their subject, simultaneously despising and desiring them. The use of assemblage emphasises this aspect, the gaudy baubles both define the forms and act as a barrier between viewer and figures. Another connection with Tucker can be seen in *The greatest show on earth* (4.07), with its repeated grinning, red-lipped mouths. The vigorous brushstrokes and densely-packed surface creates a maelstrom of imagery. Plastic knick-knacks and costume jewellery again outline forms and appear as subject matter – here, the prizes on offer at fairground attractions. The work creates a sense of the whirl of images that can overwhelm, almost threateningly so, as at a night-time circus or carnival depicted on film through spinning camera work and rapid editing. Both of these works show Lanceley moving towards engaging with urban subject matter in general, rather than Australian content specifically. These works seem to have been a transitional phase for Lanceley; between the exuberance of Imitation Realism and the restrained compositions of his later work. Increasingly, his primary concern was with form, expressed by Lanceley as a desire for the 'poetic'.

**Sense of the ‘poetic’**

In a 1991 interview, Lanceley described the evolution of his use of assemblage (which he refers to as collage) in his work during this period.

> When the Annandale Imitation Realists broke up, collage had taken me over completely. I was listening to Bartók and reading Eliot. I was drawn to them because they were collagists. ... I loved the way Eliot concocted metaphors. That view of life as collage took me over, not only as a technique, but also as a philosophy. ... I think collage is the right way to deal with the twentieth century, because we are bombarded with so many disparate, confusing images and pieces of information; everything seems to lack a sense of cohesion. My pictures try to create cohesion, by reconstructing fragments of experiences that have stayed in my mind, linking the parts together into one intense whole. In the same way a poet carefully chooses words that most powerfully evoke the impression he is after, I build up images in a picture. ... I think there is enormous possibility for visual poetry just in the ambiguity of visual happenings in a painting, when they are not so specific, when you can make visual connections and cross references, and the image reveals itself slowly.60

This quote is consistent with all of the accounts and explanations Lanceley has given of his work; in which he virtually always uses the term ‘poetic’ to describe the intent

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60 Colin Lanceley, quoted by Janet Hawley in her ‘Colin Lanceley’, *Encounters with Australian Artists*, Brisbane: University of Queensland, 1993, p. 162-3
of his work.\textsuperscript{61} It is the key concept that emerged for Lanceley from Imitation Realism and it gains coherence in the period that followed the break up of the group. Lanceley’s words echo those of Herbert Read in \textit{The True Voice of Feeling}: ‘Art is the faculty by means of which man has made a harmony out of the chaos of perception.’\textsuperscript{62} Read argued that it was the conscious identification of ‘organic form’ that defined Romanticism in English verse from Coleridge onwards. Art made possible a meditation between being and essence,\textsuperscript{63} as ‘the work of art is the visible embodiment of the nature of being.’\textsuperscript{64} In Romanticism the poem became a ‘universe of its own … made, not of empty booming words, but of plastic images.’\textsuperscript{65} Read’s analysis and definition of poetry furthers our understanding of what Lanceley meant when he described his ambition in the early-mid 1960s as wanting to be a ‘poet in paint’.\textsuperscript{66} In the verse of Ezra Pound, Read saw a preoccupation with the concrete object rather than descriptive categorisation of subjects, ‘through the concrete image, the \textit{thing}, and through the metaphor, two concrete images in juxtaposition.’\textsuperscript{67} Likewise, Lanceley used assemblage in his painting to engage with the specificity of \textit{things} and the associated meanings that they brought with them to the work. Read found in TS Eliot a visual, dramatic poet whose work was ‘a long search for sincerity of [poetic] utterance’,\textsuperscript{68} for whom poetry was ‘a mode of symbolic communication’\textsuperscript{69} — these can equally be said of Lanceley’s oeuvre. In Read’s conclusion to \textit{The True Voice} he summarised the importance of form, and particularly organic form, to modernist thought.

\textsuperscript{63} Read, \textit{The True Voice of Feeling}, 1953, p. 15-16
\textsuperscript{64} Read, \textit{The True Voice of Feeling}, 1953, p. 16
\textsuperscript{65} Read, \textit{The True Voice of Feeling}, 1953, p. 114
\textsuperscript{66} Colin Lanceley, ‘Colin Lanceley speaks on \textit{The Dry Salvages}'. in Pearce, \textit{The Dry Salvages}, 2001, P. 4
\textsuperscript{67} Read, \textit{The True Voice of Feeling}, 1953, p. 125 (his emphasis)
\textsuperscript{68} Read, \textit{The True Voice of Feeling}, 1953, p. 141-2
\textsuperscript{69} Read, \textit{The True Voice of Feeling}, 1953, p. 148
Common to the whole of this modern development – in physics, biology, genetics and aesthetics – is a growing awareness of the significance of form, and the search for some basic laws of form. ... In art the function of form is symbolical: form is a perceptible symbol for a particular state of mind. ... The tendency to geometric and symmetric form in art is universal and always ends, unless checked in academic clichés ... which kill the originating force or vitality of art ... Poetry illustrates these general processes. It can die into the symmetrical forms of regular metre and verse; or it can live, and give significant form to an evolving human consciousness, by creating symbols that represent a state of mental awareness or an act of perception.\(^{70}\)

Read held that at the heart of Romantic poetry was this concept of organic form; that the structure, metre and rhyme should be subject to, and the result of, the poet’s meditation on the theme of the poem. The work in its entirety would then be an authentic expression by the artist, and indeed would add to the ongoing development of human understanding. When Lanceley refers to the ‘poetic’ in his work, he can be seen to be referring to his desire for authentic form, that embodied and referred to meanings greater than itself. Lanceley’s oeuvre can be seen to demonstrate the development of Read’s conception of form within modernist poetry, as he went from the undisciplined exuberance of Imitation Realism towards the more refined symbolism that form held in work from the later 1960s. Lanceley described the ideal that he saw in Eliot for his own work:

The idea of creating the kind of images that meanings can cling to, so that they then exist in someone else’s mind – that’s the kind of miracle I want my art to be able to accomplish. He does it as a poet, and I want to do it as a painter.\(^{71}\)

As Lanceley absorbed the influence of Imitation Realism he began to employ assemblage towards the creation of form that could serve this ‘poetic’ ideal, to symbolise and communicate meaning. During this period Lanceley drew on Eliot and the music of Bela Bartók, seeing in their work the same ‘attitude’ of assemblage, of creating juxtapositions, especially of high and low culture. He found a kindred spirit when Robert Klippel returned to Sydney; they became friends in late 1963 after discovering shared interests in assemblage and Eliot.\(^{72}\)

\(^{70}\) Read, The True Voice of Feeling, 1953, pp. 151-2

\(^{71}\) Lanceley, in Lanceley, et al., Colin Lanceley, 1987, p. 27

\(^{72}\) Colin Lanceley, ‘Colin Lanceley speaks on The Dry Salvages’, 2001, p. 5
Klippel had lived in America from 1957 until 1963. Living in New York and Minnesota he became familiar with various forms of junk art and assemblage. He saw in David Smith's work a sculptural use of form that he felt had eclipsed his own practice thus far. Klippel used typewriters, computers and other metal machinery parts to construct his assemblage pieces, creating works of delicacy with material from rude origins. His works do not readily allow for the identification of components; individual elements are subservient to the overall form and structure of the piece. *Opus 102 (4.08)* is one of the earliest of Klippel's metal sculptures to be entirely constructed from found objects. It was made from machine parts that Klippel found in junk shops, and harnessed the physical effects of the materials previous existence; the colour and patina of metal pieces were determined by their previous life, which created a subtle palette of different tones. This enhances the sense of organic growth in the composition of the piece. His study of the forms and shapes of nature, industry and art that he had devoted himself to in London found fulfilment in these works, as he looked at objects for their shape rather than their function. In later years Klippel would prefer the term 'assemblage' rather than junk sculpture. He never embraced the social meanings associated with using detritus or desired to evoke the materials' previous history, rather he selected and employed matter purely for its formal qualities. Returning to Sydney after the Imitation Realists' exhibitions his work was a contrast to their use of junk. He played a significant role in the development of the next phase of Colin Lanceley's work. Other than the Imitation Realists, Klippel was one of the few Australian artists to use society's discards to create his work. Like Klippel, Lanceley increasingly used assemblage to define a sense of form and spatial relationships in his work.

**The Rubinstein Scholarship works**

During this period Lanceley moved toward a less literal use of assemblage objects, which is evident in the works he entered in the Helena Rubinstein scholarship exhibition of 1964. They built on the gradual refinement of his use of assemblage since his Imitation Realist works. Two of the five Rubinstein pieces, *Temple of Earthly Delights (4.09)* and *Dry Salvages (4.10)*, can be seen to be closer to his

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earlier work. The other three, *Kindly Shoot the Piano Player* (4.11), *Gemini* (4.12) and *The Great Aviator (Icarus)* (4.13), indicate the predominance that considerations of form and space, rather than those of geographic locations or popular culture, were to have in Lanceley’s subsequent work.

*Temple of Earthly Delights*, standing at over two metres high and almost a metre wide, with its box-like structure and ornate wooden detailing seems like a strange cross section between a cabinet of curiosities and an upright pinball machine. Freestanding, on legs that appear to be recycled from antique furniture, it is one of the pieces with which Lanceley explored ways to extend a work into its surrounding space. The structure of the work serves to frame its contents and enables it to be displayed standing on the floor rather than hanging on a wall. The bold red of the timber structure captures attention like a fairground attraction, but the contents appear as inexplicable, frustrating the expectation for some kind of mechanical entertainment. It instead presents an assembled melange of objects on a painted background. This is one of the works in which, Lanceley recalled, he:

- began to invent rather clumsy devices to try and extend my palette of images, by building things like shelves on the picture surface and having objects standing on the shelf, then making cross reference between the carved or painted or distorted object on the shelf and the painted images on the board behind, often using the vehicle of shadows to create a link between the two.  

The objects, as well as the title, evoke the sensation that the work is an artefact from a hedonistic religion. Carved wooden pieces are positioned so as to suggest knobs and levers, with unspecified functions, and serve to order the composition, and are repeated throughout the work. The compilation of aged toys, knick knacks and unidentifiable wooden objects tumble down the brightly-painted background as though they are the offerings from some kind of secular propitiation ritual.

*Dry Salvages* (1963-4) takes its name from the Eliot poem of that name. Lanceley discussed this poem when he described the nature of the influence that Eliot had on his own work:

> I've often felt that I'd like to be able to use images the way he uses images. For instance, there's an image in one of the Four Quartets, 'Dry Salvages', and the central metaphor of that poem is a river. He

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76 Lanceley, quoted in Lanceley, et al., *Colin Lanceley*, 1987, p. 22
approaches the society in which he lives through the flotsam and jetsam on the river bank which is a most wonderful idea. He’s picking up images, the images of its history. It’s the most incredibly evocative image of things floating in the water or caught up on the bank, and it’s also the Buddhist wheel of life, the river of life. … It’s the whole idea of language. That’s really what I feel art is about, and it’s developing a vocabulary to be able to intensify experience the way the great artists did. 77

Lanceley’s *Dry Salvages* does not illustrate the poem in a literal sense; it instead evokes the mood and reflections of the poem. Eliot used metaphors of rivers and oceans to explore the themes of the passage of time and the Christian faith. Eliot entwines the individual’s experience of time - the moment as it passes, the timeless sleepless night, the reflections from over a long life – within the broader narrative of human history and the specific one of Christianity, with a contrast to the time of the river (‘ever, however, implacable, / Keeping his seasons and rages,’ 78) and the ocean (‘Measures time not our time, rung by the unhurried / Ground swell’ 79).

There is no end of it, the voiceless wailing,
No end to the withering of withered flowers,
To the movement of pain that is painless and motionless,
To the drift of the sea and the drifting wreckage,
The bone’s prayer to Death its God. Only the hardly, barely prayable
Prayer of the one Annunciation. 80

Lanceley’s triptych presents an assemblage of objects on a vibrant red background. The objects bear the signs of use and allude to the passage of time, especially the autobiographical inclusion of a photograph of the artist as a boy with his grandmother in the central panel, 81 tin numbers as though from a calendar on the top of the left panel, and the discarded children’s toys seemingly scattered across the surface of the work. The painted surface echoes and highlights the forms of the objects on the surface. The work shares the quality that Lanceley commented on in the poem, of objects washed ashore or discarded in a river. A band of circles forms a horizontal that crosses the three sections; formed from found objects it functions compositionally to connect the three panels and relates to the theme as it creates a sense of a tide mark on a river bank, a random assortment of objects left by the retreating water. It harnesses the play of ‘aesthetic chess’ to suit the purpose and

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81 Pearce, *The Dry Salvages*, 2001, p. 10
meaning of Lanceley’s maturing approach to the role of assemblage in his work. At a height of 187.6 cm and a total width of 374.4 cm, it was also the most ambitiously sized work that Lanceley had created to date, showing the increasing confidence he had in his abilities.

*Kindly Shoot the Piano Player* uses the painted background less in the formation of the composition; it binds the whole together but it does not echo or emphasise it, as in *Temple* and *The Dry Salvages*. Largely constructed from an abandoned piano that Lanceley had found, the work presents a piano split open, with its mechanics splayed out as though for a post-mortem. The title seems to imply that the piano met its end in violence enacted upon its player, apparently named after the 1960 film *Shoot the Piano Player*, it continues the humour that was central to Imitation Realism and the interest in popular culture. Humorous titles implied a refusal to take the work too seriously, but celebrated a spirit of *joie de vivre* in art. Art could reflect an interest in popular culture as it could poetry and ‘fine art’.

The decorative carved exterior of the instrument is contrasted with the functional workings of its interior; like the ornamental wrought iron detailing on a nineteenth century factory. The basic compositional lines are formed by the timber frame Lanceley built to contain the pieces of the piano. These were then carved so that the edges of the work would have a decorative profile when viewed from the side and echo the form of the work. The carved edges indicate Lanceley’s growing interest in how his works occupied space. His consideration of the ‘profile’ of the work draws attention to the work as a three dimensional object that could be viewed from different angles in the room, not only directly from the front. The geometric structure suggests that perhaps Lanceley’s interest as an art student in Mondrian had had a latent influence on his work. The timber structure seems to hold the work in its own, freestanding, space. The painted board provides a background, delineating the forms, but visually reads as though it could be removed without altering the integrity of the structure. In this respect it is a strong early example of Lanceley’s explorations of a more ‘theatrical’ conception of space.

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82 Lanceley, quoted in ‘Pianist, pianist where are you?’, 2002
83 Lanceley describes this process for when he made ‘Gemini’, also in 1964, in ‘Colin Lanceley speaks on *Gemini*’ in Pearce, *The Dry Salvages*, 2001, p. 9
84 Lanceley discussed the interest he had in Mondrian as an art student when he was experimenting with abstract paintings, see Lanceley, interview with de Berg, 1962
There is a contrast with the other two works of his Rubinstein selection: *Icarus* and *Gemini*, which mark a different direction. Gone is the use of household tat to evoke a connection with the viewer’s own past, the aura of treasures held for sentimental value. These larger pieces instead employ objects to evoke more ambiguous sensations. Rather than being incorporated into a work for their original purpose or meanings, the objects are resolved as elements of pure form, through which a new meaning is evoked. This direction in his work was fuelled after he and Klippel discovered an abandoned Balmain engineering firm full of wooden moulds for metal machine parts. They took them away 'by the vanload.' After the works Lanceley constructed from them received almost immediate prominence through the Rubinstein exhibition, while Klippel ‘left his supply to simmer for a couple of decades’ to avoid comparison with Lanceley.

With *Gemini* Lanceley abandoned the painted background and instead used the ‘assemblage’ alone to construct the work. In *Gemini* each object is there to serve a compositional purpose in the work as a whole; instead of the seemingly random accretion of objects across the surface of *Dry Salvages*. The central post, made from turned cedar table legs found at a junk shop, determined the form of the work. Lanceley made the column first, and wanted to maintain the strength and purity he saw in its form; the ‘wings’ emphasise its solidity and strength while not interfering with the integrity of its shape. ‘Gemini’ refers to the ‘zodiac sign of the twins’ and Lanceley created a mirrored composition where the basic lines of the structure and the objects’ forms are echoed by counterparts on the other half of the work. Piano parts form a solid horizontal at the widest point, balancing the central column. *Gemini* is Lanceley’s first sustained use of the machine parts he had found, and they offer a new direction for the forms of his assemblage. The tonal range of the timber has been used by Lanceley as a device to create a greater sense of unity amongst the different pieces; the work seems to have a specific purpose as an object, rather than the sense of random accumulation of *Temple* or *Dry Salvages*. As he had

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87 Thomas *Robert Klippel: The Pattern Piece Constructions*, 2004
88 Lanceley, ‘Colin Lanceley speaks on *Gemini*,’ 2001, p. 9
89 Lanceley, ‘Colin Lanceley speaks on *Gemini*,’ 2001, p. 9
with *Pianist*, he carved a 'profile' in the outer timber edge, creating different views of the work as a three dimensional piece.

His final piece in the Rubinstein prize was *The Great Aviator (Icarus)* (1964-65). 90

'Icarus' is a name Lanceley used autobiographically, referring to the sense of 'trying to get off the ground, trying to rise; not the young Greek who flew too close to the sun.' 91 The work creates a feeling of futility, with the outsize 'feet' and disproportionately tiny, flimsy paper wings. Machine parts have again been used, evoking a kinetic sensation, where should a trigger be found, a mass of whirring cogs would start and the entire piece would lumber into the air. Smaller wheels and cogs lighten the piece, breaking up the solidity of the central mass. This work was the most serious challenge to the definition of painting that Lanceley offered the Rubinstein judges and ensured that his award would be controversial. Closely examined, these works demonstrate the progression in Lanceley's thinking from the freedom Imitation Realism introduced into his use of materials to the more restrained use of them. They point in the direction of his mature work which would prove to be fundamentally different from that of his fellow Imitation Realists.

**London**

Materials from the street had provided the Imitation Realists with an alternative from Australian art. Lanceley described that they 'went to the street because I think it was something that we had a really positive identification with – something which we didn’t have with Australian art at that time.' 92 Lanceley's work in the 1960s was a reaction against the prevailing trends in Australian art: of the so-called Charm School, the local variations on abstract expressionism and landscape painting; and in particular, abstracted depictions of the landscape.

Moving to London allowed Lanceley to exhibit and be received beyond the seemingly predetermined categories of Australian painting. As discussed in chapter one, Australian art had been exhibited in London throughout the 1950s and early 1960s to a growing and appreciative audience, but one that largely expected it to demonstrate the 'strange' qualities of the landscape, flora and fauna of Australia. On

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90 Colin Lanceley, *The Great Aviator (Icarus)*. 1964-65, carved and painted wood and rice paper, 280 x 214 cm, NGA

91 Lanceley, quoted in Wright, *Colin Lanceley*, 1987, p. 23

92 Lanceley, interview with Topliss, 1994
moving to London, Lanceley sought to escape the parochial Australian art world, as well as the expectation that he would create recognisably Australian art because he was an Australian artist. In trying to get away from ‘Australiana’, he also left behind the attempts of Brown and Crothall to find a way to express the regional identity of the Pacific. He instead engaged with the concerns of European modernism through his pursuit of a formal language, as encapsulated by Read in his analysis of organic form in poetry. He attempted to find what Crothall described as ‘solidity’ through characterising his work with a poetic sensibility. To achieve this he had to get away from the poetic sentimentality of popular Australian attitudes to the landscape.

He had a clear purpose when he got to London and endeavoured to carve a niche for himself within contemporary English art rather than Australian. When Robert Hughes wrote a short article introducing Lanceley in Studio International he opened it with a reassurance: ‘Colin Lanceley is a 27-year-old Australian, but the clichés of New Holland get no grip on his work.’ He thus distinguished Lanceley’s from the work of Australian artists with which the London reader might already have been familiar, such as Sidney Nolan, Russell Drysdale and Arthur Boyd. Lanceley had his first solo exhibition in London by March 1966 at Marlborough New London Gallery. The Gallery had exhibited fellow Australians Brett Whiteley and Sidney Nolan, but was better known for exhibiting leading English contemporary artists including Barbara Hepworth, Graham Sutherland, R.B. Kitaj, Victor Pasmore and Joe Tilson. The critic John Russell had seen Lanceley’s work in Sydney and

discussed it with Daniel Thomas. Thomas wrote a letter of introduction for Lanceley to give to Russell. When Lanceley arrived in London and set up his studio he invited Russell to see his most recent works, which were assemblages largely made from the wooden machine patterns that he had had shipped from Sydney. Russell introduced Lanceley to the Marlborough gallery, as he believed that it would be best suit Lanceley’s work. In this way he was able to begin exhibiting, virtually immediately upon arrival, at the centre of the contemporary art scene in London. Through Marlborough he met master printer Chris Prater and was able to make prints at Kelptra Studios. He was included in a group show of English contemporary art at Marlborough in September 1966 and in an Arts Council exhibition which toured Britain in February and March 1967.

Lanceley was now wholly occupied by trying to create a unique space within his work for poetic expression. This made it possible for his work to be received along with the other young artists in London who explored new materials and forms, rather than for the strange environment on the fringe of the Empire that had become associated with Australian artists.

The work I exhibited in London the first time ... in 1966, ... was in a sense a transition between the work that I'd done in Australia ... I had tried to ... bring painting and sculpture together quite consciously ... to create a different sense of pictorial space altogether. ... At this stage it wasn't very satisfactory because the two aspects ... were never completely married into the unified whole ... I've been shaping the actual picture surface to get away from the flat picture plane, which to me always reads as an illusion of three dimensions – one always looks into a picture plane ... So its these ambiguous special structures that I think are the key to the work that I'm doing and I feel that the extensions that I want to make to my pictorial language have been given tremendous impetus by this development ... They suit my idea of the kind of poetic imagery that I'd like to see my art imbued with.

In London Lanceley had become entirely occupied with the formal expression of a poetic sensibility. He now used assemblage to disrupt the conventions of pictorial space, rather than to articulate the social and cultural space that surrounded the artists.

96 Lanceley exhibited three works in Ventures, Arts Council 1967, along with Clive Barker, Mark Boyle, Barry Flanagan, Peter Green, Michael Harvey, John Latham and Richard Londcraine.
97 Lanceley, interview with de Berg, 1970
of Australia and New Zealand. He had taken the early experience of Imitation Realism and forged it into something entirely different from the work of Crothall and Brown. This would create lasting antagonism with Brown. Crothall and Brown, in a sense, both stayed 'true' to their early Imitation Realist ideas and ideals for the remainder of their careers, Crothall until his disappearance in 1968 and Brown until his death in 1997. They had all sought to escape and transcend the limitations they saw in Australian art by exploring and offering something different in Imitation Realism and with their subsequent work. For Lanceley this meant leaving Australia, and leaving behind identifiably Australian imagery. For Crothall it would mean trying to find a way of expressing this content in a way that avoided 'turning art into Australiana'.

**Crothall after Imitation Realism**

Crothall's work after Imitation Realism is virtually unknown to art history. Summarising the period after Imitation Realism, Barry Pearce wrote that 'of the three main protagonists Ross Crothall soon disappeared from the scene, with not much evidence left of the vitality he has been accredited for in the genesis of the movement.' Crothall did, however, continue to create works after Imitation Realism, until 1967 at least. These works, although in number not comparable to Brown or Lanceley, evidence this 'vitality' and demonstrate the trajectory his work was taking after Imitation Realism until his disappearance in 1968. Many of these are missing, or have only rarely, if ever, been exhibited, resulting in a lack of awareness and understanding of his work subsequent to Imitation Realism. In this section I seek to redress this lacuna through analysis of the works he completed from 1963 until 1967 that have survived in public collections or are known through photographs. He created few works from 1962 until he left Sydney in 1965, but between 1965 and 1967 he was regularly making work, first for a solo exhibition held in Auckland in 1966 and then for a planned exhibition in Sydney that did not eventuate because of his disappearance in 1968. I shall discuss these works chronologically to trace the development of his practice during this period and especially his continued focus on the specificities of the local cultural environment.

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98 Pearce, *The Dry Salvages*, 2001, p. 2
Until he left Sydney in 1965 Crothall worked in a succession of jobs and studied ticket writing in 1964 at Sydney Technical College, aiming to be self-employed as a sign writer by 1966. The interest in becoming a sign writer was primarily financial, but follows on from the curiosity the Imitation Realists shared in amateur sign writing, graffiti and posters. During this time he was uncertain if he would be a visual artist or a writer. He described this uncertainty to Daniel Thomas:

I find my own interests nowadays are mainly study – in fields which are extracurricular to art. I promise myself perhaps one or two paintings (I have become “an occasional painter” – have scrapped four out of the 6 paintings you saw, so as my attitude becomes more and more definitive, it becomes less productive. Am I a painter? ... perhaps yes ... perhaps not! I mention this so as to give you the right, in my case, of fully maintaining a wait-and-see attitude – at least this is legitimate and, in my opinion, the only valid attitude which one might take.

