College of Arts and Social Sciences
Research School of Humanities and the Arts
School of Art
Visual Arts Graduate Program, Doctor of Philosophy

Transcending the National Capital Paradigm:
The Evolution of Bitumen River Gallery/Canberra Contemporary Art Space

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August 2016

A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
of The Australian National University
Declaration of Originality

I, ………………………………………………………………… [sign and date] hereby declare that the thesis here presented is the outcome of the research project undertaken during my candidacy, that I am the sole author unless otherwise indicated, and that I have fully documented the source of ideas, references, quotations and paraphrases attributable to other authors.
Acknowledgements

Firstly and always, I acknowledge Canberra’s extraordinary community of artists. All those mentioned within these pages, and many more besides, have extended kindness and moral support to me over the years. Their presence in the city and the works they make, are the beating heart that powers our national capital.

I have been extremely privileged to have been invited to work across the broad spectrum of visual arts, theatre and music and in the multicultural communities in Canberra. To all those organisations who have employed me over the last years as a writer, curator, stage manager, mentor and facilitator, my very grateful thanks.

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Abstract

This dissertation investigates the fertile tensions in Canberra’s dual status as national capital space and local polis, that dramatically affected the development of a unique contemporary arts practice in the late 1970s. The primary thrust of this thesis is the triumph of local arts practice and community over the powerful nation-building cultural imperatives of a national capital. A complex narrative, informed by rich archival material and interviews, exposes local arts practice as a generative force in Canberra’s cultural development. Here, an examination of the citywide development of local arts and culture from the 1920s to 2001, leads to a case study of the launch and development of Bitumen River Gallery/Canberra Contemporary Art Space from 1978 to 2001. Women are shown to have exerted a profound influence in this important space, in contrast to the trend of the male-dominated art scene in the rest of late twentieth-century Australia. In sum, this dissertation traces the trajectory of arts practice in Canberra as a response to critical social and cultural needs within the national capital space, to a humanising local practice that transcended the capital’s national and international cultural imperatives.
Table of Contents

Declaration of Originality ........................................................................................................... i
Acknowledgements ................................................................................................................ ii
Abstract ........................................................................................................................................ iv
Table of Contents ...................................................................................................................... v
List of Figures ........................................................................................................................... viii
List of Abbreviations and Acronyms ................................................................................... xi

1. Introduction .......................................................................................................................... 1
   1.1 Histories of Canberra ........................................................................................................ 7
   1.2 Contemporary Arts Organisations .................................................................................. 12
   1.3 Canberra Women and Contemporary Art ................................................................. 18
   1.4 The Global and the Local ............................................................................................. 21
   1.5 Transcending the National Capital Paradigm: The Evolution of BRG/CCAS...23

2. The National Capital Space and Arts Practice: Impacts and Development—
   1913 to 1978 ......................................................................................................................... 27
   2.1 Capital Constructs .......................................................................................................... 28
   2.2 Population Growth and Social Impacts to 1978 ......................................................... 31
   2.3 Developing Arts and Culture to 1978 ............................................................................. 37
   2.4 Federal Government Commitment to Public Art ......................................................... 48
   2.5 Funding Arts and