He did not create a body of work, as Lanceley and Brown did for their solo exhibitions in 1963 and 1964. Instead, he made a few isolated works that show him exploring a more restrained style than the profusion of material in his Imitation Realist work. He no longer used the deliberately childish style of Imitation Realist works, for example La Petite Fleur Avec Les Ham Sandwiches (3.62). He developed a style of linear, more controlled abstract painting that he later combined with drawing, collage, assemblage and text. He exhibited only occasionally, in group shows. In 1964 he was commended for his entry in the CAS ‘Young Contemporaries’ exhibition at Blaxland Gallery in April 1964. The present whereabouts of this work are unknown, but it was described by Daniel Thomas in a review of the exhibition:

One notes firstly that pop art is really proliferating. It is undeniably pop art, clearly acknowledging its source material from popular culture in signs, trademarks, advertisements, comic strips. The result can be completely abstract like Ross Crothal's [sic] geometric “Red Stars,” relations of many stars on match boxes, oil drums and other packages, all claiming some special magic for their product. ... there is a claim to inherit the main tradition of realism, for the subject matter is taken from the widely-shared everyday experience of ordinary men and women in an era when the advertising jingle has become the real folk music. ... The message is that maybe the old “ad” man’s incantations and cabalistic signs have more potent magic than they

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99 Ross Crothall to John Reed, 22 July 1964, box 2, file 1, Reed Papers, MS 13186, SLV
100 Ross Crothall to Daniel Thomas, 30 August 1963, AGNSW archives, Crothall Curatorial File (his emphasis)
know. And Crothall's stars after all have an oriental ancestor in the abracadabra symbol.¹⁰¹

Thomas' review summarises both Crothall's ongoing interest in the material that had inspired his Imitation Realist work and how his work was understood in the context of Pop art. Another work by Crothall from this period that used stars is his Abstract no. 1 (4.14), which he gave to John Reed in June 1964. Whilst the geometric repetition of this work marks a new style for Crothall, he continues to use materials and iconography that were easily accessible and understood. The work depicts imagery that the viewer saw every day and yet reflected the 'potent magic' of such 'cabalistic signs'. Thomas' observation of the powerful meanings implied by such iconography corresponds to Crothall's interest and study at this time of 'astrology, philosophy, science and allied subjects.'¹⁰²

Crothall was no more impressed by the Australian art world than he was when he penned his letter to the awo. He wrote to John Reed in 1964:

Surveying the art world in Australia is like looking at a carcass painted by Clifton Pugh. It is not disappointing, but insufficient. In the last Broadsheet, Elwyn Lynn mentions what he calls the Rapotec-Brown-fracas over Mike Brown's "Kite". The spirit of genuine enquiry and polemical controversy is dead, as there is no one (nor incentive) to kindle the sacred fire! The supplies in the art world are tedious and perfunctory, and circular! It should not even create a moan....¹⁰³

What appeared to him as the superficial reception that Imitation Realism had received seemingly dulled Crothall's ambition to develop a dynamic alternative to what was seen in the art world. Crothall also kept Reed apprised of the fracas surrounding the expulsion of Mary Lou from the Australian Painting Today exhibition, sending him a press cutting with the latest news.¹⁰⁴ The affair inspired a work by Crothall, Australia's First political painting: star and environment (1964) (4.15). It recalls Abstract No. 1 in its geometric design, areas of solid colour and use of lines and dots to delineate the shapes. It differs markedly, however, in its use of assemblage and text. Painted wooden shapes, star and spoon, and a twisted piece of metal have been attached for their value as abstract forms. In addition to this,

¹⁰¹ Daniel Thomas, 'The week in Art by Daniel Thomas: Pop Art and 'Ad' Men', Sunday Telegraph, April 19 1964
¹⁰² Ross Crothall to John Reed, 22 July 1964, 2/1, Reed Papers, MS 13186, SLV
¹⁰³ Ross Crothall to John Reed, 9 January 1964, 2/1, Reed Papers, MS 13186, SLV
¹⁰⁴ Ross Crothall to John Reed, 14 June 1964, 2/1, Reed Papers, MS 13186, SLV
collage has been added in the form of cut-out figures from 'girlie magazines' of the sort Brown had used in Mary Lou, some with speech bubbles, echoing the text on Brown’s work, reading ‘Mirror on the wall’, ‘Who’s the prettiest of all?’ and (the answering call) ‘Mary Lou!’. Another is captioned with a banner reading ‘Modesty preserved’ - the figure has largely been obscured with violent streaks of paint. Alongside these is the phrase ‘Mary Lou is tops’ and two wooden love hearts, one inscribed ‘Mary Lou’ and the other ‘Mona Lisa’ are pierced by the same arrow linking them as art works and protesting the censorship of the latter. The title is another indication of Crothall’s belief in the lack of ‘genuine enquiry and political controversy’ in Australian art, if in 1964 this should be the first political painting in Australian art.

**Auckland 1965-67**

Crothall’s plans changed suddenly when he was called back to Auckland in January 1965 because his parents had been killed in a car accident. Although intending to stay only a short time, he slowly settled, finding a job and moving to Ponsonby, a then working class Auckland suburb. As he wrote to John Reed in April 1965, his uncertainty about his future as an artist was only growing, as he ‘had no inclination to get back to painting – possibly those days are over. But have been writing off and on.’ In the months after he wrote to Reed he began painting again and established a studio and created what was his most productive body of work since Imitation Realism. He resumed contact with Schoon and Colin McCahon, and met Kees Hos, the director of New Vision Gallery, then one of the two leading commercial galleries for avant-garde exhibitions in Auckland. The return to Auckland seems to have been a catalyst for Crothall to resume making art and ultimately rekindling his ambition to continue as a visual artist.

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105 See Ross Crothall to John Reed, 4 April 1965, 2/1, Reed Papers, MS 13186, SLV
106 See Ross Crothall to John Reed, 4 April 1965, 2/1, Reed Papers, MS 13186, SLV
107 See Ross Crothall to John Reed, 4 April 1965, 2/1, Reed Papers, MS 13186, SLV
109 Crothall and Schoon had stayed in contact with one another during Crothall’s time in Sydney, as Crothall described when he wrote to James Gleeson, in an attempt to rouse Gleeson’s interest in Schoon’s carved gourds. Crothall to Gleeson, 25 April and 23 May 1964, Papers of James Gleeson, 1938-2000, NLA MS 7440.
Crothall became part of a circle of avant-garde contemporary artists centred on the McCahon home. McCahon and his family lived in suburban Auckland, not far from Schoon, and were frequent hosts to an informal group. Crothall seemed to have found in McCahon a 'kindred spirit',¹¹¹ according to Lois McIvor, who knew McCahon for many years¹¹² and became reacquainted with Crothall at the McCahons' home during this period.¹¹³ The McCahon’s home was virtually an ‘open house’ to a select few.

It was a privilege to be counted as a friend, to be included in the restricted circle with whom he felt at ease and secure. This circle was no cabal of sycophants, but a gathering of like minds who gave him loyalty and a certain support.¹¹⁴

McCahon was intensely private, stubborn and could behave with ‘destructive force’ toward others.¹¹⁵ In the discussion below I consider the ongoing development of Crothall’s practice with reference to McCahon and the possible reasons why they were such ‘kindred spirits’. Crothall was invited to exhibit at New Vision in July 1966, for what would be his only solo show. The exhibition revealed Crothall’s ongoing involvement with the ideas that had shaped Imitation Realism: he continued to use found objects and humble household materials in his work, and looked to the Pacific region for inspiration, especially to New Zealand. He was still attempting to find a new form of art that expressed the unique cultural identity of the region. The works visible in photographs of the exhibition show most of them to be assemblages, often made of plywood with printed material (posters, magazines, newspapers) and text. The role of text is particularly significant in this body of work, as both a carrier of meaning as well as an element of the overall composition. Assemblage material in these works is more fully integrated into the work, with each piece a deliberate element in often abstract compositions.

¹¹¹ Lois McIvor, email to the author, 12 May 2008
¹¹³ McIvor and Crothall had attended high school together but did not keep in touch after leaving school. Lois McIvor, ‘Lost and Found’, 1997, p. 29
Several of his Imitation Realist works were included in the exhibition, such as *Bottletop necklace* (4.17.3). It was made of 'cowrie-shells made from bottle-tops' and adapted a traditional form - the shell necklace - to Crothall's contemporary urban surroundings by using a readily available material. Other Imitation Realist works were *Ye olde ‘cosmic comic rabbit’* (4.16.5, a collaborative piece with Mike Brown, that was ‘renovated’ for the exhibition), *Probably an enemy spy* (4.16.1, with paper collage added in 1966) and the sculpture *Transtasmanian wendigo* (4.17.2).

The latter has been altered, into two hanging pieces, exhibited as the *Fish mobile* and *Very merry mere*. These were suspended from ropes in the centre of the exhibition, on which they moved during the exhibition (photographs show them positioned in different places). The *Fish mobile* is the lower part of *Transtasmanian*, with a wooden tailfin added to assume a fish shape. The *Very merry mere* is the head and long neck of *Transtasmanian*, roughly forming the shape of a *mere*, with the head from the original sculpture serving as the bulbous blade of a traditional *mere*. That it is ‘very merry’ is indicated by the brightly coloured, smiling face on the traditionally formidable weapon. These pieces were perhaps included in the exhibition to give a sense of Crothall’s earlier development as an Imitation Realist.

The use of letters of the alphabet as a compositional device was a significant development in Crothall’s work. Many of the pieces include large letters cut out from card or paper, suggesting the influence of his sign writing study, from ‘poring over his sheets of letters’. Having learnt how to use text to design compositions for signs and advertising, he began to include them in his paintings as abstract forms, furthering the use of text of his Imitation Realist work. The letters of the alphabet are never devoid of their meaning as signs, but the jumbled use of them creates a sense of chaos, of a meaning withheld from the viewer by the artist. He frequently misquotes the alphabet - such as *Nephew Bryce’s Car Door* (4.18.3) which has the letters ADGHAJL running across the work - frustrating the expected order and alluding to a meaning known only by the artist. One of the most aesthetically successful works in the exhibition was *The Alphabet Crazy Computer Works* (4.19). In some ways a precursor to the wooden assemblages of Rosalie Gascoigne, the

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117 A *mere* is a traditional Maori weapon, used in close combat, they are important ceremonial objects usually carved out of jade (*pounamu*), wood or bone.
118 John Reed’s impression of Crothall at work at his lettering study – John Reed to Ross Crothall, 11 June 19642/1, Reed Papers, MS 13186, SLV
work is constructed of three vertical sections on a wooden panel. The bands on either side are made of narrow timber fragments, one of roughly shaped and arranged pieces, the other of carefully placed and evenly shaped pieces. The central panel is blue, with part of a large lighter blue star intruding on the lower left, surrounded by large white letters appearing to tumble down from the top left. A blue ‘O’ seems to tumble out of this frame onto the orange backing panel. The side panels contrast order with disorder, and the central panel, of alphabet characters in disarray, indicate perhaps the ‘crazy computer’ of the title.

There were three works dedicated to the significant figures in Crothall’s life as an artist: Theo Schoon, Mike Brown and Colin Lanceley and Colin McCahon. Two of these also incorporated additional Imitation Realist works. Each was exhibited above a notice reading ‘This painting is not yet complete’. Unfortunately they are only known to survive in the black and white photographs of the exhibition. *Tribute to Theo Schoon* (4.16.2) combined two drawings of carved gourds by Schoon, with wooden assemblage, bottle tops, parts of an egg carton, collage, assemblage and painted decorative elements on a wood panel. Schoon’s drawings are prominent in the lower centre of the work; underneath and to the right of them is patterning derived from the Maori *kowhaiwhai* designs Schoon used on the gourds. In the lower left is an assemblage which appears to be a wooden replica of a two-handled saw, perhaps to emulate the tools Schoon used in making the gourds. Above the centre a small panel of wood has been attached with letters reading ‘A MAONAB’, as this word also appears on two other works in the exhibition it seems that it had a significant meaning to Crothall. 119

The second of the *Tribute* works, his *Tribute to Colin Lanceley and Mike Brown* (4.16.3), demonstrated the ongoing importance of Imitation Realism to Crothall. Crothall described it as:

> a composite painting, comprising Lanceley’s “Spread out Poodle” 1961 as centrepiece; with a drawing by Mike Brown, “Wise olde Owl”.

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119 The construction ‘A Mao’ would suggest some meaning in Maori, but the letter “B” is not used in Maori, and no similar word can be found in Maori-English dictionaries of the period. The author gratefully acknowledges the assistance of the New Zealand art historians Damian Skinner and Hamish Keith in trying to establish the meaning of this phrase (email correspondence, July 2008). Crothall’s frequent use of phonetic spelling may also be obscuring the meaning of the phrase.
sate on an Oake", not previously exhibited; including additional painting, added small objects, etc.\textsuperscript{120} 

Other than by combining them to form the new work, Crothall has not altered the works by Brown and Lanceley indicating the importance of the careful acknowledgement of collaborators. The work is formed by three horizontal bands, the centre of which is Lanceley's painting, with a narrow strip down the left hand side which appears to have been covered with newspaper and cut-outs of the letter 'E'. The top panel has been painted in a light tone, over this, in a darker tone, seem to float the silhouettes over several creatures of some kind. These figures are reminiscent of Portrait of three artists in Cadbury's chocolate, so it is possible that Crothall meant them, left to right, to be representative of Brown, Lanceley and himself, as they had been in the earlier composition. Along the bottom edge of this band, in a darker tone, is a row of stars, recalling those of Brown's Hoop-de-lah. As with the continuation of the gourd patterning around Schoon's drawing in his Tribute, Crothall seems to be here repeating elements of the artists' work to whom he was paying homage. The top left corner is divided from the rest of the panel with an arc, this small area is again lined with newspaper, and painted over with the letter 'E'. The lower band is more densely populated with imagery than the top, which serves to balance the composition. On the right hand side is Brown's drawing. In the centre is another star, which overlaps a narrow strip of newspaper, again overlaid with the letter 'E'. On the left hand side strips of timber have been used to create an abstracted assemblage above a strip of collaged newspaper, on which the phrases '8 O'clock' and '£20,000 U.S. Bid for Colt' can be made out. The work affirms the importance of Imitation Realism to Crothall, and especially the role, relationships and work of his main collaborators, after the dissatisfaction he had expressed in his letters to the awo and John Reed, and with Colin Lanceley in particular, from his letters to the SMH and NSW CAS Broadsheet.

The last of these works, Tribute to Colin McCahon (4.16.4), refashioned another Imitation Realist piece, as stated in the catalogue, a 'remnant of earlier work, "Annandale Housewife" Sydney 1960, on pulp-board; with labels, writings, various small objects added.'\textsuperscript{121} Unlike the previous two, it is harder to see the connection

\textsuperscript{120} Crothall, Ross Crothall, 1966
\textsuperscript{121} Crothall, Ross Crothall, 1966
between this work and the artist to whom it was dedicated. Unfortunately there are no photographs of the work in its 1960 state with which to compare it. Into the surface of the pulp-board have been scratched lines that reveal the darker wood underneath, articulating the forms of the central figure and an owl on the lower right. Across the work have been distributed pieces of collaged newspapers, packaging and handwritten text on paper along with a fragment of pegboard and bottle tops. The handwritten text is quite substantial, but indecipherable in the photographs, it perhaps would have revealed a connection of this work to McCahon. On the upper left the word/s 'A MOANAB' appears again. This panel has been attached to another, slightly larger piece of board. On the parts of the board that extend around the smaller panel have been attached further collage pieces and in the top right corner the painted text 'ALSO CALLED MOTHER & CHILD'. Each of the tribute pieces is an expression of the continuing importance of these artists to Crothall’s own work. They also demonstrate how Crothall frequently used autobiographical subject matter in his work.

Other works in the exhibition also reveal the continuing influence of McCahon on Crothall and illustrate his importance to Crothall that led to a dedication of a work to him. No published source, apart from Lois McIvor’s article, records the relationship between the two artists, so in this section I consider the aspects of Crothall’s work that may have forged common ground between them. This is not intended to assert that there was any visual or physical similarity in their work, but it offers an insight into how Crothall’s work related to the New Zealand art scene, as well as to its culture more broadly. McCahon’s interest in Crothall’s work is evidenced by at least one work in his own collection. McIvor describes as ‘one of the highlights of the exhibition’ a piece lent by the McCahon’s to the 1966 show, which ‘was a powerful original work of art bought by McCahon and hung in his living room for many years.’ This piece was *Woomera Rocket Range (4.16.1)*, made from an Aboriginal bark painting (artist unknown), surrounded by collage, assemblage and paint on a plywood board. The bark painting appears to be a painting of a fish in the style of western Arnhem Land with its rarrk patterning in natural earth pigments. Crothall has positioned it vertically in the middle of his work, so it appears as a rocket. On

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122 Lois McIvor, ‘Ross Crothall and the Annandale Imitation Realists’ unpublished manuscript 1997, p. 2, an edited version of this article was published as ‘Lost and Found’, *op. cit.* from which these comments were excised.
the ‘rocket’ is a collaged label reading ‘The McCahons’, perhaps about to be launched up into the stars above, that are labelled at the top of the work: ‘Jupiter’, ‘The Sun’ and ‘Venus’. In the lower right is a smaller piece of board with a painted design, bottle tops and the phrase ‘A MAONAB’. This work may be the one that Colin Mc Cahon’s son William described to Crothall’s niece. Carron Boswell recalled:

William McCahon has a collage called ‘The McCahon Family’ made up of bits and pieces that Ross collected from family members and a lot of astrological signs. It has always hung in their home and they won’t part with it.123

Alternatively, that may be an entirely separate work, intended purely as a portrait of the McCahon family rather than the socio-political commentary implied by Woomera. Either way, it demonstrates the esteem in which Crothall’s work was held by Colin McCahon and his family.

Crothall’s short career in New Zealand, and the failure of critics to appreciate or understand his work at the time, meant that he has been almost entirely omitted from New Zealand art history. His relationship with McCahon thus helps to situate his work. Their work is obviously visually distinct from one another and Crothall never shared McCahon’s interest in painting landscapes or religious-themed works. Yet in the underlying philosophies that shaped their work there were some similarities. Both made deliberate responses to being Pakeha artists in New Zealand trying to find authentic ways to express their nationality and reflect the physical environment without resorting to depicting the strange wonders of the edge of the Empire. Both appropriated some aspects of Maori culture and attempted to embed them into their own work and, as with the work of Theo Schoon (see chapter one), such appropriations are a subject of ongoing debate in New Zealand art historical scholarship.124

123 Carron Boswell, taped interview with the author, Auckland, 12 June 2006
McCahon started drawing on specifically Maori content and imagery in the early 1960s, which Jonathan Mane-Wheoki argues was a direct result of McCahon moving to the same Auckland neighbourhood as Schoon and their becoming close friends. McCahon began using the koru motif in paintings from this time. Their friendship and exchange of influence is also in evidence in McCahon’s painting one of Schoon’s home grown gourds. The use of Maori imagery and techniques was part of a broader attempt to create art that expressed the unique culture and physical environment of New Zealand. A defining characteristic of twentieth century New Zealand art was a preoccupation with the national identity – or with the perceived lack of one. Both McCahon and Crothall explored this sense of absence, rather than asserting something that should fill it. The geographical isolation of New Zealand could present an opportunity, as Leonard Bell wrote:

isolation was not all bad. In the work of Colin McCahon for instance confused borrowing clearly turns into creative and wilful misreading. The distance that many of our artists suffered from, McCahon enjoyed. He exemplifies the modernist-nihilist who rejects the values of others, building his practice upon those values he chooses for himself, always grounding his work back in his own history. And he does this in a way that is essentially provincial.

McCahon and Crothall share this sense of choosing the content, of consciously building a history. Crothall’s 1966 work Cave Drawing, 1966 style – Example of

125 McCahon and Schoon had been acquaintances from the 1940s. See Jonathan Mane-Wheoki ‘McCahon and the Maori ‘walk’, in Brown et al., Colin McCahon: A question of faith: papers from a seminar, 2003, pp. 51-61, esp. p. 54
126 Mane-Wheoki points out that ‘The motif that McCahon employed in paintings ... is often described as a ‘koru.’ But the double-headed shape is, in fact, the traditional element in kowhaiwhai design known as mangopare – the hammerhead shark, a creature deeply respected by Pacific peoples for the valiant fight it puts up in the face of death.’ Mane-Wheoki, ‘McCahon and the Maori ‘walk’, 2003, p. 54. For example, Koru I, 1962, oil on hardboard, 121.8 x 81.2 cm, private collection and Koru, 1965, plastic paint on hardboard, 121.2 x 90.5 cm, Parliamentary Services collection, Wellington. The importance of the Maori idea of the ‘walk’ in McCahon’s work has also been well documented – through both the actual landscape, and the physical space of the gallery in which his landscape works were hung. This would find fulfillment in McCahon’s work in the early 1970s, particularly in his response to the Maori belief in the physical path along the New Zealand coast that souls took on their transmigration to the next life. See Gordon H. Brown, ‘The Autobiographical Factor’, in Michael Gifkins, (ed.) Colin McCahon: Gates and Journeys, Auckland: ACAG, 1988, pp. 18-20, and Mane-Wheoki, ‘McCahon and the Maori ‘walk’, 2003
129 Leonard Bell, ‘Mod Cons’, in Mary Barr (ed.) Headlands, 1992, p. 165
Futurist Art(!) (4.17.3, 4.20), which was, as the catalogue described it, made from 'plywood and pegboard, inscribed with alphabet, “Ned Kelly”, “007”, etc; use of paint and cut-outs'. This seems to have been an attempt to 'update' the practice of the cave drawings: not to copy the originals as Schoon had done, but to follow the cave artists’ example and, by working with what was to hand, create art that related to lived experience. It offered a possible ‘future’ direction for New Zealand art. A partial view of this work can be seen in a colour photograph and a black and white photograph which did not convey many details. What can be discerned from these sources reveals that the work was made from at least nine pieces of plywood and pegboard joined together, creating a large panel (it appears to be approximately 120 by 110 cm). On this panel comments were written, in ink and paint, collaged newspaper and cut out shapes (faces, butterflies) and letters of the alphabet, in particular the letter ‘B’, which is repeated in numerous other works in the exhibition. The shapes used refer to koru patterning and the repetitive, swirling designs of Maori rafter patterning, but they were here surrounded by collaged pieces from newspapers and advertisements, as well as references to ‘Madam Butterfly’ and ‘007’ (unfortunately the reference to Ned Kelly mentioned in the catalogue cannot be deciphered). The word ‘CAVE’ emerged out of a jumble of the large cut out letters ‘CB/B/ABB’ on the lower left hand corner of the work; which in conjunction with the title of the work, presented this as a modern cave painting for New Zealand. Instead of people taking shelter or performing rituals in isolated caves in a largely unoccupied country¹³⁰ this work was a product of contemporary urban life. It presented the cultural landscape, where high and low art forms, Maori or Pakeha, all co-existed.

Another piece consciously constructed from New Zealand imagery, Sentimental wall decoration (4.17.1, 4.21), bore the inscription ‘N.Z. PURE SCHMALTZ’ and was made from plywood, wooden assemblage pieces, pegboard, string, paint and collage. It is partially visible in a colour photograph, and can be seen at a distance in a black and white photograph of the exhibition. It was also amongst the works sent to Crothall in Sydney after the exhibition had ended. The work formed three horizontal

¹³⁰ The cave drawings Schoon had first documented on the South Island are believed to have been created during the period in which New Zealand was first inhabited at least 500 years ago, and do not have any known connection with more recent forms of Maori art. See Beverley McCulloch et al., Maori Rock Drawing: the Theo Schoon interpretations, Christchurch: Robert McDougall Art Gallery, 1985. p. 3,5
bands: a narrow top band, a larger middle one and a lower one that comprised half
the work. The upper one was painted black with three red and white decorative
collage pieces attached on the right hand side. The middle one was white with multi-
coloured, patterned strips of timber in varying sizes creating an uneven striped
pattern. Given the title, this is perhaps an updated version of Maori rafter patterning,
instead of the precisely crafted and traditional patterns of the meeting houses,
Crothall used whatever he had to hand in the urban surrounds of Auckland. There
were also collaged paper butterflies on this section, a repeated motif in Crothall’s
work at this time, sometimes accompanied by the text ‘pe pe pe’ which resembles
the Maori word for butterfly.\textsuperscript{131} The lower band was largely made of pegboard, on
which some of the assemblage pieces were attached by lacing them with string. In
the lower right a large panel was attached on which the inscription was written in
large letters. There was a painted section next to this, to which small pieces of
timber were also laced. As no further detail or inscriptions have been preserved, it is
impossible to definitively state what aspects of this work make it ‘New Zealand
Schmaltz’. The title, with its use of ‘sentimental’ and ‘decoration’ suggests that
Crothall was making a light-hearted response to the earnestness with which New
Zealand sought to define itself and with which artists sought to define New Zealand
art – including Crothall himself. And, as he had written regarding Imitation
Realism, ‘New things in art can always be taken as a joke – until they are taken
seriously.’\textsuperscript{132}

Both Cave drawing and Sentimental wall decoration used materials available in
everyday life, from which anyone could make art. He shares with McCahon the
desire to find an authentic expression of contemporary life in New Zealand that
related to the experience of life lived in the New Zealand landscape. Whereas
McCahon primarily drew on the physical, often uninhabited landscape, to create this
connection, Crothall constructed his works out of the materials - such as plywood,
advertising and packaging, text and newspapers - that surrounded the viewer on a

\textsuperscript{131} The Māori Dictionary Online includes the following listings for ‘butterfly’: ‘pepe’, a ‘(noun)
moth, butterfly’ and ‘pēpepe’, a ‘(noun) butterfly, moth, pēpepe, Machaerina sinclairii - a sedge
found throughout most of the North Island, often on damp cliffs and road banks. It has long, slightly
drooping bright green iris-like leaves. The flowering stems are rigid with drooping, fine, rusty red
flowers.\textsuperscript{3} John C Moorfield, Māori Dictionary Online, Auckland: Auckland University of

\textsuperscript{132} Ross Crothall ‘Zed to 3 in Subterraria’, CAS VIC Broadsheet, March 1962, p. 2
daily basis. Lois McIvor remembers 1960s Auckland as a ‘melting pot... of different cultural backgrounds’ as Maori, Pakeha and immigrants from both the Pacific region and postwar Europe mingled.\textsuperscript{133} Crothall wrote in the catalogue that:

\begin{quote}
We are, as a people of Maori, Pakeha, and Immigrant influences, largely ignorant of our own cultural wealth. We live in a rapidly changing culture, but also at a crucial time. Besides being "Easy come – and easy go!", New Zealand is a very confusing place. If my work does not involve the spirit of change (& perhaps surprise...) I quickly lose interest in it. My approach to art is simply this: If I do something which interests myself, though \textit{amateurish} or \textit{novel}, I believe it would also have interest to someone else.\textsuperscript{134}
\end{quote}

Here Crothall shows how keenly he was aware of the diversity of New Zealand cultural heritage and how underappreciated the uniqueness of this cultural mix was by New Zealanders in general. He sees the ‘rapidly changing’ New Zealand culture as something to explore in his art, as exciting rather than threatening and sought to involve his work in the articulation of a contemporary New Zealand identity.

The use of text on the surfaces of their works is the most immediately apparent similarity between McCahon and Crothall. With reference to McCahon’s \textit{A Candle in a Dark Room} (4.37) Gordon H. Brown wrote that

\begin{quote}
in spite of its mundane symbolism, but by the equality of words and imagery, this painting captures an intuitive solution for a desired result. Yet it took time for McCahon to grasp the power words were able to bring to his paintings. The slow emergence of this potential occurred in a staggered, leap-frog manner as words straddled his use of conventional symbols. Finally, words, phrases, quoted texts and numerals shared a place with pictographic landscape symbols to become the dominating features of his art.\textsuperscript{135}
\end{quote}

By the time he painted \textit{Victory over death 2} (4.38) words had taken on a monumental presence by their size and compositional dominance. But the certainty of their meaning could be undermined by aesthetic properties, for example through variations between translucency and opacity, over painting or crossing out some words, still leaving them visible, as though a palimpsest. McCahon often drew on Biblical or poetic texts for his works, which give works such as \textit{Victory over death 2} a philosophic grandeur that Crothall never explored. Where they are similar is in their use of handwritten texts, often using different sizes and fonts that deliberately

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{133} Lois McIvor, \textit{Memoir of the Sixties}, 2008, p. 1  
\textsuperscript{134} Crothall, \textit{Ross Crothall}, 1966, his emphasis.  
\end{flushleft}
embrace the quality of personal expression rather than an abstract, removed voice. In both, text conveys shades of ambiguity or ambivalence, calling into question or contradicting apparent meanings. McCahon was originally inspired by comic books, advertising and sign writing for his use of text.\(^\text{136}\) Crothall’s initial use of text, and that of the Imitation Realists, was almost certainly a result of McCahon’s influence rather than that of Pop art from New York or London. The most significant difference between the two artists is in Crothall’s use of text to convey humour, taking a seemingly light-hearted approach to the work. As he wrote in the catalogue: ‘I am serious and light-hearted at the same time, and/or sometimes moods alternate. I am fascinated by ironies and paradoxes. I like changing things from what they are, or what they seem, into something else.’\(^\text{137}\)

Some works in the exhibition have text written on them, in addition to the cut out letters of the alphabet and collaged text from newspapers and magazines. A work that used text extensively is *Terrors of the screaming night!* [sic] (4.22) that was described in the catalogue: ‘Alternative title ‘Copy of a painting of a painting of a painting’ – as inscribed. Use of PVA glue, paint, paper; on plywood.’\(^\text{138}\) Not all the text can be deciphered in the photographs of the work, including the inscription mentioned, and this casts a doubt on identifying the work shown as *Terrors*. This identification has been made as it is the only work visible in the photographs that matches the description.\(^\text{139}\) The title also suits the content of the work: the inscriptions suggest that the work represents the midnight worries of the artist, such as:

**WHERE IS MY MCCAHON GIMMICK**

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\(^{137}\) *Crothall, Ross Crothall*, 1966

\(^{138}\) *Crothall, Ross Crothall*, 1966

\(^{139}\) Also, a catalogue number can be seen on the wall beside the work in the exhibition, which indicates that it is one of the listed works, but the number itself cannot be read. A process of elimination of other works that are easily identifiable from their listed inscriptions and descriptions also lead to the conclusion that this work is *Terrors*. 
WHERE IS MY KELLIHER PAINTING FOR THE KELLIHER ART COMPETITION\textsuperscript{140}

WUNNDER WHAT THE EMMINNENT ART CRITIC GORDON H. BROWN WILL SAY TO CONDEMMN ALL MY BEAOUTIFUL PAINTNTINGS

KEEEP NZ COMMUNIST

KEEEP US HAPPY WITH OURSELVSE

The first two quotes emerge in speech bubbles from the large face in the middle of the work, effectively making a statement on the twin poles of contemporary art in Auckland: the conventional, academic landscapes of the Kelliher prize and the small avant-garde circle in which McCahon was prominent. As well as his own work, McCahon’s roles as curator at Auckland City Art Gallery and then lecturer in painting at Elam School of Art made him one of the most influential art world figures for a generation of painters in Auckland.\textsuperscript{141} Crothall used these facetious remarks to comment on the limitations of this dichotomy and his difficulty in finding a place for his own work in either of them.

Works such as \textit{Terrors} show the deliberate autobiographical quality of Crothall’s art. This has been seen in previous chapters with some of his Imitation Realist works, such as \textit{Self Portrait with pot by Theo Schoon (3.13.2)}, \textit{Portrait of 3 artists in Cadbury’s chocolate} and \textit{The transtasmanian wendigo}. As the three \textit{Tribute} works show, this continued in his work after Imitation Realism. In drawing from his own

\textsuperscript{140} Critic and art historian Hamish Keith recently described the Kelliher Prize and its role in the 1960s: ‘with its dreary and empty landscapes, and the annual exhibitions of the New Zealand Academy of Fine Arts were still promoted as serious art – remote from reality – promoting a primarily rural New Zealand. It was little wonder that the New Zealand public seemed bored with the whole idea of art,’ in \textit{The Big Picture: A history of New Zealand art from 1642}, Auckland: Random House, 2007 p. 240 The prize had been founded in 1956 by brewer Sir Henry Kelliher, and the conservative nature of the works exhibited is reflected by the judges he appointed: ‘M. Napier Waller (Australia), 1958; William Dargie (Australia), 1959; Rubery Bennett (Australia), 1960; William Dargie, 1961; Douglas Pratt (Australia), 1962; John Loxton (Australia), 1963; and Claude Muncaster (England), 1965.’, from ‘Kelliher Art Prize Competition’, from \textit{An Encyclopaedia of New Zealand}, edited by A. H. McLintock, originally published in 1966. website: http://www.teara.govt.nz/1966/K/KelliherArtPrizeCompetition/KelliherArtPrizeCompetition/en [accessed 2/8/2008] ‘The competition is prestigious and popular; the public face of New Zealand art.’, wrote Dianne Beatson, describing its role in the 1960s. ‘Making a scene’, Mary Barr (ed.) \textit{Headlands}, 1992, p. 205

\textsuperscript{141} McCahon worked at ACAG (where he also taught evening painting classes) 1953 – 1964; Elam School of Fine Arts, University of Auckland, 1964 – 1970. His influence is attested to by many who knew him during this period, see for example: Brenda Gamble, ‘Colin McCahon as Colleague and Friend’ and Claudia Eyeley, ‘Colin McCahon as a Teacher’, both \textit{Art New Zealand}, no. 8 (Summer 1977/8); Hamish Keith, ‘Patrick Hanly: A Conversation’, \textit{Art New Zealand}, no. 14 (Summer 1979/80); Lois McIvor ‘Remembering Colin McCahon’, \textit{Art New Zealand}, no. 49 (Summer 1988/9), Agnes Wood, \textit{Colin McCahon: The Man and the Teacher}, Auckland: David Ling, 1997, passim.
biography he attempted to create work that articulated common experiences of life in
Australia and New Zealand. The titles and content of some works, such as *Nephew
Bryce’s car-door* and *My sister Edna’s place* (4.17.1), made the personal
significance for Crothall key to the work as a whole. *Nephew Bryce’s car-door* was
a ‘car door, decorated with labels, cut-outs etc’ 142 It was literally the door from his
nephew’s car, severed with a welding torch to make a curved panel, with door handle
intact, on which to attach an assortment of advertising and magazine pictures along
with large cut out letters of the alphabet, crushed tin cans and bottle tops. *My sister
Edna’s place* was a plywood board with ‘wooden assemblage, drawings of house-
plans, etc.’ 143 The panel was lined with collaged newspaper and house plans. The
small diagrams of the house interiors were arranged to form an aerial view of a
neighbourhood. This surrounded a heavy black outline of a suburban bungalow,
with pitched roof, chimney and attached garage, in the upper centre of the work. The
outline was filled with collaged newspaper, over which ‘MY SISTER EDNA’S
PLACE’ was written. Small pieces of timber and what may be paint charts also
adorned the house. Along the top of the work was a row of curved lines, suggesting
clouds. Along the lower edge were cut out letters and timber with bottle tops
attached. These works both drew on the immediate surrounds of Crothall’s family
for their content and materials. They demonstrate how grounded his work was in his
daily life and that autobiographical content remained central to Crothall’s practice.

The 1966 exhibition as a whole had a diaristic quality, as in addition to the
catalogued works, there was various extra material, including a selection of smaller
works, such as *Girl of the Midnight Sun*, an Imitation Realist collaboration between
Brown, Kohn and Crothall that was included in the exhibition but not catalogued or
for sale. In addition to smaller works there was a range of material attached to the
walls: cut out numbers, a row of newspaper crosswords, newspaper articles,
quotations from poetry and various extended labelling, indicating the sources for
some of the quotations (not only the author but also who had suggested them for the
exhibition) and a large label reading ‘Maori Rafter Patterns’, above which were three
vertical strips of scrap timber, adorned with collage and painted patterns. As with
those in *Sentimental Wall Decoration* it is perhaps intended that these are a

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142 Crothall, *Ross Crothall*, 1966
143 Crothall, *Ross Crothall*, 1966
contemporary, Pakeha, adaptation of the traditional Maori form. There were also pieces of timber leaning in one corner of the exhibition which seem to have been included as Crothall appreciated the aesthetics of the markings (indicating their country of origin, original contents et cetera) that are fragments of what were originally wooden crates. One of the reviewers also mentions ‘a piece of carpet, labelled in case we could not recognise it.’144 This material transgresses the usual conventions of exhibiting art, which attempt to create as little distraction from the work as possible. Though more refined here, it is an obvious connection with the Imitation Realist exhibitions. However, it does not create the sense of the exhibition being one unified installation. It seems to be extra documentary material, as though Crothall was sharing some of the visual detail of life that fascinated him, along with the materials that he used to make his work, in an attempt to encourage others to join him in his endeavour. This seems to be the motivation behind his ‘frottages’ (4.17.3), which instead of the word’s actual meaning,145 is here described as ‘a coined word; no particular meaning. Each contains [a] variety of miscellaneous items. You take a Frottage home – and finish it the way YOU want to – for yourself.’146 They appear to be the plain, recycled pieces of board on one wall of the exhibition, what the ‘miscellaneous items’ may be is unclear, but they are certainly an attempt to get the viewers of his exhibition to participate in his creative project. As Kees Hos described it in an interview, ‘What mattered was the interplay of emotion, thought and memory between the viewer and the object, rather than the object itself.’147

Few in the audience, however, seemed able or willing to understand this kind of response and interaction with materials and ultimately the response to the exhibition left Crothall disappointed. Only two pieces sold from the exhibition148 and it was

144 T.J. McNamara, ‘Anti-Art Display at Gallery’, New Zealand Herald, 11 July 1966
145 From the French for ‘rubbing’, ‘A technique of creating a design by placing a piece of paper over some rough substance such as grained wood or sacking and rubbing with a crayon or pencil until it acquires the surface quality of the substance beneath ... Max Ernst pioneered the technique and it was much used by other Surrealists.’ Ian Chilvers & Harold Osborne (eds.) The Oxford Dictionary of Art, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988, p. 189
146 Crothall, Ross Crothall, 1966 (his emphasis)
147 Author unknown, ‘Serious twist to an odd assemblage’, The Auckland Star, 12 July 1966
148 An annotated catalogue in the New Vision Gallery file records that the works Put the lace how you want it and The House that Jack Built were the only ones to have sold from the exhibition (Woomera Rocket Range was already owned by McCahon at the time of the exhibition), CA000001/002/0012 Folder 27 Artists: Files Cranwell and Crothall, New Vision Gallery Archives, Museum of New Zealand – Te Papa Tongarewa Archives
misunderstood in the New Zealand press, generally seen as ‘anti-art’ or as a joke or a satire. T.J. McNamara, art critic for the *New Zealand Herald* described it as ‘possibly the most outrageous and funniest exhibition mounted in Auckland… consciously and deliberately anti-art, a complete denial of everything that has ever been thought artistic.’\(^{149}\) Hamish Keith’s review in the *Auckland Star* was less critical, but focused on the materials Crothall used rather than his intent in doing so, and was fairly dismissive of the results. ‘The current show is itself something of an assemblage. Much of it was created on the spot.’\(^{150}\) Another, unattributed, article in the *Auckland Star* on the following day interviewed Kees Hos and other artists for their reaction. The article quotes ‘A lecturer in painting at the Elam School of Fine Arts, Mr Colin McCahon, [who] said Crothall assembled junk in the most incredible order and commented on our environment in a profoundly serious way.’\(^{151}\) A photo appeared in *The Auckland Star* of Crothall in a dunce’s cap at the exhibition, with the quote ‘If I’m expected to be a clown, I’ll be one.’\(^{152}\) Crothall played to the expectation and branded himself a fool in response to the reception of his work as a joke by critics and the public, printing down the side of the cap “R. Crothall / eclectic’ [sic]. According to Lois McIvor, this reception is part of the reason that by September of 1966 Crothall had moved back to Sydney, determined to be recognised as a visual artist.\(^{153}\) He had 21 of the works exhibited at New Vision shipped to Sydney,\(^{154}\) and although he made some attempt to exhibit them, this never eventuated and the present location of the works, if they have survived, is unknown.\(^{155}\)

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\(^{149}\) T.J. McNamara, ‘Anti-Art Display at Gallery’, *New Zealand Herald*, 11 July 1966

\(^{150}\) Hamish Keith, ‘A rest period for gallery supporters’, *The Auckland Star*, 13 July 1966

\(^{151}\) ‘Art that’s not open and shut’, *The Auckland Star*, 12 July 1966

\(^{152}\) McIvor, ‘Lost and Found’, 1997, p. 29

\(^{153}\) A carbon copy of a letter on file in the Crothall artist file of the New Vision Gallery archives records that on 3 Nov 1966 Kees Hos dispatched: ‘The contents of two crates to be shipped to Mr Ross Crothall, Kings Cross, Sydney, Australia are twenty-one paintings, made by Mr Crothall himself and all belonging to his own collection and property. The value is approximately £250 in total.’ Crothall writes to Hos, 20 Feb 1967 that ‘The two crates of paintings have passed through Customs – an expensive, ghastly business – I have them, but they are still not yet unpacked’.

\(^{154}\) Frank Watters, director of Frank Watters Gallery, recalls discussing with Crothall the possibility of having an exhibition of these works but that it never eventuated. Frank Watters, taped interview with the author, Sydney, 11 March 2008
Sydney 1966 - 1968

The period in New Zealand clearly revitalised Crothall’s ambition to be a visual artist. He had a renewed focus on using assemblage and collage material found in the course of everyday life as a part of his work. By September 1966 Crothall had clearly resolved to dedicate himself to visual art, as he wrote from Kings Cross in Sydney to Kees Hos:

Sydney has changed a lot - & grown - since I was here last. The skyline has changed.

My destination:

I have decided not to think of return to New Zealand until I have broken through on the 'big time' here – and then, if Sydney is not enough, to "wherever the world decides" UK (?) ...... or USA (!?) ... and at least, to channel [sic] all my activities into painting.

This at least has been a big 'Simplification' and a growing process. I am glad (and fortunate) that I have no further ties, or complicated circumstances (!)

It is a struggle here – but worthwhile. All I can say is, I am glad I took the step – and came.156

Unfortunately there are no other letters from this period that evidence this change in focus from the local environment that had thus far provided the content and inspiration for his work, in order to seek success as an artist overseas. It can be surmised, however, that after the Imitation Realist and his solo exhibitions had been misunderstood, particularly in the press, that Crothall considered it unlikely that he would find a sympathetic audience on either side of the Tasman. This was perhaps just a temporary phase, as he makes no further mention of it and subsequently tries to organise an exhibition in Sydney and at least discusses exhibiting again in Auckland.

Crothall approached the Watters Gallery in Sydney about holding a solo exhibition in 1967. Gallery director Frank Watters recalls Crothall’s intense personality and his determination to be a visual artist.

Ross Crothall came to see me. He wanted an exhibition; he said he had all these paintings from New Zealand. I asked whether I could see them and he said that they were such beautiful crates he didn't want to open them. I'm not sure whether he resented the fact that I

156 Ross Crothall to Kees Hos, 10 Sept 1966, CA000001/002/0012 Folder 27 Artists: Files Cranwell and Crothall, New Vision Gallery Archives, Museum of New Zealand – Te Papa Tongarewa Archives
wanted to see the works – he had a very developed opinion of his own quality. We certainly weren’t unfriendly.

... Ross came to see me with this special assemblage In defence of Mary Lou157 and he gave it to me because we’d tried to help Mike.158 ... Crothall had notes on the back, which were really interesting; he called it “Australia’s First Political Painting”.

... I liked him, he was very difficult – he was very withdrawn, he would come to see you, and he would never tell you he was coming, and he would be immediately full-on. As if he had been building up all the things he wanted to unload and then you would cop that all at once. I have very, very fond memories, although we never got anything worked out [for an exhibition].159

Between October 1966 and January 1967 he completed a series of at least eleven collages, ten of which are now held by the National Gallery of Australia. Crothall had left these works in the storeroom of Gallery A, a commercial art gallery in Sydney, at the time of his disappearance. When Gallery A closed in 1983 they were left for safekeeping with the NGA. They reveal the direction his work was taking and are his last known works before his disappearance. All are collages on either wood or cardboard with acrylic paint, pen, pencil and collaged elements, including newspaper, packaging, advertising and playing cards. He did not use assemblage in these works which reinforces their flat, gridded compositions. Seven of the titles refer to the works either being ‘experimental’, or a ‘practice’, ‘sketch’ or ‘study’ indicating that Crothall regarded these works as being an exploratory phase or, which is perhaps more likely when they are considered in the context of his work overall, that he considered his art making itself to be a kind of philosophical process, a way of engaging with an idea and playing it out. This can be seen in the way that motifs are often repeated throughout the work, such as the love hearts and arrows in the November 1966 Study (4.27). These works continue the main characteristics, discussed above, of the work in his 1966 exhibition, including the use of text and autobiographical content. Handwritten comments are throughout the works, ranging from quotes from DH Lawrence and TS Eliot through to his own observations on current events and on the works themselves. Words are frequently misspelt,

157 Australia’s First Political Painting, now in the collection of the Queensland Art Gallery, discussed above.
159 Frank Watters, taped interview with the author, Sydney, 11 March 2008
apparently intentionally, as he used phonetic spelling, expressing a wish on Cuppa (4.29) 'to do for spelling what Lloyd Wright did for architecture'. In OBZ (4.30) Crothall makes reference to the building of the Sydney Opera House, then underway, the visit of LBJ to Australia and Mike Brown's trial. Although Artistic sketch (4.32) includes a fragment from a drawing of what appears to be Maori patterning of some kind, overall, there is less content that links the works to the Pacific region through indigenous cultures. Instead, the material is all taken from Crothall's surroundings. For example, the map of Sydney and brands of products ('Kit Kat', 'Sutex' and 'Fruit Tingles') used in Unfinished sketch (4.31) made the work immediately recognisable as a product of the local environment. The title is written on a small card affixed verso on the work, and so it seems that it has been deliberately left unfinished.

**Crothall's use of the grid**

A new development in these works and an immediate similarity between all eleven is the use of a grid to structure the composition and organise the material. This prompts a connection with the prevalent use of grids in painting during the 1960s, which was also a subject of considerable analysis by critics and theorists in the late 1960s and early 1970s. John Elderfield emphasised the historical role of the grid in painting:

> Traditionally, the grid has two main functions: as a measuring and as a transfer device. Although a grid may be used primarily as a tool for measurement or proportioning, if it contains any added imagery its transfer function is inevitably present. ... Placing data in separate but juxtaposed squares ... when used within art, is to assert its "informational" attributes. It implies that the art consists of two things: the regular framework, and the information put into the framework. ... The emergence of real grids and grid structures in the '60s objectified ... Pollock's approach. The recent trend to use grids as, literally, frameworks marks a return to an informational or signifying sensibility: of grids, once more, as containers.  

Elderfield emphasises the capacity of the grid to create an 'allover' composition for a work, rather than using linear design to focus the eye on one point of the work, the grid diffused this, creating an even, flat, surface plane for the work. Crothall creates his grids out of the detritus of everyday life - packaging, adverts, notes,

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160 John Elderfield, 'Grids', Artforum, no. 10, May 1972, p. 54

161 Elderfield, 'Grids', 1972, passim.
newspapers, tickets, match boxes, playing cards – organising them, seeming to assert such ‘informational attributes’ as those Elderfield describes. The use of the grid orders the earlier melange of materials, such as that of The big barb, to result in a more meditative, considered presentation of the banalities of the everyday. The lines forming his grids serve to both connect and frame; linking the otherwise disparate fragments together but also setting them apart from one another. Practice board (4.36) is constructed from four horizontal planks of timber, held in place with three vertical strips of timber. There are narrow spaces between the horizontal pieces so that the work is not one flat panel. All of the timber pieces are covered in a collage of paper packaging and labels, with handwritten notes, newspaper, magazine advertisements and painted detail. The grid has been created here using bold lines in pink, yellow, purple and blue, which have been painted in stepped diagonals of each colour. The grid pattern here has been evenly maintained despite the uneven size and surface of the planks; this unifies the surface of the work, creating an apparent surface plane, across the different levels and gaps in the timber.

Rosalind Krauss opens her essay Grids with a description of this compositional structure as having been increasingly used by modern artists since cubism; she holds it to be ‘emblematic’ of ‘modern art’s will to silence, its hostility to literature, to narrative, to discourse.’ She argues that the grid consciously declares art to be modern, and that ‘if it maps anything, it maps the surface of the painting itself’; it aligns art with science and locates it in a world of thought that is distinct from nature. In reference to Crothall’s work, Krauss’ essay is relevant as it highlights the grid itself as a carrier of meanings: it is associated with science and the organisation of information into an intelligible order. By putting a seemingly random combination of material together in a grid structure, Crothall implies a connection, that some overall truth will be revealed, and this engages the viewer’s attention, slowly drawing them into the work as they notice more and more material to consider.

Krauss’ analysis of the grid is essentially a formalist one, a view that Lawrence Alloway criticised in his essay *Systemic Painting*, for lacking ‘a serious desire to study meanings beyond the purely visual configuration.’

The approach of formalist critics splits the work of art into separate elements, isolating the syntax from all its echoes and consequences. The exercise of formal analysis, at the expense of other properties of art, might be called formalistic positivism. Formal analysis needs the iconographical and experiential aspects, too, which can no longer be dismissed as “literary” except on the basis of an archaic estheticism.

Alloway’s aim in this essay was ‘to provide a general theory … of the uses of systems by recent abstract artists’. He identified a shift from the perceived dominance of Abstract Expressionism, as artists such as Ad Reinhardt and Barnett Newman gradually began to employ ‘systemic’ approaches to painting in the 1950s. He concentrates his critique on the formalist criticism of Clement Greenberg, arguing that he focused on the technical elements of painting at the expense of other meanings the work might convey. Alloway emphasises the specific, human scale of systems such as the grid, rather than their expressions of classical absolutes. He argues that ‘the personal is not expunged by using a neat technique, anonymity is not a consequence of a highly finished painting. The artist’s conceptual order is just as personal as autographic tracks.’

Alloway’s analysis is primarily of work that contrasts starkly with Crothall’s, such as that of Frank Stella and Kenneth Noland, as he was trying to emphasise personal elements in forms of painting that seemed to deny such content, such as Hard Edge, geometric, conceptual and minimalist art. However he observes parallels between the artists he identified as ‘systemic’ and the Pop artists, particularly Lichtenstein and Warhol, acknowledging that the tendency toward employing repetitive imagery and processes was more widespread than the narrower selection of abstract painters. This allows for more diverse applications of systemic processes, such as the use of grids by

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166 Alloway, ‘Systemic Painting’, 1966, p. 121
170 Alloway, ‘Systemic Painting’, 1966, p. 131
171 Alloway, ‘Systemic Painting’, 1966, p. 132
Crothall in this instance, to be more fully considered. Crothall’s works contrast with those both Krauss and Alloway discuss, he declare quite the reverse of a ‘will to silence’ or ‘hostility toward discourse’, instead trying to emphasise the connections between visual art and all aspects of life. His work relates to the examples that Elderfield, Krauss and Alloway discuss from art internationally, but is a product of a specific, local context. Crothall’s ‘transtasman’ identity shaped the form and content of his works. The grid was used as a framework for his personal response to his surroundings. His repetitive use of it in these works creates the possibility that he intended them to be seen as a series, which is also suggested by his dating each of them with the month and year, allowing them to be viewed with a reasonable semblance of chronological order. The dating of the works also suggests a diaristic quality to Crothall’s practice, that these works functioned as an autobiographical record of his surroundings: the newspapers he read, packaging from things he bought and sweets he consumed.

**Crothall’s disappearance**

Although the final known work of this series is dated January 1967, he was making plans to exhibit his work as of November 1967, which indicates that perhaps other works were made during that year but have been have not been located. These plans were alluded to by Crothall when he wrote to Kees Hos:

> I am thinking of exhibiting in Auckland with the Barry Lett Galleries, next time that is, that I would have a show in New Zealand. ... If the type of exhibition that I could send, say, after a show in Sydney, could fulfil some of its expectations, perhaps New Vision would also be interested in the possibility of a further show later on.  

Barry Lett Galleries, along with New Vision, were the two most prominent commercial galleries in Auckland during the 1960s. The Barry Lett Galleries were associated with younger artists and more avant-garde work, so after the poor reception of his work at New Vision, it may have made sense to try exhibiting in a different gallery. This indicates his ongoing identification as a New Zealand artist.

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173 Ross Crothall to Kees Hos, 22 Nov 1967, CA000001/002/0012 Folder 27 Artists: Files Cranwell and Crothall, New Vision Gallery Archives, Museum of New Zealand – Te Papa Tongarewa Archives


that although he had considered a move to the northern hemisphere, he had not broken with the New Zealand art world.

His actions after this are difficult to ascertain, the only correspondence that is known to exist after the letter cited above are two telegrams from Crothall to John Reed in early December 1967. The first is recorded in the John Reed Papers but copied out in Reed’s handwriting, which is difficult to read:

Representative contact Bronte Signwriting Challis Brown recall magnificent Lanceley exhibition at [illegible] and keep [?] earthy go west from Sydney

Mucko / Crotto / Giotto / El Cid

The second read:

INSTRUCT LANCELEY ENGLAND RE MYSTERIOUS BROWN EXHIBITION STOP YOURS FAITHFULLY

ROSS JAMES CROTHALL

Reed wrote to Brown that ‘we have had the maddest telegram – which could only be from you – followed by a sinisterly mysterious one which is signed Ross James Crothall.’ Brown replied that he had not sent any telegrams and that he had not had contact with Crothall for ‘many months’. The telegrams tempt speculation that Crothall may have already been suffering from the mental illness with which he would later be diagnosed, as neither Brown nor Lanceley were exhibiting at the time and nor was there any apparent reason that Reed would need to instruct the other had they been. There is no known contact between Crothall and Reed after their last letters in the Reed Papers from 1965 until the telegrams in 1967, followed by a Christmas card, wishing the Reeds ‘a year of fulfilment and satisfaction for 1968.’

Tragically, this was not to be for Crothall, as he went missing after a period of

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176 Ross Crothall to John Reed, undated, c. December 1967. “Challis Brown” likely refers to Mike Brown, whose middle name was Challis and who was also referred to as Challis Brown in Commonwealth Film Unit files, suggesting that perhaps he used that name for non-art related jobs. “Mucko Crotto Giotto El Cid”, and variants thereof, was one of the varied nicknames Crothall adopted for himself, which he also used in correspondence with Kees Hos, not dated, c. September 1966, CA000001/002/0012 Folder 27 Artists: Files Cranwell and Crothall, New Vision Gallery Archives, Museum of New Zealand – Te Papa Tongarewa Archives
177 Ross Crothall to John Reed, undated, c. December 1967, Reed Papers, MS 13186, SLV
178 John Reed to Mike Brown, 11 December 1967, Reed Papers, MS 13186, SLV
179 Mike Brown to John Reed, not dated, c. December 1967, Reed Papers, MS 13186, SLV
180 Ross Crothall to John and Sunday Reed, December 1968, Reed Papers, MS 13186, SLV
illness, during which he had been admitted to the Callan Park Hospital. He was released and had been planning to return to Auckland with a ticket sent for that purpose from his family, however this ticket was never used and his whereabouts or fate has yet to determined.\(^{181}\)

Crothall’s known works demonstrate the ongoing development of his work during the 1960s. He attempted to incorporate all of his surroundings and experiences into resolved works of art that expressed an authentic response to life in Australia and New Zealand. Unfortunately there are no known later works to indicate what might have subsequently become of Crothall as an artist. His fate limits an understanding of his work, both in terms of the number of works, as well as the difficulty in finding the works that have survived. For example, as Crothall was never formally declared missing or dead, the works left in the care of the NGA are still waiting for Crothall to collect them, as this was the belief at the time of their deposit there.\(^{182}\) This limits their exposure via reproduction or exhibition. As Crothall is generally believed to have had a mental illness, this also colours our understanding of his work, he is rarely mentioned in Australian art history, and when he is, descriptions are vague of his movements after 1962 and rarely mention his work after Imitation Realism.\(^{183}\)

\(^{181}\) Edna Skinner, interview with the author, 2006; Lanceley, interview with the author, 2006

\(^{182}\) According to a ‘Note for File’ written by Daniel Thomas, then the curator of Australian art at the NGA, the works were to be received from Gallery A, where the works had been left by Crothall, as ‘a long term loan from an unidentified owner.’ 1 November 1983, Ross Crothall curatorial file, NGA

This has limited the understanding of the range of Crothall’s work, as well as the ideas that he brought to Imitation Realism. In studying his work after the Imitation Realists disbanded we are able to see how he continued to create work out of his surroundings. He used his local environment as a source of both subject matter and materials. The return to New Zealand reinvigorated his practice, he was seemingly fascinated by the predicament of those in settler cultures. To quote again from his 1966 catalogue statement, the ‘cultural wealth’ that New Zealand had, ‘as a people of Maori, Pakeha and Immigrant influences’ provided the opportunity to try and find a form of expression that engaged with the entirety of this unique culture.

**Brown after Imitation Realism**

Compared to Crothall, Brown has attracted an extensive amount of critical and art historical interest, yet he holds a paradoxical place in Australian art. Of any of the Imitation Realists he has received the most substantial assessment by art historians and public galleries, with two retrospectives at the National Gallery of Victoria within his lifetime, and smaller exhibitions since that have examined specific aspects of his practice (*It ain’t necessarily so: Mike Brown and the Imitation Realists* at Heide Museum of Modern Art in 2006 and *Kite: Mike Brown and the Sydney Twelve* at La Trobe University Art Museum in 2007, toured until 2009). A forthcoming monograph by Dr Richard Haese on Brown and the evolution of a postmodern Australian avant-garde will undoubtedly further establish and explore Brown’s importance and influence in Australian art since the early 1960s.185 Brown’s

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184 Crothall, Ross Crothall, 1966

185 A product of some 25 years research by Dr Richard Haese, La Trobe University, who was kind enough to discuss with the author some of the book’s contents and main arguments in a meeting, 3 November 2005, various aspects of Haese’s argument for Brown’s importance to late 20th century Australian art, and of his ongoing importance to the understanding of Australian postmodernism in particular can be found in his essays: ‘On being-in-the-world: The Art of Mike Brown: 1958-1994’ in Brown, et.al., *Power to the People*, Melbourne: NGV, 1995, pp. 35-81; ‘Waiting for Postmodernism’, *Art Monthly Australia*, no.78 (April 1995), pp. 5-8; ‘Mike Brown (1938-1997): The
criticism of both Australian society and especially its art world ensured that he received press attention throughout the 1960s and beyond. Yet due in part to this trenchant criticism of the art world, along with the relatively ephemeral nature of a considerable amount of his work, he has remained on the outer of the Australian art world. Haese also points that early in his career Brown had explored ideas that only became widespread in the early 1980s, when they became associated with postmodernism. By which time he was among those who ‘were victims of a generational shift that afflicted many (although far from all) mid-career artists who entered the 1980s on the wrong side of forty’ and who received only minimal coverage in high profile exhibitions of Australian contemporary art, such as the Sydney Biennale or Perspecta surveys. Brown’s rejection of the art market also meant that for the majority of his working life, he existed barely on or above the poverty line. By his own account, Brown was committed to Imitation Realism throughout his practice; in this section I focus on his work in the years after 1962 to explore what he meant when he referred to this influence. I argue that he took from Imitation Realism a consistently oppositional stance to the art world (and sometimes to society at large) – that made his place within it quite ambiguous. He achieved recognition from critics, curators and art historians, including John Reed, Elwyn Lynn, Bernard Smith and Richard Haese, yet rarely any substantial financial reward and he seemingly deliberately maintained an ‘outsider’ status. Through an analysis

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**Artist as Revolutionary**, *Mike Brown and the Sydney Twelve*, Melbourne: La Trobe University Art Museum, 2007, pp. 10-12

186 As will be discussed below, the expulsion of Mary Lou as Miss Universe from the exhibition *Australian Painting Today* at the Art Gallery of NSW in December 1963, his excoriating criticism of contemporary art in Sydney on his work *Kite*, exhibited April 1964 and his prosecution, conviction and subsequent appeal for exhibiting obscene paintings in 1965 ensured that Brown regularly appeared in the newspapers 1963-67. Subsequent critical coverage was garnered through his exhibitions, catalogue essays and work that criticized society and/or the Australian art world, such as *I don’t know what to think about anything (it don’t matter no how)* his 1972 exhibition and accompanying catalogue at Watters Gallery, see Donald Brook, ‘An artist’s enquiry into the point of his art’, *SMH*, 27 July 1972, and Elwyn Lynn, ‘The subterranean squeeze’, *The Bulletin*, 5 August, 1972, p. 35, and Keith Looby, ‘The importance of Mike Brown’, *National Times*, 31 July 1972, p. 28; his exhibition of collages from pornographic images *Hard, fast and deep: a peepshow of pornographic filth* at Charles Nodrum Gallery, November 1987, which Gary Catalano refused to review on the grounds that ‘it started as porn and finished as porn’, (according Charles Nodrum, in his ‘Mike Brown and the Art of Contradiction’, in Brown, *Power to the People*, 1995 p. 84) and his graffiti around Melbourne streets in the mid-1980s, see J. Brown and M. McConville, ‘Mike Brown and the Art of Stealth’, *The Sydney Morning Herald, Good Weekend* magazine, 16 April 1988, pp. 80-2, for Brown’s criticism of the art world, see also his ‘Introduction’ to Brown *Power to the People*, 1995, pp. 15-32 and Daphne Guiness, ‘Mike’s ministry of fun’, *The Australian*, 9 October, 1992


188 see letters to John Reed 1963-69, also, Brown discussed his uncertain financial state in a letter to his brother, Julian Brown, 12 November 1996.
of his work from 1963 until 1965, and one of his murals from 1969-70, we are able to see how his work developed from the time of his involvement in Imitation Realism.

**An ‘unnatural primitive’**

Imitation Realism was fundamental to the ideas and motivations of Brown’s work until his death in 1997. It shaped his understanding of the purpose of art in society; an ideal he attempted to reach throughout his life. The nature of this influence becomes clear when his work in the period immediately after 1962 is contrasted with that of Colin Lanceley of the same period. Imitation Realism was perhaps equally important in the artistic development of both Lanceley and Brown, but for Lanceley its significance was in the formal qualities and aesthetic possibilities of junk, assemblage and collage. Lanceley did not continue the deliberately naïve quality that had characterised Imitation Realism, whereas Brown’s work, by contrast, always had some element of naïve, outsider or folk art.

For Brown ‘Imitation Realism was as comprehensive a revolution in political, aesthetic and general philosophic values as can be imagined.’ Having left art school because of the conservative modernism that it taught (see chapter one), Imitation Realism had provided a way forward with his work, to try and create his own authentic form of the indigenous arts that he had seen in New Zealand during his travels in 1959, in Papua New Guinea in 1960 and the collection of Aboriginal art exhibited at the Art Gallery of NSW in 1960. Tearing down artistic conventions and rebuilding them from first principles was the primary lesson for Brown from Imitation Realism: he would continue to do this for the remainder of his career, pushing his materials and ideas in new directions. He would use painting, collage, assemblage, drawing, sculpture, printmaking, graffiti and digital art, whatever allowed him to explore new angles and find ways to challenge assumptions. In contrast with Crothall, he would be more openly antagonistic toward society and especially the art scene. Whereas Crothall, as discussed above, tried to create an alternative form of art for the ‘settler society’ that drew on all

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189 Brown, ‘Power to the People’, 1995, p. 16
190 *Australian Aboriginal Art*, 17 Aug – 18 Sept 1960, AGNSW, exhibited bark paintings, carved figures and objects from around Australia. It was the first time such a survey was shown in one of the state galleries rather than as an ethnographic exhibit in a museum.
aspects of the Pacific’s unique cultural identities, but largely without overt criticism. After Imitation Realism, Brown’s criticism of art and society in Australia would only become more explicit (in both senses of the word).

After Imitation Realism he went through a period of uncertainty and questioning, as he ‘did not want to get trapped with a particular style’,191 which, along with the demands of working full-time, slowed his work for the following year.192 He remade *Mary Lou* in *Mary Lou as Miss Universe* during this period (4.06); so that when Laurie Thomas requested to borrow it for inclusion in the *Australian Painting Today* exhibition at the AGNSW the work that was received was substantially different to the one that had been expected. Thomas believed that the work was not up to its previous standard and hence not fit to be included in an exhibition intended to be toured internationally as a survey representative of Australian contemporary art.193 Due to the nudity depicted in the collaged images, the judgement was seen to be on moral rather than aesthetic grounds and purposefully purported to be so by at least one member of the Commonwealth Art Advisory Board (CAAB), Douglas Pratt. The CAAB were funding the tour abroad and reputedly refused to do so while *Mary Lou* was included. Pratt, a conservative landscape painter, took the opportunity to not only repudiate the work’s contents but also the medium, telling the *Sunday Times*:

> I thought it was stupid and offensive. It’s one of those damn stupid collages. The thing is built from toys and junk. It’s ridiculous in the extreme. It’s not even a painting – most of it has been cut out of magazines. I’m damn glad it’s gone.194

*Mary Lou as Miss Universe* records the turmoil that Brown felt towards his work during this period, it lost the quality of the original that Robert Hughes described as being that of a ‘monstrous idol … [where] the impulses of the Imitation Realists

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191 Mike Brown, interview with Clive A Evatt, 1 August 1972, quoted in Evatt, *The Pop Art of Mike Brown*, unpublished honours research essay, Power Institute of Fine Arts, Sydney University, 1972, p. 4
192 In a letter to John Reed Brown described his routine ‘at a time when the artistic Heavens have suddenly opened for me, I am stuck in a job which gives me little freedom and no peace of mind. In the last two weeks I have fallen into a nightmare routine of painting till 3 A.M., dragging myself off to work to arrive always late, and squirming at my desk through an endless day.’, Mike Brown to John Reed, 1 May 1963, Box 2A/18, File 16/Part 2 of 2, Mike Brown Correspondence, Reed Papers, MS 13186, SLV
193 Bernard Smith, 1990 (3rd ed.) *op. cit.* p. 394, Pratt stated that Thomas had already removed the painting, a move that he supported, as he would ‘not be a party to public money being spent on sending this sort of work around the world.’ Douglas Pratt, letter to the editor, *SMH*, 6 January 1964
194 Douglas Pratt, quoted in ‘Cut-out nude is not art’, *Sunday Times*, 8 December, 1963
merge with those of the Nigerian fetish-carver.\textsuperscript{195} Instead it was more pointedly a commentary on the media, but the composition is not fully resolved. Instead of the jumble of material from different sources, it is dominated by a wash of magazine cut-outs that do not seem to be fully integrated, either with each other or with the remaining pieces of assemblage (primarily those forming the figure of Mary Lou herself). It indicates some of the directions Brown was taking in his work: the social criticism was increasingly pointed, and the collaged forms were taking on value as abstract design. Down the left hand side, in particular, the different scales of the magazine images, juxtaposed with the painted elements, have been integrated to create a flow of imagery that tumbles down the work. This effect was one that Brown developed throughout the sixties in collage works, particularly the collaged and painted murals he created in the late 1960s and early 1970s, where the space afforded by whole walls gave free rein for Brown’s intricate designs of collage, text and abstract patterning to flourish. After Mary Lou as Miss Universe it seems that Brown decided to pare his works down for a time concentrating on painting, both abstract and figurative pieces, in a flat, linear style with bright poster colours. The first of these works seems to have been Seven Lonely Days (4.39) which used a flat, comic book style that belies the depressing subject matter. The two styles then seem to co-exist in Brown’s oeuvre from this time: the densely worked, intricate collage imagery with the sparser paintings and drawings that emphasise the flat surface plane.

In April 1963 he found direction again, as he described it to John Reed, he felt as though ‘the artistic Heavens have suddenly opened for me’.\textsuperscript{196} Also at this time Brown and Croothall decided to work independently of one another, indicating the new confidence and purpose in his work.

Ross and I are working apart now, for a couple of reasons. First, we have both reached a stage where our work seems self-sufficient, and the time of groping in the dark, when we could be most use to each other working together and exchanging ideas, has gone. Considering this, the mountainous difficulties of arranging a joint exhibition, and trying to finish all our contributions to it by the same date, seem unnecessary. It’s interesting, that you came to Roslyn Gardens right at the end of the working-together period – since then it has happened to be practical for me to work in my own studio; and then last

\textsuperscript{195} Robert Hughes, ‘A lot of junk’, Nation, 16 June 1962, p. 20
\textsuperscript{196} Brown to Reed, 1 May 1963, Reed Papers, MS 13186, SLV
weekend Ross and I were talking and decided that we had no need anymore to work together or try to adjust our exhibiting plans to each other. All very good – an exciting future looms ominously.¹⁹⁷

Brown soon afterwards began to exhibit again. First, he sent a painting to the 25th Annual CAS Interstate Exhibition in October at Farmers Blaxland Gallery, Sydney. The Madam Butterfly Hunt (now lost), was the first work he exhibited that showed this new direction.¹⁹⁸ He followed, shortly after this, with a series of paintings that he exhibited in a solo exhibition he held in his home in Paddington in December. With the news that Mary Lou was not to be included in the Australian Painting Today exhibition tour, he decided to reclaim it, before the end of its showing at the AGNSW, so that he could include it in his solo exhibition, The Nine-Day Wonder Show.¹⁹⁹ He described himself in the advertisement for this show as an ‘Unnatural primitive – ex-Imitation Realist’ indicating the differences in his work that had developed in the 18 months since the last substantial Sydney showing of his work in the Subterranean Imitation Realist show in May 1962. The ‘Unnatural primitive’ term is particularly apt. The works maintained the deliberate naivety of Imitation Realism, but in the bright synthetic colours of magazines, comics and advertising. They were referred to as Pop art by critics in the period, and there are certainly obvious similarities, but works such as Seven Lonely Days and Pleasures of Smoking (4.40) retain too much of the handmade to sitcomfortably with the slick sophisticated imagery and the quality of mechanical reproduction that are associated with New York Pop of this time. The deliberate naïveté of Brown’s use of collage contrasts with the sophisticated adaptations and appropriations that characterise the work of artists seen to epitomise international Pop art from this time, such as Warhol or Hamilton. These works instead have an unaffected, amateurish quality that conveys with simple directness the subject matter: a depressingly long, lonely week and a satire on the ridiculous overstatement of advertising. Elwyn Lynn summarised the show as a ‘refreshingly clean, vivid, sophisticatedly-innocent and lively

¹⁹⁷ Brown to Reed, 13 May 1963, Reed Papers, MS 13186, SLV
¹⁹⁸ Evatt, The Pop Art of Mike Brown, 1972, p. 5
¹⁹⁹ Brown removing the work from the AGNSW was recorded in a large photograph and an article under the headline ‘Get it out of Here! Ban on painting’, Sunday Mirror, 1 December 1963. A copy of this article is preserved in the Brown ephemera file in the AGNSW Research Library on which has been written that ‘the artist and this newspaper removed it before the exhibition finished by deceiving Gallery attendants. Neither the CAAB nor the Gallery ordered the removal.’ [their emphasis] This indicates that Brown may have capitalized on the potential for publicity for his own exhibition as a positive result from Mary Lou not being included in the travelling exhibition.
exhibition’, that had ‘none of Sydney’s fuzzy romanticism or emphasis on fine passages of paint, but ... a lively deployment of a variety of forms’; ‘the antithesis of the accumulated junk and debris that constituted Brown’s previous work.’

**Brown and the art world**

Lynn’s contrast of Brown’s work with Sydney painting in general was a timely one as Brown would increasingly be in outright opposition to it. The exhibition *Twelve Artists*, was also shown in December 1963 at Hungry Horse Gallery. It was described in *The Bulletin* as ‘a strong group of works by twelve avant-garde artists ... a big event.’ It was exhibited with a catalogue that doubled as a calendar: each artist had one reproduction for a month of the year. Along the bottom of the pages were logos from the companies sponsoring the catalogue (such sponsorship was then a novelty). It also reproduced a photograph of the artists on the wrought iron balcony outside the gallery that is now iconic of the Sydney art world of this period. For Brown, the exhibition and the calendar were a prime example of the increasingly commercial nature of the art world and particularly its adoption of advertising and marketing techniques. This incensed Brown, who poured his frustration into making *The Kite (4.41)*: above a collage made from the calendar, and around the photograph of the artists, he wrote a diatribe castigating the work and commercialism of the artists involved and the Sydney art world in general, an excerpt of which runs thus:

> Present-day mainstream art in Sydney should not be likened to a diseased organism but to the disease itself – it is a cancer which won’t stop flourishing until it has eaten the heart out of its own futile existence. ... this modicum of talent is surrounded as it is in Sydney by an ocean of untalented mediocrity, and is propagandized, publicized and merchandized by means of a cynical conspiracy between avaricious art dealers and a bandwagonning Press, the atmosphere thus generated is one in which even talent must suffocate, and art must surely die. The blazing emptiness of the artworks represented, together with the conspicuous expensiveness of the publication make it an impressive indictment of all concerned.

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200 Elwyn Lynn, ‘Marylou queen of the nine-day wonders’, *Sunday Mirror*, 8 December 1963  
202 The photograph, exhibition and calendar are all discussed by Vincent Alessi, ‘Sydney 1964: Then and Now’, *Kite: Mike Brown and the Sydney Twelve*, Melbourne: La Trobe University Art Museum, 2007, pp. 5-9  
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... all the painters represented in the calendar are purveyors of nothing more or less than charm. When painting loses its impetus to explore and extend the frontiers of human consciousness and begins to revolve around any fixed point or within any recognisable boundary it at once becomes “charm” or furniture painting.  

He also named Lanceley, John Olsen, Klippel, Stanislaus Rapotec, William Rose, Frank Hodgkinson and Leonard Hessing in the text, singling them out for particular criticism. These artists deliberately created work that was distinct from the so-called ‘Charm School’ in Sydney and so Brown was being unmistakably confrontational in describing their work in these terms. Dissatisfaction with the forms of painting that were prominent in the Sydney art world had been crucial in the conception of Imitation Realism, but Crothall and Brown had then sought to create an alternative, rather than criticising it. Here Brown was provocative, endeavouring to arouse reaction and discussion of the state of the art world as he saw it. There was discussion, but it seems to have centred on the nature of the work and its inclusion in the *Young Contemporaries* exhibition, rather than on the work’s actual content. Brown described *Kite* as ‘more of a ‘happening’ than a manifesto, and in writing the words I felt no more committed to them than Lichtenstein would feel in writing the words in his comic strips.’ This is disingenuous perhaps; as he went on to write:

> My main concern was to put forward a point of view at least as valid and persuasive as the uncritical praise that is too often lavished on the big names of Sydney, so that whereas previously there was no precedent for really destructive criticism, it has now been provided. And in case what I’ve just said gives the impression that I’m backing down from the severity of my words on the kite, I must say that I believe that my words were very sugary compared with what could be validly written. A really good survey of Sydney art would be

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204 Mike Brown, *Kite*, 1964 (excerpt)
205 Brown certainly was not the only one who felt this way, for example, on the same page on which John Henshaw’s review, cited above, appeared, a summary account ran thus: ‘A more than casual acquaintance with the Sydney art world quickly reveals an “in” group of painters: painters who are very highly esteemed and have all the influence, prestige and receive all advantages of any such privileged group. Superficially it seems as if this standing is obtained without any conscious effort on the part of the painters concerned. But in reality, although a product of the artistic immaturity of Sydney, reputations are often the result of a very special sort of promotion. The aptitude Sydney painters have for promotion is phenomenal. Built on the rather insubstantial basis of “social lobbying” their position is nevertheless very secure due to the present need for this deification. Sydney’s art world is small, inbred and violently unsure of itself. Both collectors and painters feel the need mutually to boost their respective purchases and pictures.’ Neville Boden, ‘Promotion’, *The Bulletin*, 21 December, 1963, p. 35
206 Elwyn Lynn described this discussion, at a monthly meeting of the CAS, on 21 April 1964, as ‘vehement’, an example of which was given as the letter published from Stanislaus Rapotec to the *Broadsheet*, in the May 1964 CAS NSW *Broadsheet*, pp. 5-7
207 Mike Brown, letter to the editor, CAS NSW *Broadsheet*, May 1964 pp. 5-7
unprintable. No one should expect instant miracles from poor li'l old Sydney, but what is so bad is the complacency.\textsuperscript{208}

Brown does not seem to have allowed for discretion by critics, who were often artists who wrote art criticism part-time, socialised in the small Sydney art world and so sought to ‘build up’ rather than ‘tear down’ the efforts of artists in their criticism. Such discretion was not the better part of valour for Brown, who saw it amounting to ‘complacency’ and a refusal to demand more of art and artists. It seems that this was intolerable to Brown, for whom art increasingly demanded the full extent of his intellectual abilities, in seeking to define and express both what ‘art’ was and his own sense of self, which never comfortably fit with the conventional societal definitions. Vivienne Binns, then in a relationship with Brown, recalls this as an intense time of exploration for both of them as they sought to articulate what it meant to be an artist.

We had long, long talks. By the time I finished with Mike I just wanted to stop talking! The two of us were working everything out through conversation. We were very similar in some ways but I was more capable with life ... He was more of the spirit, like an old wizard. He was fascinating, very intelligent....

There was the idea that art is not just for artists. He was against the theoretical intellectual, and what he saw as pretensions, of the time, for instance around the Colour Field artists and all that. He was very curious about it though, and he would get to it through irony, he would imitate what they did, he wouldn't come at it through the theory, and come up with idiosyncratic and intuitive results. He had a very urgent and immediate creative impulse in those days, he needed to work it out on the surface, it was a totally different approach to someone, like Albers for example, whose practice relied on particular knowledge and theory. He was maybe more like Van Gogh, who read voraciously but worked it out on the surface - intuitively. He wouldn’t linger too long in the intellectual background before getting into the painting. ... At some point or another everything would become ridiculous to him. He was passionate and intense, and that could drive him into depression, but equally, there would be a moment where everything would become absolutely ridiculous and hilarious. In the midst of the most serious discussions, time and time again, he would break into laughter.\textsuperscript{209}

The irony that Binns described can be seen in the works in his next solo exhibition at the MOMADA in Melbourne in October 1964, \textit{Face Value}. The works encompassed a range of styles that Brown had been exploring, as Binns explains,

\textsuperscript{208} Mike Brown, letter to the editor, CAS NSW \textit{Broadsheet}, May 1964 pp. 5-7
\textsuperscript{209} Binns, interview with the author, 2008
these were part of a response to the forms of painting prevalent in contemporary art at the time, such as the abstract forms of *Birth of a Star* (4.42) which references both hard-edge painting, with its flat, defined areas of pure colour, as well as Pop art in stars that are repeated across the surface. The works, as Brown wrote in the catalogue, were intended to be ‘taken at “face value”’:

I can assure visitors to this exhibition that the paintings on show contain no hidden depths. The abstracts are just “pretty patterns” or conglomerations of gestures without special significance. The figurative paintings have no implications beyond what they depict – hills, trees, clouds or faces. The two “Pop” wall sculptures are pure nonsensical caprice.

My methods of working are straightforward to the point of being facile, not because I think simplicity is a virtue, but because sophistication for its own sake is a bore. Art which affects to have deeper significance than can be readily understood by the public at which it is aimed, is mere mystification. The notion that art should subtly suggest rather than clearly proclaim, is decadence.

My paintings should be taken at “face value”, and if at this level many of them are found to have no meaning, at least they have the virtue, that they don’t pretend to have.

yours truly, Mike Brown

As he describes it here, Brown was trying to create work accessible to the viewer; that did not demand prior knowledge of art or of creation in order to appreciate and understand the work. He clearly positions his work in the context of other contemporary artists who ‘affect ... deeper significance’. Given the inclusion of *The Kite* in the exhibition it seems fair to say that this contrast was with the artists he had castigated therein. However, the attempt to create such uncomplicated expression is itself not straightforward. It invites questioning and analysis of what exactly is before the viewer; how the artist has formed it and why. Works such as *Seven Lonely Days, The Pleasures of Smoking, Folding Pictorial* (4.43) and *No trouble in Paradise* (4.44) all rely on the viewer’s familiarity with the style Brown employs for their apparent simplicity. To do this, Brown draws on advertising, folk art and commercial illustration, to create ‘fine art’ – so it could be said that Brown’s expectation of what could be ‘readily understood by the public at which it is aimed’

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was quite low. In contrast, the predominantly abstract forms of the *Twelve* artists were intended for a fairly small audience, literate in contemporary abstract painting.

That Brown was offered a solo exhibition at the Museum so soon after the *Annandale Imitation Realist* show demonstrates the high regard in which he was held by Reed, as the Museum’s director. This esteem was echoed by Bernard Smith in his review, in which he called the exhibition ‘the most original Melbourne has seen this year.’ Smith perceived the complexity behind the immediate ‘face value’ of Brown’s works:

> The paintings are bright, flat, posterish and apparently naive; and they are as bracing as a fresh wind on a spring day. Brown’s art, and his thinking, has embarked upon an exciting journey towards simplicity. … Purely as paintings they possess without exception a bright, showy radiance; but behind the radiance there is a mind prepared to satirise, burlesque, and scarify. Gently at times, not too gently at other times.

The strength of Brown’s art lies not in his adoption of a prepared moral position but in the highly skilful use of innocence. … It is an innocence Brown has had to fight for, and learn how to use. This is what distinguishes his work from most avant-garde painting in Australia today. A personal voice is beginning to come through. And a personal voice is better than echoes.\(^{211}\)

Smith’s support of Brown’s work is not surprising when it is considered in the light of the *Antipodean Manifesto* and its description of various forms of contemporary art and ‘their innumerable band of camp followers [who] threaten to benumb the intellect and wit of art with their bland and pretentious mysteries.’\(^{212}\) Rather than ‘echoes’ from international contemporary art, Smith saw Brown developing unique expression, which included Kite’s scarifying response to the surrounding art world. Along with Smith, correspondence between John Reed and Elwyn Lynn, who was in Europe at the time, indicates that they also seem to share Brown’s assessment of the tendency of contemporary art toward ‘mystification’. Lynn described the ‘hard edge boys hav[ing] the edge’ in the London art scene.\(^{213}\) Reed replied, agreeing with Lynn’s disappointment in ‘fashionability’ determining the success of an exhibition. He added that ‘we are having our own burst of hard edge at the moment with Mike

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\(^{211}\) Bernard Smith, ‘Brown’s Show Most Original for Year’, *The Age*, 14 October, 1964


\(^{213}\) Elwyn Lynn to John Reed, 8 October 1964, Box 12/18, File 33, Reed Papers, MS 13186, SLV
Brown's show.' He enclosed Brown's catalogue statement and recounted his opening remarks.

I said that 'Face Value' did not necessarily correlate with superficiality. It is a fine fresh show with an elusive aesthetic which Mike seems to control with an amazing precision from which stems the idea of simplicity. His landscapes are quite new and may seem as naïve as he says, but his flat rolling hills and flat Christmas trees and toy houses end up by giving our vision and our understanding a new twist.\(^{214}\)

The Reeds bought *Folding Pictorial* from the exhibition, which encapsulates the aspects of the landscape paintings that he described to Lynn. The painting asymmetrically divides the picture plane into three sections, each presenting a different aspect of the landscape – a darkened silhouette against the evening sky in the upper right, a view of distant rolling hills in the lower right and a hillside of trees painted in a style reminiscent of folk art on the left hand side. The naïve style is seemingly simple, yet uses a sophisticated composition and bright poster colours to create an alternative to the landscape tradition that dominates Australian art history. Instead of a naturalistic rendering (in either purely visual terms such as those of the Heidelberg School, or the national myths of Drysdale, Nolan et al.), Brown adopts an emphatically artificial approach: that of the 'unnatural primitive', as he had described himself for the *Wonder Show* exhibition. He also employed this style for *No Trouble in Paradise*, an imagined rural idyll in candy-colours, where even the dead tree is covered with a flowering vine in bright yellow. Two red and yellow birds frolic in the sky, amidst a landscape untouched by human habitation.

Brown continued to use collage and assemblage in this exhibition. *Kitchen Utensils (Christmas Present)*\(^{215}\) (4.45) was a construction of cheap kitchenware on a timber frame. The work presents an ordered symmetrical arrangement of a dish rack, plastic cutlery, wooden utensils, plastic cups, sink strainers, towel drying racks, cupboard door handles and floral paper of the type used to line drawers. The work continues the assemblage practices, and particularly the use of found objects and cheap consumer wares, that Brown had employed throughout the Imitation Realist period but with a more controlled hand, subjecting each item to the overall

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\(^{214}\) John Reed to Elwyn Lynn, 14 October 1964, Box 12/18, File 33, Reed Papers, MS 13186, SLV

\(^{215}\) This work was originally entitled *Christmas Present* as it was titled in the *Face Value* catalogue but later acquired the name *Kitchen Utensils*, by which it is currently known in the Heide collection.
composition. By contrast *Big Mess* (4.46) at first seems just that. Upon closer inspection a sense of order does emerge, but the work is clearly meant to be an intricate mass of collage material and painted text and imagery (both abstract and figurative). The comic-book style lettering of the words ‘BLOP’ and ‘WHANG’, written large in the background, dominate the composition, which seems to tumble from a dynamic explosion of small images and abstract painted elements at the top of the work, in a cascade of popular culture references and nude pin-ups, towards the figures at the bottom, which have more space in which to cavort. Brown used speech bubbles to undermine the supposed seductive quality of the images by having some of the figures make nonsensical or unappealing comments. ‘Chocolate log and tomato sauce!!!’ proclaim one embracing couple to be answered with ‘SYPHILIS & PILES!!!’ by the couple on the lower right.

These works demonstrate some of the characteristic aspects of Brown’s practice. This included constant change: he would shift between different forms and media, experimenting to find the one that best expressed the subject he was exploring and would be the most accessible and affordable for his audience. He maintained the rage against the art world, adamantly criticising it whenever market economics and not the creation of art seemed to be the primary concern. For example he wrote in the catalogue essay for his 1995 retrospective at the NGV:

> I do not in any way invalidate anyone's individually acquired reputation in 'establishment' circles, except insofar as this may have been acquired at the cost of an artist's ability to relate to and maintain revolutionary solidarity with other artists. For if art is not importantly seen as a revolutionary activity, if it embraces far right values of competitive exclusivism whilst placing itself above commercial corruption through withdrawal to the ivory tower of the elite, then it must irresistibly be seen as a fruitless masturbatory activity.²¹⁶

For Brown, Imitation Realism shaped a life long oppositional stance toward such machinations of the art world. Similarly, it formed his use of materials and subject matter, and he constantly sought to use what was to hand, from his immediate surroundings. In some Imitation Realist works, such as *Mug Lair* (1.09) this was less resolved, as it appeared more derivative of the cultures from which he had drawn - inspiration on his travels in New Zealand and Papua New Guinea. Works from the mid-1960s, such as *Peggy Joan* (4.47) and *Windier Day Still* (4.48)

²¹⁶ Mike Brown, *Power to the People*, 1995, p. 32
demonstrate how these sources were absorbed. The abstract patterns still bear the influence of the linear, two-dimensional designs of tribal art, but do so in bright colours of commercial paint. The motifs were increasingly incorporated into Brown’s own cultural background.

This process is particularly well demonstrated in the murals Brown created in the late 1960s. Brown had created two murals in houses in which he lived in Auckland in 1968 and 1969 but neither survived or were well documented. The available images are of poor quality but indicate enough similarity to the third mural for it to be discussed as representative of the three. This mural, *It ain’t necessarily so* (4.49-52), was created between December 1969 and February 1970 while Brown was staying with Sweeney and Pamela Reed at Heide (John and Sunday Reed having moved to Heide II, a new house on the same property.) Brown was permitted to use the dining room walls for the creation of a mural. The room itself is something of an icon in Australian art history, Sidney Nolan having painted the first *Kelly* series there in 1946-7. Photographs show one of the *Kelly* paintings, *First class marksman* on the wall of the dining room with the mural encroaching from the right (4.50).

The mural made extensive use of popular culture; it stretched around three walls of the room in an explosion of collage, imagery and text. The left to right thrust of the work is emphasised through the text, the largest of which reads: “It ain’t necessarily so!! It ain’t ness-hess-airily so!! The things that you’re libel / to read in the Bible

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217 Brown wrote to John Reed that one of these was created in a house in Herne Bay, Auckland, in May - June 1968, and had to be abandoned as Brown could no longer afford rent for the property; the second was in a house in Remuera, Auckland, September - December 1968, which was unable to be finished as the building was due to be demolished. Brown to Reed, c. late June 1968, 9 August, 1968, c. April-May 1969. Reed Papers, SLV MS 13186. In the 9 August letter Brown wrote regarding the murals: ‘I arrived in Auckland owning almost nothing except an obsessive desire to cover vast areas with wild painting; there being nothing else to paint on, I took to the walls of the house I was in, and in two months of night-and-day worked I turned almost the whole interior of the house into one big painting. Two rooms at least were reasonably complete, and the rest was well on the way when I was forced to face the fact I couldn’t stay in the house any longer ... I salvaged a few scraps of the murals ... and even taken out of their rightful context they’re by far the best painting I’ve done – but in place on the walls they represented a new world.’ There are few photographs of these murals, and those that there are do not convey a great amount of detail – see Evatt, *The Pop Art of Mike Brown*, 1972, photographs 23-34.


219 For the circumstances surrounding the creation of the mural, see Clay Lucas ‘Party at the Reeds’ in *It ain’t necessarily so... Mike Brown and the Imitation Realists*, Melbourne: Heide Museum of Modern Art, 2006.

they ain't ness-hess-hairily So!!!” The words were taken from the lyrics of the Gershwin song *It ain’t necessarily so* from the musical *Porgy and Bess*. Another song, the Louis Armstrong classic, *When you’re smiling* was quoted on the back of the dining room door. The ‘It ain’t necessarily so’ text was written in red and edged in white to distinguish it from the surrounding imagery, and was painted early in the construction of the mural. It provides the ‘spine’ of the composition, structuring the mass of material. Areas of quite intricate ‘doodling’ abstraction contrast with the collaged images, predominantly of nude or semi-nude women, and painted comic book-style faces and figures. Stars are repeated across the work, as he had in his Imitation Realist works. The work continues Brown’s practice of deliberate naivety using imagery, iconography and text that connects to the everyday life of the viewer rather than specialised knowledge of contemporary or historic art. It continues the inclusion of text in Brown’s work and his tendency to work in all-encompassing environments, as he had in the house he shared with Crothall in Annandale and the installation of the Imitation Realists exhibitions. The ‘unnatural primitive’ description that he had coined for his earlier work can similarly be applied to this mural to describe Brown’s use of a folk art style that was both heavily influenced by, as well as containing the products of, the commercial media. When the mural is compared to *Mary Lou as Miss Universe* it can be seen how Brown had developed his work, the collaged figures are integrated into the painted elements far more successfully. Working directly onto the walls allowed the work to expand in a seemingly free form manner, which he had started to assume in *Mary Lou* but had been restricted by the dimensions of the board and its conventional portrait orientation. The sprawling form of the work suited its contents, and its seeming message. The phrase ‘It ain’t necessarily so’ questioned religious truths - that one may be ‘liable, to read in the Bible’ - as well as, more broadly, social mores and artistic conventions, through depictions of nudity and the work’s ephemeral nature.

From the selection of Brown’s works discussed in this section we are able to see how Imitation Realism shaped not only Brown’s use of collage and assemblage in his work, but the underlying philosophy of the role and meaning of art in society. He rejected art that was apparently aloof from everyday life, which required extensive theoretical knowledge for the viewer to approach and understand. It formed his view that art could be a tool for social criticism, of ‘revolutionary activity’, to debate both
the meaning of art as well as society more generally. Ultimately, it determined his paradoxical role in the Australian art world as a dedicated practitioner fundamentally opposed to the economics of the art market.

**Conclusion**

As we saw in the previous chapter, the Melbourne exhibition was the highpoint for Imitation Realism as a group. The exhibition allowed the artists to exhibit their work in an all encompassing environment, completely different to what was expected in Australian art. They presented an alternative, work that was completely different to either the abstract or figurative painting that garnered such attention in response to the *Antipodean Manifesto* or the *Recent Australian Painting 1961* exhibition. The response to the exhibition focused on the artists' materials however, rather than the ideas that had motivated their work, which resulted in disillusionment, particularly for Crothall. The differences between the three artists and the directions they were taking in their work meant that working as a group no longer motivated them. The Imitation Realists split up some recrimination between Lanceley on one side and Brown and Crothall on the other.

For Brown in particular, the difference between their approaches to art would be a source of reproach for decades. It was imperative for Brown that art should include critical or political content and for him this was what was at the heart of Imitation Realism. This meant that he and Lanceley would almost inevitably clash over the meaning of Imitation Realism. The importance of Imitation Realism to Lanceley centred on formal properties, the freedom it instigated in his work centred on the use of medium, rather than the model for wholesale artistic revolution that it offered to Brown. This interpretative difference resulted in a series of articles in 1994 between Lanceley and Brown. Brown wrote a two-part article in *Art Monthly* in 1994, written in response to Lanceley's lecture *Craven 'A': Surrealism and the Annandale Imitation Realists*, of which an edited version was published as an article in *Art and Australia*.221 Titled *Kite II*, Brown connects the article to his earlier criticism of Lanceley (and other artists) of the original *Kite*. The reference is appropriate, as the tone bears more than a passing resemblance to the trenchant criticism of the first

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The tone of Lanceley’s piece is nostalgic, recalling an important developmental stage for his work in days long past. Brown, however, wrote in the present tense, such as when he described Lanceley’s ‘betrayal’:

Modern art has often been, among other things, a form of political/social activism, and no modern movement has been more intensely ideological than Imitation Realism. To have no politics in art is, in I.R. terms, a reactionary political stance whose visual counterpart is academicism. Lanceley’s later evolution as an apolitical stylist unaware of the inevitable social implications of his work represented a desertion and even in a sense a betrayal of the I.R cause.222

Lanceley attributed the differences to memory, as ‘there were three Imitation Realists so there are three stories’.223 Regardless of who is correct in each factual detail, the articles serve to overwhelmingly demonstrate the importance of Imitation Realism to each and, as I have concentrated on in this chapter, the different aspects of it that shaped their work. As it was the formal qualities of collage and assemblage that shaped and inspired Lanceley’s subsequent work, it explains the significance that the games of ‘aesthetic chess’, and the use of found and junk materials have in his accounts of Imitation Realism.224 For Brown it was the ‘revolutionary’ potential that had this impact on his work and so it was this that he concentrated on in Kite II, as he did in his introduction to the Power to the People exhibition catalogue, quoted above.225 This can be seen to explain his emphasis on the importance of politics and ideology to Imitation Realism when, as we saw in the group’s statement in the CAS VIC Broadsheet, they were at pains to point out ‘that nothing in the IR ideology is sacrosanct.’226

Crothall’s memory of Imitation Realism, of course, cannot be known. But it can be seen from his work from 1963 until 1967 that his work continued to try and find a form that responded to the entirety of the unique cultural landscape in Australia and New Zealand, rather than the unique physical landscape that had so dominated art discourse of the period. His approach to collage and assemblage changed, becoming

222 Mike Brown, ‘Kite II: Part 1’, 1994, p. 4
225 Brown, Power to the People, 1995, p. 32
more diaristic over the period. In contrast with the deliberately naïve drawings of his Imitation Realist work, his later collages and drawings gain a greater sense of Crothall's own voice.

The path of each of the Imitation Realists after the group disbanded is revealing of the possibilities and experiences of Australian artists in the 1960s. Each remained frustrated with the options open to them in Australian art. Lanceley continued to push boundaries of materials in his exploration of poetic form and ultimately found that he was better able to do this in London than in Sydney. Crothall constantly tried to respond to the peculiarities of his immediate environment, but found that Auckland was as puzzled by the nature of his work as had been Sydney and Melbourne. Brown maintained a critical position toward the art world. In his work he sought new forms to critique societal and artistic mores. Although they each took different directions in their work after Imitation Realism they continued to explore alternatives to what was then prominent in Australian art.
Conclusion

The Imitation Realists presented a radical alternative in Australian art during the early 1960s. Their use of materials, collaboration and exhibition installation strategies were all new to the Australian visual arts scene. Close analysis of their work, exhibitions and statements have shown how the group formed, worked together and then ultimately disbanded. The stated objective of this thesis was to demonstrate how the work of the Imitation Realists both adapted and contributed to changes to art in Australia. This has been achieved by considering their work within the context of the debates that shaped the reception and production of art in Australia, including changing ideas concerning materials, exhibition display and the national identity.

Imitation Realism has rightly been seen as the start of the widespread use of assemblage and popular culture by Australian artists during the 1960s. Viewed in the context of their training and the debates of the Australian art world in the 1950s, it can be seen that the impetus for their work was to find an alternative ‘Australian’ form of art. They rejected the focus on landscape of Australian art, which as Robert Hughes observed, both abstract and figurative artists dwelt upon in the 1950s and early 1960s.¹ Imitation Realism arose as a response to what the young artists saw as the inadequacies of local art. This was as a result of a disconnection that they saw between contemporary art and daily life in Australia. The Imitation Realists found that both abstract and figurative painters were at a remove from modern urban life as they experienced it. They tried to form an authentic mode of art that connected with their experience of life.

Their experiences at the NAS were crucial to the formation of Imitation Realism. The teaching frustrated them but as a result of attending the school they formed a close-knit group of friends who were also eager to find a form of art that engaged them. The ideas Crothall contributed from contemporary New Zealand art offered a different way forward for the group, especially to Brown, who was particularly

¹ Robert Hughes, 'Abs and Figs for Export', Nation, 2 November 1963, p. 18, and cf. his ‘Introduction’ to the exhibition catalogue Australian Painting Today: a survey of the past ten years, Brisbane: Queensland Art Gallery, 1963
impressed with the possibilities he saw in Maori art and other forms of traditional indigenous art from around the Pacific. Their ideas gained material form when they shared a house in Annandale in 1960 and 1961.

In creating their work they focused on the local. Their immediate surroundings furnished them with the materials and subject matter for their work. They sought to emulate what they understood from the practices of PNG and Maori artists, who used materials that were at hand and for whom art was integrated into daily life. Stylistically they were influenced by Maori and Sepik region art in particular, but they also attempted to embed this work into their own conditions by using bright synthetic paints and materials that were abundant in urban Sydney. They incorporated their cultural and physical surrounds, referencing Australian colloquialisms, English literature and American popular music in works made out of scrap timber, bottle tops, plastic toys and house paint.

Assemblage offered them a way to break through the impasse they perceived in contemporary art. It allowed them to embed fragments of actual life into the work and for the work itself to be constructed out of daily refuse. Virtually no precedent existed for their work in Australia, but internationally they were part of a widespread interest in the 'primitive' and the use of found materials. The Imitation Realists shared this practice, using deliberately naïve techniques and styles to create work that sought to capture creativity at its most basic level. Imitation Realists used assemblage to respond to modern life as a whole, not just to modernism within the visual arts. With their use of assemblage they drew attention to their materials' origins outside the gallery, familiar from the everyday life of both the viewer and the artists. Their work was a product of the urban environment in which it was exhibited and created. It was fashioned out of the immediate surroundings of the viewers, presenting a commonality of experience rather than remote landscapes, historic myth or abstract form.

Through the installation of their work the group brought their creative process into the gallery. They created an environment out of their works, in which the whole was an experience greater than its individual parts. They broke with all the earlier conventions for exhibiting modern art at the galleries that hosted the shows. Their practice of assemblage extended from the individual works to the exhibition as a
whole. In Lawrence Alloway’s words, the use of junk in art works meant that ‘proximity and participation replace distance and contemplation as the communicative style of the object.’\(^2\) In using objects garnered from their immediate surroundings they broke down the divide between the viewer, life and the work.

It was assemblage that generated the most attention from art critics. Elwyn Lynn interpreted their work in light of international art and the perception that assemblage was the most advanced form of contemporary art internationally. Lynn’s promotion of their work as a leading form of avant-garde art can be seen as a continuation of the attempts of the CAS NSW to advance the new and innovative in art. The Imitation Realists’ belief in the ‘organic’ nature of art connected them with influential art world figures, in particular Elwyn Lynn and John Reed. With Reed’s imprimatur to exhibit at MOMAA they can be seen as the latest amongst the avant-garde Australian artists the Reeds had championed since the 1930s. Their approval was a sign that the Imitation Realists were potentially the next generation of leading contemporary artists. Younger artists also saw the group leading the way forward. Artists such as Martin Sharp and Vivienne Binns, who had shared similar frustrations to those of Lanceley and Brown while studying at the art school, saw potential open out through the installation of the exhibitions as well as in the works themselves.

The artists, however, especially Crothall, were taken aback at the enthusiasm with which the group was received. For Crothall it was tantamount to failure that they were invited to join the ‘bandwagon of Australian art’ rather than challenging the premise on which it was based. From Crothall’s little-known statements I have shown how he regarded the cultural context of Australia as ‘a dog’s breakfast’, but one that provided an opportunity to find a new form of art. In his work in Auckland from 1965 can be seen an attempt to give expression to the unique cultural combination of ‘Maori, Pakeha and Immigrant’ that shaped the country.

Imitation Realism can be seen to have subsequently inspired numerous, mostly younger artists, to experiment with collage, assemblage and popular culture. By 1964 Mike Brown felt that it had already become passé to use such materials, at least in the work of Colin Lanceley, whom he felt had been relying too heavily on

\(^2\) Lawrence Alloway, ‘Junk Culture’, *Architectural Design*, vol. 31, no. 3 (Mar 1961), p. 23
"'Imitation Realist' clichés', as he phrased it on the *Kite*. The artists were each inspired by different parts of Imitation Realism, but it can be seen as the common foundation in the work of all three. Along with the use of assemblage, Lanceley found inspiration in the literary side of Imitation Realism, which provided the beginnings for his ideal of a poetic quality in his work. This was a substantially different journey to that undertaken by either Brown or Crothall. For them, Imitation Realism was very much a product of their physical location: in an urban centre of the Pacific region. They sought to find an authentic form of expression for their cultural and lived experience.

In the art of the Imitation Realists can be seen a response to both life and art in Australia in the 1950s and 1960s. Their work continues to offer a response to what the artists encountered in everyday life: popular culture, literature, kitsch objects, art history, colloquial speech, household detritus and found objects on the street. They sought to create an alternative to figurative and abstract painting and the debates regarding the nature of 'Australian' art during the 1950s and 1960s. With the introduction of assemblage they proposed a different engagement with their physical and cultural environment. In their work they tried to evoke an idea of creativity as a basic 'primitive' impulse common to humanity and an immediacy that connected with the viewer's own experience of urban Australia. Through their materials and subject matter the Imitation Realists attempted to bring an authentic engagement with the materiality of daily life into art and the art gallery.
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1.14 Artist unknown
_Suspension hook. c. 18-19th C._
East Sepik Province; Middle Sepik River, latmul people
wood, pigment, sago leaf fibre, marsupial skin, height 49.2 cm, Jolika Collection

1.15 Artist unknown
_Couple in embrace. 19th-early 20th C._
Sandaun Province, North Coast; Aitape region; Tumleo People
wood, pigment, height 77.5cm Jolika Collection
1.16 Mike Brown

left:  *Bush Carpenter's Girlfriend*, c. 1961-62
      paint, bottle tops on wooden assemblage  dimensions and location unknown

centre: *Young girl conscious of her front and back view*, c. 1961-62
        synthetic polymer pain on carved wood  15.5 x 12.5 x 4 cm  private collection

        paint on wooden assemblage  dimensions and location unknown
1.17 Colin Lanceley
*Glad family picnic*. 1961-62
oil, mixed media on plywood 122 x 183 cm Bequest of Lucy Swanton 1982, AGNSW
1.18 Colin Lanceley
*Narcissist in Curlers.* c. 1961-62
enamel, oil, synthetic polymer paint, egg cartons, plaster, wire, metal clips on paint tin lid
62 x 33 x 22 cm Heide
1.19 Ross Crothall (with crochet by Elsie Lillian Crothall, c. 1892 - 1965)
left: *Puppy dog trinket box*. c. 1961-62
paper, plastic, ball point pen, cotton thread, crochet 10 x 14 x 14 cm private collection

right: *Pussy cat trinket box*. c. 1961-62
paper, plastic, ball point pen, cotton thread, crochet 4.5 x 11.7 x 12.5 cm private collection

1.20 Ross Crothall,
*Tamakane*. c. 1950
linoprint on paper
Shown here as used for the cover illustration for *Kotuku*, 1950 and 1951, the school magazine of Otahuhu College, NZ.
1.21 Giuseppe Capogrossi (1900 - 1972)
*Surface*. 1956
colour lithograph on paper, dimensions unknown,
Sidney Mishkin Gallery, Baruch College, New York

1.22 Theo Schoon (1916 - 1985)
*Untitled*. c.1967
colour cibachrome photograph, 37 x36.5 cm, John Leech Gallery, Auckland

Schoon photographed the gourds he had grown, one of which he had carved, near
geothermal mud pools in New Zealand.
1.23 Theo Schoon
*Rita Angus* c. 1942
Oil on board, dimensions unknown
Private collection, Christchurch

1.24 Theo Schoon
*Rita Angus* c. 1947
Black and white photograph
Collection of the Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tamaki

1.25 Colin McCahon (1919 - 1987)
*Six Days in Nelson and Canterbury.* 1950
Oil on canvas on board 55.8 x 116.5 cm
Auckland City Art Gallery Toi O Tamaki
1.26 Colin McCahon  
_Crucifixion According to St Mark_. 1947  
oil on canvas on board 80 x 109.5 cm  
Robert McDougal Art Gallery, Christchurch

1.27 Colin McCahon  
_Northland Panels_. 1958  
commercial oil based paint on 8 unstretched canvas panels 177.9 x 81.7 cm, 177.8 x 83.5 cm, 176.1 x 59.5 cm, 176.4 x 55.4 cm, 177.8 x 82.5 cm, 177 x 61 cm, 177.9 x 80.2 cm, 174.6 x 60 cm  
Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa collection
1.28 Ross Crothall
I do, I do, I do. c.1961
paint and coloured fashion illustration on masonite board 46 x 33.5 cm private collection
Mike Brown and Ross Crothall

*Festive cavalier personage with robot bodyguards and lipstick, etc... 1961*

Painting, fibre-tipped pen, ballpoint pen, red wax pencil, enamel, gouache and watercolour on newsprint on composition board 38.5 x 44.5 cm NGA

Illustrations for chapter two
Illustrations for chapter two

2.01 Georges Braque (1882 - 1863)
*Fruit dish and glass.* 1912
charcoal and printed paper pasted on paper 61 x 45 cm private collection

2.02 Pablo Picasso (1881 - 1973)
*Still life with chair caning.* 1912
oil and oil cloth on canvas with rope 27 x 35 cm Musée Picasso
2.03 Pablo Picasso  
*Glass and Bottle of Suze.* 1912  
pasted paper, gouache, charcoal 65.4 x 50.2 cm  
Washington University Gallery of Art, St Louis

2.04 Marcel Duchamp (1887 -1968)  
*L.H.O.O.Q.* 1919 (first version)  
pencil on reproduction, various versions with different dimensions are held in different collections.
2.05 Max Ernst (1891 - 1976)
*Here everything is still floating*. 1920
pastel photoengraving, 10.4 x12.4 cm MoMA

2.06 Kurt Schwitters (1887 - 1948)
*Merzbau*. c. 1933
Construction incorporating wood, paint, found objects. Hannover (destroyed 1943)
2.07 Kurt Schwitters

*Miss Blanche.* 1923

collage 15.9 x 12.7 cm  Sammlung Werner Schmalenbach, Düsseldorf

2.08 Joseph Cornell (1903 - 1972)

*Untitled (Cockatoo with Watch Faces).* c. 1949

construction with inoperable music box 41.3 x 43.2 x 11.3 cm private collection
2.09 Mary Webb (1917 – 1958)
not titled [small collage of printed labels and paper scraps] c.1956
collage of labels and paper scraps on paper 31.5 x 24 cm NGA
2.10 Sidney Nolan (1917 – 1992)
*Collage.* c.1938-40
collage of steel engravings on steel engraving 30.6 x 22.5 cm NGA

2.11 Sydney Nolan
*Collage: The bathers, The studio, The waterfall.* 1940
collage of steel engravings on paper 24.5 x 28.6 NGA
Robert Klippel (1920 – 2001)
(Collage of sculptural form) 1955
cut paper, ink, watercolour on paper dimensions unknown NGA
2.13 Colin Lanceley
*Just like his Uncle Fred.* 1962
Tins, metal, pipes, glass, plastic and oils on board 60.96 x 43.18 x 5.08 cm private collection
2.14 Mike Brown, Ross Crothall and Colin Lanceley
*Byzantium* 1962
oil and mixed media on plywood 183 x 122 cm NGA
2.15 Jean Dubuffet (1901–1985)
*Woman Grinding Coffee.* 1945
plaster, oil, tar, and sand on canvas
116.2 x 88.9 cm  Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

2.16 Jean Dubuffet
*Limbour as a Crustacean.* 1946
oil and sand on canvas 116 x 88.8 cm  Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington DC

2.17 Jean Dubuffet
*The Magician.* 1954
slag and roots 109.8 x 48.2 x 21 cm  (including slag base) MoMA
2.18 Rolfe Hattaway (1907 – 1970)
*untitled*, 1949
pencil on paper 27 x 37 cm private collection

2.19 Rolfe Hattaway
*untitled*, 1949
pencil on paper 28 x 23 cm private collection
2.20 Theo Schoon
*Meringue*. c. 1963
acrylic on board 156.5 x 120.5 cm
Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa

2.21 Karel Appel (1921 - 2006)
*Questioning Children*. 1949
gouache on wood 87.3 x 59.8 x 15.8 cm
Tate Gallery, London
2.22 Corneille (1922 - )
Sun. 1953
watercolour, gouache 30.5 x 43 cm Stedelijk Museum, Schiedam

2.23 John Olsen
Spanish encounter. 1960
oil on hardboard triptych: 183 x 366 cm overall AGNSW
2.24 Karel Appel  
*Pair of Lovers*. 1955  
oil and canvas 93.3 x 130 cm  Gemeente Museum, The Hague

2.25 Antoni Tàpies (1923 - )  
*Figura paisaje en gris*. 1956  
oil and sand on canvas 46 x 114 cm  private collection
2.26 Alberto Burri (1915 – 1995)
*Sacco*. 1953
hessian, canvas and stone 44 x 36 cm private collection

2.27 Enrico Baj (1924 – 2003)
*General*. 1961
oil with sisal, silk, wool, glass, cotton, enamel, wood and various metals 146 x 110 x 5 cm NGA
2.28 Elwyn Lynn (1917-1997)
The Raft. 1956
oil on hardboard 91.4 x 121.9 cm QAG

2.29 Elwyn Lynn
Ebb. 1964
mixed media on canvas 121.9 x 152.4 cm NGV
2.30 Richard Hamilton (1922 - )
Just what is it that makes today's homes so different, so appealing?. 1956
collage 26 cm x 24.8 cm Kunsthalle Tübingen

2.31 Robert Rauschenberg (1925 – 2008)
Collection. (formerly Untitled) 1954
oil, paper, fabric, wood, and metal on canvas 203.2 x 243.84 x 8.89 cm San Francisco
Museum of Modern Art
2.32 Robert Rauschenberg
*Reservoir.* 1961
oil, wood, graphite, fabric, metal, and rubber on canvas 217.2 x 158.7 x 39.4 cm Smithsonian American Art Museum

2.33 Jasper Johns
(1930 - )
*Flag.* 1954–55
encaustic, oil, and collage on fabric mounted on plywood 107.3 x 154 cm MoMA
2.33.1 Detail of *Flag*.

2.34 Jasper Johns
*Target with Plaster Casts*. 1955
encaustic and collage on canvas with objects 129.5 x 111.8 cm private collection
2.35 Richard Stankiewicz (1922 - 1983)
We Two Are So Alike. 1958
welded steel  184.2 x 101.6 x 55.9 cm
New York University Art Collection

2.36 Claes Oldenburg (1929 - )
The Store. opened 1 December 1961
In cooperation with Green Gallery at 107
East 2nd Street in New York City.
Temporary environment with plaster and
paint sculptures, shop display furniture.
Illustrations for chapter three

3.01 Museum of Modern Art, Tavistock Pl, c.1958
From the proposal for the *Museum of Modern Art of Australia*, 1958

3.02 Museum of Modern Art of Australia, Tavistock Place, Melbourne
*Exhibition of Australian domestic architecture*, October-November 1960
State Library of Victoria
3.03 Wolfgang Sievers (1913 - 2007), Photovision '61 exhibition at Museum of Modern Art, Flinders Street, Melbourne, Victoria, 1961, 1961 photograph, 19.2 x 24.8 cm Wolfgang Sievers photographic archive, NLA

3.04 Wolfgang Sievers
Part of Photovision '61 exhibition at Museum of Modern Art, Flinders Street, Melbourne, Victoria, 1961, 1961 photograph 18.5 x 24 cm Wolfgang Sievers photographic archive, NLA
3.05 Sketch plan of the *Annandale Imitation Realist* exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art of Australia showing the approximate placement of installations and larger works.

Explanatory notes

i. Stairs to gallery

ii. Office space

iii. Gallery entrance. The doors and panels on either side were Perspex screens with geometric designs. As shown here, they were held open during the Imitation Realists' exhibition.

iv. *The Horrible Lousy Chicken Coop*

v. Ladder used to display works

vi. Shelf displaying works

vii. Metal wire screens

viii. Installation made from wire screens

ix. *Stink pipe Orpheus*

x. *Glad Family picnic*

xi. *Mary-Lou*

xii. Archway leading to *Mary-Lou*

xiii. Doorway to second gallery

xiv. *The Big Barb*

xv. *Byzantium*

xvi. Dashed lines indicate the angled sections of ceiling
3.06 Entrance to the Annandale Imitation Realist exhibition showing the archway the artists constructed with the inscription by Brown. Through the archway can be seen the Horrible Lousy Chicken Coop. Through the panels of the door on the left can be seen the ladder covered with small artworks. Along the left hand side of the ceiling can be seen the long paper banner. Beneath it are the benches and screens angled against the wall to create different layers and levels to display the works, from one of the screens Lanceley’s Green footballer playing the field can be seen (see close-up 3.06.1). Hanging from the ceiling can be seen Crothall’s Shower of raindrops and clothes-peg. Through the screen to the right of the door can be seen a row of works hung at varying depths from the wall on the right. In the lower right corner a glimpse of the banner that wended its way up the staircase can be seen.
3.06.1 Close-up of the view from the entrance to the exhibition to the works on the left-hand side of the gallery, including Lanceley's *The green footballer playing the field* (centre) hanging above Brown's *Mr Hodge* and Crothall's *Personified Organization Man* on the floor. On the screen in the background can be seen the verso of Brown’s *Headlights Orpheus on stilts*. 
3.07 rear of The Horrible Lousy Chicken Coop
On the right-hand side is Mike Brown's *Hoop-de-lah* and on the left is Mike Brown and Ross Crothall's *The Transtasmanian.*
3.07.1 Detail showing Brown's *Hoop-de-lah*
3.08 On the far right can be seen part of Brown and Crothall's The Transtasmanian. Inside of The Horrible Lousy Chicken Coop: on inside left wall are two unidentified works: the upper one appears to be by Brown, as it resembles his style of drawing and in particular the grid-like composition has some resemblance to Quiet People (3.10). On the back wall hang (from upper left): Crothall, Buzzah Yang, partially obscured by an abstract possibly by Brown, to the right of which is Crothall's Over the peaches and under the corn, Portrait of moi meme, and Suitcase. On the far right is an unidentified drawing. Along the middle row (left to right): was an unknown drawing, Mike Brown's The little king, Lanceley's Green grub, which hung above Brown's Woman bedazed and The fabulous wacko beaut. Along the lower row (left to right) were Crothall's Saint and Probably an enemy spy.
3.09 Mike Brown
*The little king.* c. 1961-62
Buttons, shells, clothes pegs, shelving brackets, safety pins, plastic lips, pencils, badges, spectacles, nails, fibre bristles, wood, metal, ribbon, enamel, synthetic polymer paint on wooden panel. 43.5 x 29 x 15 cm. Heide
3.10 Mike Brown
*Quiet people.* c. 1961-62
gouache, lithograph, pen on cardboard 44 x 70.6 cm  NGA

3.11 Ross Crothall
*Portrait of three artists in Cadbury’s chocolate.* 1961-62
mixed media on wood panels 37 x 52.6 cm  Heide
In the foreground of this picture is a ladder covered with small works. These include, hanging at the top, Crothall's Mad Woman and on the rung to the right his small wooden assemblage Ignoble Spirit. On the rung beneath that was a small carved wooden head which rested above a collaborative piece by Crothall, Brown and Magda Kohn, Men of doomy destiny. This was partly obscured by the painting of a snake's head on a paint tin lid, which was above Crothall's Mask of a sociable fellow. To the right of all of these was an wooden assemblage sculpture of Lanceley's (title unknown). The work at the base is unidentified, but stylistically suggests Crothall, it appears to be an assemblage made from the side of a wooden crate, paint, metal bottle tops and other found objects.

Hanging from the ceiling, to the left of the ladder, was Crothall's Happy Astronaut. Underneath it was Suddenly last summer by Mike Brown (3.13.1). In the background, behind the ladder can be seen half of Lanceley's The green footballer playing the field. Above it was the paper banner that was installed from the ceiling. To the right, also hanging from the ceiling can be seen Crothall's Shower of rain drops and clothes pegs.

On the right hand side of this photograph can be see the installations the Imitation Realists constructed from the wire screens in the gallery (see enlargement below).
3.13 On the left-hand side is the inner wall of The Horrible Lousy Chicken Coop. At the top, the right edge of Festive cavalier personage with robot bodyguards and lipstick is visible and underneath it is Crothall’s Face only. On the wall behind Coop the right hand edge of Portrait of three artists in Cadbury’s chocolate is just visible, to the right of which is the ladder with a large assemblage figure on the side. On the floor beside the ladder is Lanceley’s sculpture Big smile. On the screen at the far right the left side of Lanceley’s Green footballer playing the field can be seen.

On the wall above Big smile is Brown’s Suddenly last summer (see detail below) with Crothall’s Halt the bus to the right. These hang above the shelf on which stand, from left to right, Crothall’s Self portrait with a pot by Theo Schoon, his two trinket boxes, an unidentified sculpture made with a bottle, Brown’s Motor scooter moll, a small unidentified piece, Crothall’s Suntanned Queensland Eta hot-dog, another small unidentified piece, a sculpture by Lanceley, and unidentified drawings on board (see detail).

In the foreground is a freestanding installation made out of wire mesh hanging screens. The central panel of this installation was resting at an angle. In the foreground can be seen Crothall’s Clown at large on a windy day (3.22).
3.13.1 Enlargement showing Mike Brown’s *Suddenly last summer*, 1961 enamel, synthetic polymer paint, assemblage on wood 61 x 118 x 9 cm private collection

3.13.2 Enlargement showing the shelf and the artworks above and beneath it.
3.14 Ross Crothall
*Suntanned Queensland Eta Hot-Dog.*
plastic, labels, synthetic polymer paint, string, wire, buttons, bottle tops, foil, glass bottle 40 x 10.5 cm private collection

3.15 Ross Crothall
*This is Tom* c.1961
collage with red & blue ballpoint pen on board 29.1 x 56.8 cm AGSA
3.16 Colin Lanceley
*The Green Footballer Playing the Field*. 1961
oil, enamel and polymer on paper on composition board 85 x 122 cm AGSA

3.17 Mike Brown
*Mr Hodge*. [recto] c. 1961 enamel and gouache on composition board
*Hodge Podge*. [verso] c. 1961 gouache on composition board
45.8 h x 31.4 w NGA
3.18 At the top of this photograph can be seen the end of the paper banner that ran along the ceiling (3.12-13). Beneath this is Lanceley's painting 'with a tail' that he described in the catalogue and Lanceley's painting with found objects encrusted into the surface in the bush beside the water.
3.19 View down the length of the first gallery. In the bottom left hand corner can be seen the edge of the ladder which was used as a stand to display works. Above this can be seen Crothall’s *Shower of clothes pegs and raindrops* hanging from the ceiling.

Brown’s construction *The Horrible Lousy Chicken Coop* is in the foreground on the right. Above it hangs a painting believed to be by Colin Lanceley. To the left of *Coop* is an installation on which hangs Brown’s *The fabulous patriot and his wife* (centre of the front screen). Above and below it are works that cannot be identified. On the reverse (behind the assemblage figure) hung Crothall’s *Toothpaste filler on the rampage* (3.20).

On the left, at the rear of the gallery can be seen a number of wire screen installed like a folding screen on which hung the work believed to be Brown’s *The people eater*. On the other side was Crothall’s *Very elegant woman* (3.25).
3.20 Ross Crothall
Toothpaste filler on the rampage. c. 1961-62
synthetic polymer paint and glass jars on timber and plywood
Heide
3.21 Mike Brown
*The fabulous patriot and his wife.* c.1961-62
synthetic polymer and enamel paint on wood and metal with wool, 76.6 x 61 cm, Heide
3.22 Ross Crothall
*Clown at large on a windy day*. c. 1961-62
synthetic polymer paint, ink, coloured pencil and paper on composition board
69.5 x 63.5 cm Heide

3.23 Mike Brown, Ross Crothall and Magda Kohn
*Girl of the Midnight Sun* 1961
paint and collage on board, dimension unknowns, whereabouts unknown
possibly: *The People Eater* c.1961-2
painting on wood, dimensions unknown, whereabouts unknown

In the background on the left can be seen a glimpse of *Mary-Lou*. 
3.25 Ross Crothall
*Very elegant woman.* c1961-62
wood and plywood, metal heads of paper-binders 57.2 x 29.9 x 4.4 cm NGA
3.26 Ross Crothall
*Madly petrified soul expecting disaster.* c. 1961-62
wood, cork and nails on board 69 x 46 x 8.3 cm
private collection

3.27 Ross Crothall
*Gross debutante.*
carved wood, wood, metal bottle tops, buttons, nails, drawing pins, costume jewellery, chain, synthetic polymer paint, enamel on plywood
170 x 34 cm private collection
The back left hand corner of the first gallery. On the left is Lanceley’s Self Portrait, shown here with its original backing, the underside of a coffee table (cf. 1.04). To the right is the work believed to be Peggy Gale’s Angel Face. Hanging in front of it is a work by Brown, title unknown, which is beside Lanceley’s Stink pipe Orpheus. On the back wall of the gallery is a painting which shows the influence of indigenous Pacific arts on the group, title and artist unknown. On the right hand side part of Lanceley’s Glad family picnic can be seen (1.17).
3.29 Mike Brown
*Mary-Lou* (1962 state)
Mary-Lou installed in the Melbourne exhibition with Ross Crothall on the left, Colin Lanceley on the right, and Brown underneath, continuing to work on the painting (see enlargement). Part of Crothall and Brown’s *Renovated Intaglio* can be seen on the wall to the right.
3.29.1 Enlarged detail of Mary-Lou
3.30 The back right-hand corner of the first gallery. Viewers were directed (lower left) to 'Pass beneath this arch and visit Mary-Lou', Brown's large painting with found objects that can be glimpsed through the arch. The work above this message was Lanceley's Coming over Cloudy. To the right, on top of the arch, was a small unidentified sculpture and Brown's Winged Orpheus. The painting underneath is unidentified. The work partially visible on the screen to the right is Brown's Interior view of where we're up to. The sculpture on the plinth is Brown's Bush carpenter's girlfriend and the painting above, title unknown, is by Lanceley.
3.31 Mike Brown
*Interior view of where we're up to.* c.1961
oil, enamel, pastel, pencil and collage of mixed media on composition board
84.5 x 78.9 x 2.8 cm NGA
3.32 Doorway from the first gallery into the second. Lanceley’s Welcome J is on the left, Brown’s Mug Lair is to the right on the plinth, on which is Crothall’s Grandma Moses, hanging above and on the right side are two unidentified works. To the right of the doorway is Brown’s Shangri-La Corroboree and Crothall’s Bus Stop. Through the doorway is Lanceley’s Here we come on the Double Decker
3.32.1 Enlarged detail of Mug lair (left) and Here we come on the Double Decker (right).

3.33 Mike Brown
Shangri-la corroboree. 1961
enamel, gouache and pen and ink on wood panel 21 x 43.5 cm NGA
Some of the works in this image seem to have been put in place for the photograph, including Brown and Crothall's *Symbolic diseases of the body politic* (see enlargement) in the left foreground and Lanceley's *Stink pipe Orpheus* and Crothall and Brown's *The Transtasmanian* on either side of Crothall's *The big barb*, which is shown in the position where it was located for the exhibition. In the doorway can be seen Crothall's *The archaeopologist* and next to it on the wall is an unknown abstract, in front of this is another unknown piece, a carved painted sculpture (cf. 3.35). On the left-hand side of the photograph can be seen the edge of Lanceley's *Antipodean Snow Woman*. 
Enlargement from previous image: Mike Brown and Ross Crothall, *Symbolic diseases of the body politic.*
In the foreground is Crothall's *The big barb*, which obscures two unknown works — on the wall is an abstract painting with timber assemblage pieces, which hangs behind a brightly painted, carved piece of timber. This bears the influence of both Maori and Sepik sculpture, as does *Mug Lair*, by Brown with Crothall, which stands in the doorway. The work believed to be Crothall's *The Archaeopologist* hangs in the doorway. On the left, above the light switch, is a wooden assemblage by Crothall, *Valiant Captain Krushev-Orph*, beneath the light switch is a board with two drawings mounted on it.

Through the doorway can be seen the installation of wire screens, that were erected like a folding screen. The back of the work that is believed to be Brown's *The people eater* can be seen on the other side of the screen on which hangs Crothall's *Very elegant woman*. These obscure the view of Crothall's *Gross Debutante*, only the feet of which can be seen (see enlargement below.)
3.35.1 Enlargement of previous image.
3.36 Colin Lanceley standing beside Ross Crothall's *The Big Barb*. 
3.37 View showing most of the second gallery from near the doorway. The largest collaboration between Lanceley, Brown and Crothall, Byzantium, dominates the room. It has been installed as a figure with Brown’s The happy cat as the face. To the right of Byzantium is Timothy Loves Sonya, hanging above an unidentified drawing. The work on the far right is Crothall’s Wooden Curtain.

To the left of Byzantium is Lanceley’s painting on a wok, Mask of a Stupid Fellow. Underneath it is a painting by Crothall, title unknown, that also appears in the portfolio shot of Crothall’s work and The scow (3.64-5).

At the top left of the photograph is Crothall’s Young aesthetick cow (3.39), hanging above a painting by Lanceley on a table top. This was above Crothall’s Woman driver (3.39). The painting to the right of the Aesthetick cow is unknown, this was hanging above Lanceley’s Countdown’s memories of the Great War which was on the wall at the back, behind the unknown painting attached to the pole and Crothall and Brown’s Symbolic diseases of the body politic (3.34.1). Crothall’s Captain Orpheus can be seen on the floorboards in front of Symbolic diseases.
3.38 Ross Crothall
*The young aesthetick cow.* c. 1961-62
synthetic polymer paint, cardboard and metal on composition board 73 x 87 cm  Heide
3.39 Ross Crothall
*Woman Driver.* c. 1961-62
synthetic polymer on metal scales 30 x 20 x 14.6 cm Heide
3.40 Ross Crothall
*Captain Orpheus*. c. 1961-62
wood, plastic, iron, cork and cardboard assemblage sculpture 14 x 26.5 x 14 cm Heide
3.41 L to R: Ross Crothall, Mike Brown and Colin Lanceley, with Byzantium. Works are as described for illustration 3.37.
3.42 Lanceley, Brown and Crothall’s Byzantium is on the left. Brown’s The happy cat was installed as the face above Byzantium. To the right is Timothy Loves Sonya, hanging above an unidentified drawing. The work on the far right is Crothall’s Wooden Curtain. The works on the wall to the right cannot be identified.
3.43 All these works appear to be by Crothall; on the top right is *Woman without a stitch on* (3.46) above an unidentifiable drawing. To the left is *I do I do I do do do* (1.28) above *Van Gogh today*. The works to the left of these have not been identified.
In the top right can be seen the corner of Crothall, Kohn and Brown's *Mr Unpredictable*. To the right were two drawings and a circular painting that cannot be identified, although the drawing at the top can be identified as one of Crothall's. Under them is Crothall and Brown's *Sailing to Byzantium* (1.10). To the left was Brown's *Mirg's Migration into Heaven-Heaven* (3.45), which hung above another unidentifiable drawing. The large work to the left is Crothall's *Cigarette mural*. The works further left are as described for 3.43.
3.45 Mike Brown
*Mtg’s Migration into Heaven-Heaven*. 1961
pen, ink, gouache, enamel on newspaper on composition board 36 x 56.6 cm QAG

3.46 Ross Crothall
*Woman without a stitch on*. 1961/62
ink on paper, synthetic polymer paint on board 56 x 69 cm (image) University of Queensland
3.47 Byzantium viewed from the side, NGA paintings store.
3.48 Detail of Byzantium
3.49 Detail of Byzantium
3.50 Detail of Byzantium
3.51 Photograph of some of Colin Lanceley's works in the exhibition. The titles are not known for the round painting at right, the work above it and the one to that work's right. The title is also unknown for the assemblage figure with 'Rowan' marked on its leg, the small sculpture on the wooden stool or the painting with collage leaning against the heater. The sculpture on the heater is Narcissist in curlers, to the right is Antipodean snow woman and then Spread out poodle and Saintly woman. On the floor underneath Spread out poodle is Just like his uncle Fred (2.13). To its right is Big smile. Above Saintly woman is Coming over cloudy. On the right can be seen part of Mask of a stupid fellow (3.37).
3.52 Lanceley's *The green footballer playing the field* is at the top and his *The glad family picnic* the bottom of this image. The photograph seems intended to record his works in the exhibition as neither of them were hung in the second gallery.

Through the doorway into the first gallery can be seen Brown and Kohn's collaboration, *Before & After* and an ink drawing, likely one by Crothall, that has been ripped into two and mounted on board. These hang on the second of the installations the artists made from wire screens in the first gallery (3.13, 3.19).
On the far left and right of this image can be seen Brown’s *Interior view of where we’re up to* and *Mug Lair* atop a plinth on which Crothall’s *Grandma Moses* can be seen. Otherwise, the works are all by Lanceley and the photograph seems intended to record more of his works, as the large painting, *Countdown’s memories of the Great War*, and the two unknown paintings above it were all exhibited elsewhere in the gallery. The work to the right is *Welcome J* and above it to the left is an unknown painting.
This photographs record works by Brown. It is not known where these pieces were shown in the exhibition but the spot they are shown in here (in front of the doorway opposite the entrance to the main gallery) was occupied by Lanceley’s Glad family picnic. The work in the top right is Neon Blush (3.60), hanging above Easter Island Bunyip (1.11) which is to the right of Night of the Coon moon which is underneath an unidentified work.
3.55 Works by Crothall in the exhibition but not all exhibited as pictured here. At the centre is Crothall’s *Cigarette mural*. To the right is *The archeopologist*, above *Me playing the role of the smoker*. On the floor, from left to right were two of the trinket boxes, an unknown sculpture, a collaboration with Kohn, *A study in Siamese twins, Captain Orpheus, Valiant Captain Krushev-Orph, The three disgraces and Very elegant woman*. In the upper left was *Woman without a stitch on*, above *Wooden curtain*. The titles are unknown for the works above and to the right of *Woman without a stitch on* and to the right of *Wooden curtain*. 
3.56 Mike Brown
*Hey, mumma*. c. 1961-62
mixed media on composition board 70.5 x 69.5 cm Heide
3.57 Ross Crothall
Tourists in Search of the Salt Mines. c. 1961-62
gouache, synthetic polymer paint, pencil, coloured ballpoint pens and printing ink on board
54 x 70 cm  NGA

3.58 Mike Brown and Ross Crothall
The Ironworkers Unite.  c. 1961-62
felt-tipped pen, coloured pencil, acrylic paint on paper mounted on board, chain 35.9 x 43.6 cm  Ballarat Fine Art Gallery
3.59 Ross Crothall
*Buggared Car.* [later known as *Car wreckage.*] 1961 (7th Jan)
bull-point pen, silver paint and crayon on paper, on board 38 x 51.2cm private collection

3.60 Mike Brown
*Neon Blush.* c. 1961-62
synthetic polymer paint on carved timber panel private collection
3.61 Ross Crothall
*Expecting to conceive.* c. 1961-62
synthetic polymer paint and mixed media on wood 65.5 x 22.5 x 6.3 cm Heide
3.62 Ross Crothall
*La Petite Fleur Avec Les Ham Sandwiches.* c. 1961-62
synthetic polymer paint, nails, twine, rope on wood 97 x 65.6 x 6.5 cm  Heide
3.63 Mike Brown
*John the Baptist*, 1962
beaten copper 30 x 22.2 x 7.5 cm private collection

3.64 Lanceley, Crothall and Brown, *The scow*, 1962, MOMAA

*The Scow* was an installation created from Imitation Realist works after the exhibition had finished. It is not known how long it remained in the museum after the exhibition had finished. Works that can be identified include *Stink pipe Orpheus*, *The big barb*, *The fabulous patriot and his wife* and *Mug lair on a chair* (the assemblage sculpture including a wooden chair).
3.65 Rear of The scow. Works that can be identified from this angle are Headlights Orpheus on stilts and the verso of The big barb.

3.66 Pablo Picasso
*Guernica*. 1937
oil on canvas 349 cm x 776 cm Museo Reina Sofia, Madrid
3.67 Ross Crothall, Mike Brown and Colin Lanceley
The Café Balzac mural 1962
Left and centre panels: oil, synthetic polymer paint and mixed media collage; right panel: car
duco, enamel paint, sand and plaster, oil, synthetic polymer paint and mixed media collage
on plywood panels triptych: 195.3 x 467.4cm (overall) QAG
3.68 Ross Crothall, left panel of *The Café Balzac mural.*
3.69 Mike Brown, centre panel of *The Café Balzac mural.*
3.70 Colin Lanceley, right panel of The Café Balzac mural.
Illustrations for chapter four

4.01 Garry Shead (1942 - )
Wahroonga Lady in her naked lunch. 1965,
oil and fabric on canvas on board, 92 x 122 cm, private collection

4.02 Colin Lanceley
The Royal Family Lairo Suite
Heroic Personage (No. 1). 1962
oil and newspaper on board 91.5 x 60 cm private collection
4.03 Colin Lanceley
The Royal Family Lairo Suite
The Great Dictator (no.2). 1963
assemblage and mixed media on board 121.5 x 91 cm private collection

4.04 Colin Lanceley
The Royal Family Lairo Suite
Princess Excelsior Magnificent (No. 3). 1962-63
mixed media on board 132.5 x 99.5 cm private collection
4.05 Colin Lanceley

Love me stripper. 1963

oil and assemblage on plywood 188.3 x 122 cm  NGA

4.05.1 Love me stripper (detail)
4.06 Mike Brown
Mary-Lou as Miss Universe, 1962-64
paint, collage and assemblage on paper, dimensions unknown, destroyed by the artist
4.07 Colin Lanceley
*The greatest show on earth.* 1963
oils and found objects on plywood 122 x 244 cm private collection

4.08 Robert Klippel
*Opus 102.* 1961
brazed and welded steel, found objects 73.7 cm AGNSW
4.09 Colin Lanceley
*Temple of Earthly Delights.* 1963
oil, enamel and assemblage on wood 218 x 96 cm private collection

4.10 Colin Lanceley
*Dry Salvages.* 1963-64
oil and assemblage on plywood panels triptych, 187.6 x 374.4 x 18 cm overall AGNSW
4.11 Colin Lanceley
*Kindly shoot the piano player.* 1964
oil and enamel on mixed media construction 183 x 153 cm private collection

4.12 Colin Lanceley
*Gemini.* 1964
assemblage 305 x 305 x 21 cm overall AGNSW
4.13 Colin Lanceley
*The Great Aviator (Icarus)*. 1964-65
carved and painted wood with rice paper 280 x 214 cm  NGA
4.14 Ross Crothall
Abstract no. 1. 1963
oil on composition board 119.5 x 91.8 cm Heide

4.15 Ross Crothall
Australia’s First political painting: star and environment. 1964
oil and assemblage on composition board 91.8 x 119.5cm QAG
4.16 *Ross Crothall* exhibition, New Vision Gallery, Auckland, July 1966 (see enlargements for details of works)
4.16.1 On the far left can be seen part of *Bottletop necklace* and *Very merry mere*, behind which is *Landscape with butterflies*, c. 1966, collage on wood, dimensions and location unknown. Then from left to right are:

- *The alphabet crazy computer works*, c. 1966, paint on wooden assemblage, dimensions unknown, private collection
- Three smaller unknown works surround *Put the lace how you want it*. c. 1966 assemblage, 33 x 18 cm, location unknown.
- *Green cosmic star*, c. 1966 paint, assemblage on wood, dimensions and location unknown.
- *Probably an enemy spy*, c. 1961-62, mixed media on paper on board, dimensions and location unknown.

Above *Green cosmic star* and *Probably an enemy spy* are two works that are unidentified, as is the hanging sculpture on the far right, made from wooden assemblage and paint on pegboard.

4.16.2 *Tribute to Theo Schoon*, c. 1966, Theo Schoon drawings, paint and assemblage on board, dimensions and location unknown.
4.16.3 Tribute to Mike Brown and Colin Lanceley, c. 1966, Colin Lanceley's Spread out Poodle surrounded by collage, paint and a Mike Brown drawing (lower right) on wood panels, dimensions and location unknown.

4.16.4 Tribute to Colin McCahon, c. 1966, collage, paint on board, dimensions and location unknown.
4.16.5 The work in the upper left is a collaboration between Crothall and Mike Brown, *Ye olde 'cosmic comic rabbit'*. c. 1962-66, ink and collage on board, dimensions and location unknown.

Lower left is a collaboration between Crothall and TV Wright, *The dogs with long noses*. c. 1966, ink and collage on board, dimensions and location unknown.

Upper right: *Untitled*. c. 1966 assemblage on board 22 x 30.5 cm, location unknown.

Lower right: unknown
4.17 *Ross Crothall* exhibition, New Vision Gallery, Auckland, July 1966 (see enlargements for details of works)
4.17.1 Enlargement showing, from left to right:
What would Barry Humphries think of it all?, c. 1966, collage on plywood, dimensions and location unknown.
My sister Edna's place, c. 1966, collage, assemblage on plywood, dimensions and location unknown.
Two unknown works
Sentimental wall decoration – inscription 'NZ pure schmaltz', c. 1966, assemblage, paint on plywood and pegboard, dimensions and location unknown.
Two unknown works.
The work on the top right is Vigour and sting' – inscribed: 'Is it an octopus – or a dog?', c. 1966, pen on paper with collage on board, dimensions and location unknown.
Underneath it is 'The Avocado Cinema' – nostalgia for the good old movies, paint, string, collage on board.
The works on the floor, leaning against the wall, are unknown.

4.17.2 Enlargement showing, hanging in the foreground, the two halves of what was The Transtasmanian (3.07, 3.34). On the left is Very merry mere and on the right is Fish mobile. Both c. 1966, paint and collage on wooden assemblage, dimensions and location unknown.
On the wall behind, to the right of the ladder, is Questions of culture are still standing (???), c. 1966, collage and paint on board, dimensions and location unknown. This hangs above three unknown works. The boards behind Fish mobile are believed to be the Frottages which the buyer could 'take home and finish themselves.'
4.17.3 Enlargement showing, from the left, three more of what are believed to be the Frottages. The two works to their right are unknown. The work on the far left of the back wall is An expressionist's portrait of his impressions of a critic. c. 1966 paint on hardboard (reassembled from an earlier painting), dimensions and location unknown. The large painting on the back wall is Cave Drawing, 1966 style – example of Futurist art (!), c. 1966, paint, collage on plywood and pegboard, dimensions and location unknown. To the right is Bottletop Necklace. 1962 bottle tops on string, displayed on white board, dimensions unknown, private collection.
4.18 Ross Crothall exhibition, New Vision Gallery, Auckland, July 1966 (see enlargements for details of works)
4.18.1 On the left hand side are the ‘Maori rafter patterns’ that are not individually identified. Then from left to right are:
Tin butterfly fricasses. c. 1966 collage and tin on board
Being ... (ABBCDschmalzy). c. 1966 collage, paint on plywood
Terrors of the screaming night. c. 1966 pva glue, paint, collage on plywood

4.18.2 Left to right:
Very merry mere. 1961-66, collage, paint on wood
Mr Abernathy sits inside his computer and drives it like a car. c. 1966 collage and assemblage on wood panels, dimensions and location unknown.
Crothall, Magda Kohn and Mike Brown, Girl of the midnight sun. 1961 assemblage, paint on board, dimensions and location unknown.
My ‘Post-flyingworth’ cameo, c. 1966, assemblage, dimensions and location unknown.
The two pieces on the far right are unidentified.
4.18.3 Left to right:
The alphabet, the sea, the imprint of a fossilized butterfly, c. 1966, collage, paint on wood panels, dimensions and location unknown.
Nephew Bryce’s car-door, c. 1966, paint, collage on car door, dimensions and location unknown.
What would Barry Humphries think of it all?, c. 1966, collage on plywood, dimensions and location unknown.

4.19 Ross Crothall with The Alphabet Crazy Computer Works
4.20 On the left is Cave Drawing, 1966 style – example of Futurist art (!), paint, collage on plywood and pegboard. Behind Crothall is Bottletop Necklace. 1962 bottle tops on string, displayed on white board. To the right is Landscape with butterflies. c. 1966 collage on wood.
4.21 Crothall holding an unknown work with, in the background, *Sentimental wall decoration – inscription 'NZ pure schmaltz'*. c. 1966 assemblage, paint on plywood and pegboard.
4.22 Ross Crothall
*Terrors of the Screaching Night!* c. 1966
pva glue, paint, collage on plywood, dimensions and location unknown.
Mr Abernathy sits inside his computer and drives it like a car. c. 1966 collage and assemblage on wood panels, dimensions and location unknown.
4.24 Crothall with *What would Barry Humphries think of it all?*. c. 1966 collage on plywood
4.25 left: Crothall, Magda Kohn and Mike Brown, *Girl of the midnight sun*. 1961 assemblage, paint on board
right: Crothall *My 'Post-Iltingworth' cameo* assemblage
4.26 Ross Crothall
*Study* October 1966
synthetic polymer paint with collage on plywood 48 x 48 cm NGA
4.27 Ross Crothall
*Study* November 1966
synthetic polymer paint, collage on plywood 69 x 60 cm NGA
4.28 Ross Crothall
Study November – December 1966
collage on plywood NGA
4.29 Ross Crothall
*Cuppa* December 1966
collage on cardboard 70.2 x 60 cm NGA
4.30 Ross Crothall
OBZ December 1966
collage on plywood NGA
4.31 Ross Crothall
Unfinished Sketch January 1967
collage on cardboard 66.4 x 44.8 cm (irreg.) NGA

For conservation reasons this work could not be unwrapped from plastic wrapping, small parts of the work are obscured in the photograph by masking tape on the plastic.
4.32 Ross Crothall
*Artistic sketch* January 1967
collage on cardboard 42.8 x 64 cm NGA
For conservation reasons this work could not be unwrapped from plastic wrapping, small parts of the work are obscured in the photograph by masking tape on the plastic on the top and bottom edges.

4.33 Ross Crothall
*Horizon Line* January 1967
collage with ink on cardboard 31 x 38.2 cm NGA
For conservation reasons this work could not be unwrapped from plastic wrapping, parts of the work are obscured in the photograph by masking tape on the plastic on the left and right edges.
4.34 Ross Crothall
A-B-SEE January 1967
collage with ink on cardboard
60.4 x 39.8 cm
For conservation reasons this work could not be unwrapped from plastic wrapping, small parts of the work are obscured in the photograph by masking tape on the plastic on the top and bottom edges.
4.35 Ross Crothall

*Experimental Drawing* January 1967

ink, collage on cardboard  65.8 x 42.2 cm  NGA

For conservation reasons this work could not be unwrapped from plastic wrapping, small parts of the work are obscured in the photograph by masking tape on the plastic on the top and bottom edges.
4.36 Ross Crothall  
*Practice Board*. January 1967  
mixed media and collage on timber boards 56 x 97 x 5 cm  Heide

4.37 Colin McCahon  
*A Candle in a Dark Room*. 1947  
oil on board 38 x 31 cm  Auckland Art Gallery
4.38 Colin McCahon
*Victory over death 2.* 1970
synthetic polymer paint on unstretched canvas 207.5 x 597.7 cm NGA

4.39 Mike Brown
*Seven lonely days.* 1962
synthetic polymer paint on composition board 73.7 x 49.0 cm private collection
4.40 Mike Brown
*Pleasures of smoking*, 1962
synthetic polymer paint on composition board 69 x 48.4 cm NGA
4.41 Mike Brown
*The Kite.* [originally titled: *Sydney, Mar 1964*] 1964
gouache and collage on paper and wood 149 x 155.3 cm (irreg) Heide

4.42 Mike Brown
*Birth of a star.* 1963
synthetic polymer paint on composition board 91 x 91.5 cm QAG
4.43 Mike Brown
*Folding Pictorial.* 1964
enamel and synthetic polymer on composition board 122 x 183 cm Heide

4.44 Mike Brown
*No Trouble in Paradise.* 1964
enamel and synthetic polymer on composition board 91.5 x 183 cm MCA
4.45 Mike Brown
Kitchen utensils (Christmas present), 1963
mixed media and found objects on timber 54 x 54 x 15.2 cm Heide
4.46 Mike Brown

*Big mess*. 1964

synthetic polymer paint and collage on plywood  183 x 91 cm  private collection
4.47 Mike Brown
*Peggy Joan*. 1965
gouache on masonite 120.7 x 90.2 cm private collection

4.48 Mike Brown
*Windier day still*. 1965
oil on board 124.4 x 93.7 cm La Trobe University
4.49 Mike Brown
Window blind, the only surviving section from the mural *It ain't necessarily so*. 1969-70
synthetic polymer paint and collage on Swiss cotton blind 234 x 111 cm Heide
4.50 The dining room at Heide with part of Mike Brown’s mural *It ain’t necessarily so*. 1969-70 synthetic polymer paint and collage. On the left hand side is Sidney Nolan’s *First Class Marksman* 1946, enamel on board, now in the collection of the NGV.

4.51 The dining room at Heide with part of Mike Brown’s mural *It ain’t necessarily so*. 1969-70 synthetic polymer paint and collage.
4.52 The dining room at Heide with part of Mike Brown's mural *It ain't necessarily so*. 1969-70 synthetic polymer paint and collage.
Appendix II:

Works of art in the 1962 Imitation Realism exhibitions

This list is taken from the catalogues for the exhibitions *The Annandale Imitation Realists* (MOMAA, February 1962) and *The Subterranean Imitation Realists* (Rudy Komon Gallery, May 1962).

Entries are listed in the order used in the Annandale Imitation Realist catalogue, as noted in the first column, with the numbering from the Subterranean Imitation Realist catalogue in the next column. Works that were shown in the second exhibition and not the first are at the end.

Titles are given as listed in the catalogues, with differences between the two catalogues noted in square brackets. The original catalogues did not include information about the dimensions or media of the works. Where it has been possible to find this information it has been listed alongside each entry, along with the location of the work, if known. Illustration numbers refer to the illustrations in Appendix I.

All works were made c.1961-62 unless otherwise stated. All measurements are given in centimetres, height x width x depth.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AIR cat. #</th>
<th>SIR cat. #</th>
<th>artist/s title/s</th>
<th>media/dimensions</th>
<th>collection</th>
<th>ill. no.</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>151</td>
<td>Brown, with Crothall <em>Sailing to Byzantium</em>. 1961</td>
<td>enamel, synthetic polymer paint on composition board 91.5 x 122 cm</td>
<td>NGA</td>
<td>1.10, 3.44</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td>Brown, Crothall &amp; Lanceley <em>Space Modulator Feminine Gender</em></td>
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<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td>Brown &amp; Crothall <em>Scandal Mongers</em></td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>156</td>
<td>Magda, Crothall &amp; Brown <em>Mr Unpredictable</em></td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>152</td>
<td>Brown &amp; Crothall <em>The Last of the Mohicans</em></td>
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<td>6</td>
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<td>Brown with Crothall <em>The Seventh Traumatic Wonder of the World</em></td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>157</td>
<td>Brown, Magda &amp; Crothall <em>Men of Doomy Destiny</em></td>
<td>paint, collage on board</td>
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<td>No.</td>
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<td>Work Title</td>
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<td>Dimensions</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>153</td>
<td>Magda, Crothall, Brown</td>
<td>Girl of the Midnight Sun, 1961</td>
<td>painting on board with collage elements: foil, Philip Morris cigarette packets</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>Crothall and Brown</td>
<td>Personified Organization Man</td>
<td>drawing on paper mounted on masonite</td>
<td>3.06.1</td>
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<td>Crothall &amp; Brown</td>
<td>Perseus Persued</td>
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<td>11</td>
<td>Crothall &amp; Brown</td>
<td>The House that Jack Built, 1961</td>
<td>private collection</td>
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<td>12</td>
<td>Brown &amp; Crothall</td>
<td>A remnant from a discarded myth</td>
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<td>13</td>
<td>Brown, with Crothall</td>
<td>Mug Lair, 1960-61</td>
<td>enamel, synthetic polymer paint on carved wood 89.5 x 23.10 cm</td>
<td>1.09, 3.32</td>
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<td>14</td>
<td>Brown &amp; Crothall</td>
<td>Renovated Intaglio</td>
<td>print on paper on board</td>
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<td>Brown &amp; Crothall</td>
<td>Doomed Customers</td>
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<td>Brown &amp; Crothall</td>
<td>The Flag of the Annandale Imitation Realists</td>
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<td>17</td>
<td>Brown &amp; Crothall</td>
<td>Too Pink Lovelies</td>
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<td>18</td>
<td>Brown &amp; Crothall</td>
<td>Festive Cavalier Personage With Robot Bodyguards and Lipstick</td>
<td>fibre-tipped pens, ballpoint pen, red wax, pencil, enamel, gouache, watercolour on paper on board 38.5 x 44.5 cm</td>
<td>NGA 1.29</td>
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<td>19</td>
<td>Brown &amp; Crothall</td>
<td>The Ironworkers Unite</td>
<td>felt-tipped pen, coloured pencil, acrylic paint on paper mounted on board, chain 35.9 x 43.6 cm</td>
<td>Ballarat Fine Art Gallery 3.58</td>
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<td>20</td>
<td>Crothall &amp; Brown</td>
<td>Cosmic Comic Rabbit [later state appears in Crothall's 1966 exhibition]</td>
<td>ink, paint on paper on board</td>
<td>4.16.5</td>
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<td>Magda &amp; Crothall</td>
<td>A Study in Siamese Twins</td>
<td>drawing with collage on paper mounted on board</td>
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<td>The People Next Door</td>
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<td>23</td>
<td>Brown &amp; Crothall&lt;br&gt;<em>Symbolic Diseases of the Body Politic</em>&lt;br&gt;Painted assemblage sculpture (possibly papier mâché)</td>
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<td>24</td>
<td>Lanceley, Brown &amp; Crothall&lt;br&gt;<em>Byzantium. 1962</em>&lt;br&gt;Oil, synthetic polymer paint, enamel, wood, squashed tin, egg carton, bottle tops, milk bottle tops, glass, plastic toys on plywood&lt;br&gt;183 x 122 cm</td>
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<td>25</td>
<td>Brown &amp; Crothall&lt;br&gt;<em>The Transtasmanian</em>&lt;br&gt;[SIR cat: Crothall, sculptural basis by Brown&lt;br&gt;<em>The Transtasmanian Wendigo Mark II</em>]&lt;br&gt;Collage, paint on timber&lt;br&gt;3.07, 3.08, 3.34, 4.17.2</td>
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<td>Crothall &amp; Brown&lt;br&gt;<em>The Money Animal</em></td>
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<td>Peggy Gale&lt;br&gt;<em>Angel Face</em>&lt;br&gt;Paint, collage and buttons on metal&lt;br&gt;3.28</td>
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<td>Magda with Brown&lt;br&gt;<em>Before &amp; After</em>&lt;br&gt;Ink, paper on board&lt;br&gt;3.52</td>
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<td>Lanceley, Crothall &amp; Brown&lt;br&gt;<em>Father Xmas</em></td>
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<td>Crothall &amp; Brown&lt;br&gt;<em>Scoop</em></td>
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<td>Lee Howlett, Brown &amp; Crothall&lt;br&gt;<em>Strike it Rich</em></td>
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<td>Magda [Kohn]&lt;br&gt;<em>The Cigarette Man and His Lucky Cat</em></td>
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<td>Lanceley&lt;br&gt;<em>My China Plate</em></td>
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<td>Lanceley&lt;br&gt;<em>Icky Noo</em></td>
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<td>35</td>
<td>Lanceley&lt;br&gt;<em>Coy</em></td>
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<td>36</td>
<td>Lanceley&lt;br&gt;<em>Great Snake</em></td>
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<td>37</td>
<td>Lanceley&lt;br&gt;<em>Debutante</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>38</td>
<td>Lanceley&lt;br&gt;<em>Darling</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>39</td>
<td>Lanceley&lt;br&gt;<em>The Green Footballer Playing the Field. 1961</em>&lt;br&gt;Oil/enamel/polymer on paper on composition board&lt;br&gt;85 x 122 cm&lt;br&gt;AGSA 3.06.1, 3.12, 3.12.1, 3.16, 3.52</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
| 40 | 8 | Lanceley  
*Man from the labyrinth* |  |
| 41 | 9 | Lanceley  
*In the bush beside the water. 1961* | paint, bottle tops on wood | 3.18 |
| 42 |  | Lanceley  
*Sting Ray Mask* |  |
| 43 | 10 | Lanceley  
*Countdown's memories of the Great War* | paint, bottle tops on board | 3.37, 3.53 |
| 44 | 11 | Lanceley  
*Self Portrait* | oil paint on wood  
48.5 x 35.5 x 12.5 cm  
(later state) | private collection | 1.04, 3.28 |
| 45 |  | Lanceley  
*Stink Pipe Orpheus* | enamel, oil paint, bottle tops, metal objects, galvanized iron, cement  
228.6 x 40.6 cm | Heide | 3.28, 3.34 |
| 46 | 12 | Lanceley  
*The Glad Family Picnic* | oil, mixed media on plywood  
122 x 183 cm board | AGNSW | 1.17, 1.32, 3.52 |
| 47 | 13 | Lanceley  
*Coming over cloudy* | paint on metal assemblage |  | 3.30, 3.51 |
| 48 | 14 | Lanceley  
*Big Smile* | assemblage from paint tin lid, cork, wooden base, metal. |  | 3.13, 3.13.2, 3.51 |
| 49 | 15 | Lanceley  
*Narcissist in Curlers* | enamel, oil, synthetic polymer paint, egg cartons, plaster, wire, metal clips on paint tin lid  
62 x 33 x 22 cm | Heide | 1.18, 3.51 |
| 50 | 16 | Lanceley  
*Waa* |  |  |
| 51 | 17 | Lanceley  
*Green Grub* | paint on metal paint can lid |  | 3.08 |
| 52 | 18 | Lanceley  
*Saintly woman* | oils, collage of synthetic paint and costume jewellery  
76 x 76 cm | NGA | 3.51 |
| 53 | 19 | Lanceley  
*Just like his uncle Fred* | tins, metal pipes, marbles, plastic tops, lace fragments, oil paint on plywood  
61.5 x 42 x 4 cm | private collection | 2.13, 3.51 |
| 54 | 20 | Lanceley  
*Boo Boo the bald clown* |  |  |
| 55 | 21 | Lanceley  
*Here we come on the Double Decker* | paint on board with wheels |  | 3.32 |
| 56 | 22 | Lanceley  
*Henry Miller* |  |  |
<p>| 57 | 22 | Lanceley | Mask of a stupid fellow | paint on metal wok | 3.37, 3.51 |
| 58 | 24 | Lanceley | Treasure Island | | |
| 59 | 23 | Lanceley | Welcome J. | paint on wooden assemblage with metal | 3.32, 3.53 |
| 60 | 25 | Lanceley | Spread out poodle | paint on board | 3.51, 4.16.3 |
| 61 | | Lanceley | Antipodean Snow Woman | cardboard, oil, synthetic polymer paint, costume jewellery on composition board 87 x 56.3 cm | 3.34, 3.51 |
| 62 | 26 | Lanceley | Up Rosemary Lane | | |
| 63 | | Lanceley | African Bottle-O | | |
| 64 | 27 | Lanceley | Satyr scenting a nymphomaniac [AIR: Satyr scenting a Nymph] | | |
| 65 | 75 | Brown | Hey Mumma. 1961 | enamel, foil on composition board 70.5 x 69.5 cm | Heide 3.56 |
| 66 | 61 | Brown | Ship Ahoy | | |
| 67 | 33 | Brown | The Little King | buttons, shells, clothes pegs, shelving brackets, safety pins, plastic lips, pencils, badges, spectacles, nails, fibre bristles, wood, metal, ribbon, enamel, synthetic polymer paint on wooden panel 43.5 x 29 x 15 cm | Heide 3.08, 3.09 |
| 68 | 34 | Brown | John the Baptist. 1962 | beaten copper 30 x 22.2 x 7.5 cm | private collection 3.63 |
| 69 | 55 | Brown | Woman Bedazed | drawing on paper on board | 3.08 |
| 70 | 32 | Brown | The Fabulous Wacko Beaut | paint on board | 3.08 |
| 71 | 76 | Brown | The Happy Cat | enamel on flattened metal drum 58 cm (diam.) | private collection 3.41 |
| 72 | | Brown | Three Astranoids | | |
| 73 | | [AIR cat. skips #73] | | | |
| 74 | | Brown | The Women in my life | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Title/Description</th>
<th>Medium/Technique</th>
<th>Location</th>
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<tr>
<td>75</td>
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<td>Brown Hoop-de-Lah</td>
<td>paint on two boards</td>
<td>3.07, 3.07.1</td>
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<td>76</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>Brown Mary-Lou</td>
<td>paint, assemblage on board</td>
<td>3.29, 3.29.1</td>
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<td>cf. 4.06</td>
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<td>77</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>Brown Widow Martyred</td>
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<td>78</td>
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<td>Brown Headlights Orpheus on Stilts</td>
<td>assemblage with paint, timber, plastic</td>
<td>3.06.1</td>
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<td>79</td>
<td></td>
<td>Brown The Fabulous Patriot &amp; His Wife</td>
<td>enamel, oil, tin lids, woollen crotchet, paper, wood on composition board</td>
<td>Heide 3.19, 3.21</td>
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<td>80</td>
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<td>Brown GUG</td>
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<td>81</td>
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<td>Brown The Easter Island Bunyip</td>
<td>synthetic polymer paint on composition board</td>
<td>Private 1.11, 3.54</td>
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<td>82</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>Brown Mr Greybones</td>
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<td>37</td>
<td>Brown The People Eater</td>
<td>paint, plastic toys on timber</td>
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<td>Brown Winged Orpheus</td>
<td>assemblage sculpture</td>
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<td>85</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>Brown Sighing for Byzantium</td>
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<td>86</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>Brown The Searcher</td>
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<td>87</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>Brown AH</td>
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<td>88</td>
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<td>Brown Hot Dog</td>
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<td>89</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>Brown HI</td>
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<td>90</td>
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<td>Brown Mug Lair on a Chair</td>
<td>paint, assemblage on wooden chair</td>
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<td>91</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>Brown Mrg's Migration into Heaven-Heaven. 1961</td>
<td>pen, ink, gouache, enamel on newspaper on composition board</td>
<td>QAG 3.44, 3.45</td>
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<td>92</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>Brown Suddenly Last Summer. 1961</td>
<td>enamel, synthetic polymer paint, assemblage on wood</td>
<td>Private 3.12, 3.13, 3.13.1</td>
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<td>79</td>
<td>Brown Shangri-la Corroboree</td>
<td>synthetic polymer paint, pencil, ink, crayon, nails on carved timber panel</td>
<td>NGA 3.32, 3.33</td>
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<td>Medium</td>
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<td>94</td>
<td>Genuine Sepik Skull</td>
<td>Brown</td>
<td>Paint on wooden assemblage</td>
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<td>95</td>
<td>Motor Scooter Moll</td>
<td>Brown</td>
<td>Paint on wooden assemblage</td>
<td>1.16, 3.13</td>
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<td>96</td>
<td>Ickle-Ockle</td>
<td>Brown</td>
<td>Paint on wooden assemblage</td>
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<td>97</td>
<td>Mr Hodge, with Hodge-Podge on reverse side</td>
<td>Brown</td>
<td><em>Mr Hodge</em>: enamel and gouache on composition board&lt;br&gt;<em>Hodge-Podge</em>: gouache on composition board 45.8 x 31.4 cm</td>
<td>NGA 3.06.1, 3.17</td>
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<td>98</td>
<td>Young girl conscious of her front and back view</td>
<td>Brown</td>
<td>Synthetic polymer pain on carved wood 15.5 x 12.5 x 4 cm</td>
<td>Private</td>
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<td>99</td>
<td>Neon Blush</td>
<td>Brown</td>
<td>Synthetic polymer paint on carved timber panel</td>
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<td>100</td>
<td>Quiet People. 1962</td>
<td>Brown</td>
<td>Gouache, lithograph, pen on cardboard 44 x 70.6 cm</td>
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<td>101</td>
<td>Spirits Untormented</td>
<td>Brown</td>
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<td>Guermicker</td>
<td>Brown</td>
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<td>103</td>
<td>Trajan's column</td>
<td>Brown</td>
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<td>104</td>
<td>There is nothing can repair a human</td>
<td>Brown</td>
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<td>105</td>
<td>Eggs Marching to Destruction</td>
<td>Brown</td>
<td>Egg carton, eggs, synthetic polymer paint 9 x 10 x 15 cm</td>
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<td>106</td>
<td>Anarchists Arriving</td>
<td>Brown</td>
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<td>107</td>
<td>Pillars of Society</td>
<td>Brown</td>
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<td>108</td>
<td>That's Mug Lair Again</td>
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<td>109</td>
<td>Baby Mine</td>
<td>Brown</td>
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<td>Aunt Belladonna</td>
<td>Brown</td>
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<td>111</td>
<td>Transtasmanian Wendigo Mark I [AIR: The Trans-Tasmanian Wendigo]</td>
<td>Brown</td>
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<td>112</td>
<td>Delphic Oracle</td>
<td>Brown</td>
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<td>113</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>Brown</td>
<td>Principia Philosophica</td>
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<td>114</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>Brown</td>
<td>Interior View of where we're up to</td>
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<td>115</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>Brown</td>
<td>Honesty is the best</td>
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<td>49</td>
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<td>The King of the Bicycle Boys rejoices</td>
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<td>The Snake Valley boys having a grog party [AIR: The Snake Valley boys giving a grog party]</td>
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<td>Brown</td>
<td>Satyr</td>
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<td>59</td>
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<td>Bather</td>
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<td>Pan-face</td>
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<td>122</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>Brown</td>
<td>Gallery of love items</td>
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<td>123</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>Brown</td>
<td>Mum in the Devil's Kitchen</td>
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<td>52</td>
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<td>Head of Mercedes Benz</td>
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<td>125</td>
<td>60</td>
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<td>Byzantium Birds</td>
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<td>71</td>
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<td>Bush Carpenter's Girlfriend</td>
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<td>The Policeman takes a healthful walk in the mountains</td>
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<td>128</td>
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<td>Crothall</td>
<td>All my life I have followed the latest fashions</td>
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<td>129</td>
<td>123</td>
<td>Crothall</td>
<td>Unequalled Norelco</td>
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<td>130</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>Crothall</td>
<td>Bikini Furniture Jetsam</td>
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<td>Medium</td>
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<td>131</td>
<td>Portrait of 3 Artists in</td>
<td>collage, pen, nails, synthetic polymer paint on timber</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cadbury’s Chocolate</td>
<td>37 x 52.6 cm</td>
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<td>132</td>
<td>Mask of a Sociable Fellow</td>
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<td>Self Portrait by R</td>
<td>ceramic pot with collage</td>
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<td>Crothall with a pot by Theo Schoon my teacher</td>
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<td>This Reminds Me of a Petrol Pump</td>
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<td>Valiant Captain Krushev-Orph</td>
<td>assemblage sculpture of wood</td>
<td>3.35, 3.55</td>
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<td>Very Elegant Woman. 1961</td>
<td>wood, plywood, metal heads of paper-binders 57.2 x 29.4 x 4.4 cm</td>
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<td>137</td>
<td>I Do I Do I Do Do Do [Also titled: I do I do I do]</td>
<td>paint and fashion illustration on board 46 x 33.5cm</td>
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<td>138</td>
<td>The Archeopologist</td>
<td>assemblage of plywood, paint</td>
<td>3.34, 3.35.1, 3.55</td>
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<td>With A Dim Cloud on Top</td>
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<td>In Flowers and Roses</td>
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<td>Ignable Spirit</td>
<td>wooden assemblage sculpture</td>
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<td>142</td>
<td>Faceonly [AIR: Face Only]</td>
<td>collage with ink on board</td>
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<td>143</td>
<td>The Bunyip Kiwi Version Only</td>
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<td>144</td>
<td>Bus Stop [AIR: Halt the Bus]</td>
<td>drawing on paper on board</td>
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<td>145</td>
<td>Probably [AIR title: Probably an enemy spy]</td>
<td>mixed media on paper on board</td>
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<td>Psychopath In Search of His Umbrella and His Soul</td>
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<td>147</td>
<td>Shower of Rain-Drops and Clothes Pegs</td>
<td>aluminium foil, wooden pegs, timber</td>
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<td>148</td>
<td>Toothpaste filler on the rampage</td>
<td>synthetic polymer paint and glass jars on wood and plywood 59.7 x 67.3 x 17.5 cm</td>
<td>Heide 3.20</td>
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<td>149</td>
<td>Jupiter and Venus</td>
<td>timber assemblage Jupiter: 53 x 19.5 x 9 cm Venus: 57 x 21 x 6.5</td>
<td>Heide 1.12-13</td>
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<td>150</td>
<td>Three Trinket boxes @ £3 ea</td>
<td>[see separate listings in the SIR catalogue below for trinket boxes]</td>
<td>private collection 1.19, 3.13.2</td>
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<td>Prune Box</td>
<td>ball point pen on paper on masonite 26 x 54 cm</td>
<td>AGSA 3.15</td>
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<td>This is Tom</td>
<td>synthetic polymer paint on board 45 x 72 cm</td>
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<td>153</td>
<td>Voices of Silence</td>
<td>wood, cork and nails on board 69 x 46 x 8.3 cm</td>
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<td>Madly Petrified Soul Expecting Disaster</td>
<td>assemblage of wood with paint</td>
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<td>155</td>
<td>Happy Astronaut</td>
<td>collage on board</td>
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<td>Bearded-Man</td>
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<td>The Happy Athlete</td>
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<td>Portrait of a Satisfied Tin Lid</td>
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<td>159</td>
<td>And Now I dream of him</td>
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<td>160</td>
<td>Grandma Moses</td>
<td>paint on board</td>
<td>3.08</td>
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<td>161</td>
<td>Woman Driver</td>
<td>synthetic polymer on metal scales 30 x 20 x 14.6 cm</td>
<td>Heide 3.37, 3.39</td>
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<td>162</td>
<td>Angry Housewife</td>
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<tr>
<td>163</td>
<td>Miro Special [AIR: Special Miro]</td>
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<td><em>The 3 Disgraces</em></td>
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<td><em>Suntanned Queenslander Eta Hot-Dog</em></td>
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<td><em>La Petite Fleur Avec Les Ham Sandwiches</em></td>
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<td><em>American Passing Through</em></td>
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<td><em>Tourists in Search of the Salt Mines</em></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**185**
- **Crothall**
- *Me Playing the Role of the Smoker*
- Ballpoint pen on paper on composition board painted with synthetic polymer paint. 43 x 33 cm
- Private collection 

**186**
- **Crothall**
- *Man Contemplating Mischief*

**187**
- **Crothall**
- *Buzzah Yang*
- Ink on paper on board
- 3.08

**188**
- **Crothall**
- *The Young Aesthetic Cow*
- Synthetic polymer paint, cardboard and metal on composition board. 73 x 67 cm
- Heide, 3.37, 3.38

**189**
- **Crothall**
- *Expecting to Conceive*
- Synthetic polymer paint and mixed media on wood. 65.5 x 22.5 x 6.3 cm
- Heide, 3.61

**190**
- **Crothall**
- *The 3 Disgraces*
- Ink drawing on paper on board
- 3.55

**191**
- **Crothall**
- *Suntanned Queenslander Eta Hot-Dog*
- Plastic, labels, synthetic polymer paint, string, wire, buttons, bottle tops, foil, glass bottle. 40 x 10.5 cm
- Private collection, 3.13, 3.14

**192**
- **Crothall**
- *A Hardboard Ghost*

**193**
- **Crothall**
- *Item of Beach Jewellery* [Believed to be *Bottle Top Necklace*, exhibited in Crothall's 1966 exhibition]
- Necklace made from bottle tops
- 4.17.3

**194**
- **Crothall**
- *I will, I do, I must*

**195**
- **Crothall**
- *La Petite Fleur Avec Les Ham Sandwiches*
- Synthetic polymer paint, nails, twine, rope on wood. 97 x 65.6 x 6.5 cm
- Heide, 3.62

**196**
- **Crothall**
- *American Passing Through*

**197**
- **Crothall**
- *Tourists in Search of the Salt Mines*
- Gouache, synthetic polymer paint, pencil, coloured ballpoint pens and printing ink on board. 54 x 70 cm
- NGA, 3.57
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<td>Brown, Lanceley, John Percival, Mirka Mora, Laurence Hope</td>
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<td>Lanceley, Crothall, Mirka</td>
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<td>Wim van Uden</td>
<td><em>Three Barrel Slats</em>. 1962</td>
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Appendix III:

Photographs published of the Imitation Realist exhibitions

The following table lists the published photographs of the Imitation Realist exhibitions and the publications in which they appeared. The images were reproduced in black and white unless otherwise stated.

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<th>Photograph:</th>
<th>Published:</th>
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<td><img src="image" alt="Photograph" /></td>
<td>Ian Moffitt, 'So this is bottle top art!', <em>Sunday Mirror</em>, May 20, 1962, p. 42</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Traudi Allen, <em>Cross Currents in Contemporary Australian Art</em>, Sydney: Craftsman House, 2001, p. 17</td>
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The three artists with *Byzantium & Transtasmanian Wendigo* at the *Subterranean Imitation Realists* exhibition, Rudy Komon Gallery, May 1962.
<table>
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<tr>
<th>MoMAA exhibition installation: <em>Byzantium</em> with ‘Here in Byzantium’ written along the wall, with a display of works underneath.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Haese, <em>Power to the People</em>, 1995, p. 10</td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MoMAA exhibition installation: view from entrance to main gallery, with <em>The Horrible Lousy Chicken Coop</em> on the right. View extends the length of the gallery.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lanceley, ‘Craven ‘A’: Surrealism and the Imitation Realists’, p. 481</td>
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<td>Haese, <em>Power to the People</em>, 1995, p. 34</td>
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<tr>
<th>Plant, <em>Irreverent Sculpture</em>, 1985, Small thumbnail on the cover</th>
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<tr>
<td>Mike Brown, ‘Kite II: Part I’, p. 7</td>
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</table>
Lanceley, ‘Craven ‘A’: Surrealism and the Imitation Realists’, p. 485 (colour) |
<table>
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<tr>
<td>MOMAA exhibition: entrance</td>
<td>Mike Brown, ‘Kite II: Part 1’, p. 4</td>
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<tr>
<td>View of Ross Crothall, Mike Brown and Colin Lanceley with works in the <em>Annandale Imitation Realists</em> exhibition.</td>
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<td>MOMAA exhibition showing installation of some of Crothall’s works.</td>
<td>Plant, <em>Irreverent Sculpture</em>, 1985, p. 22</td>
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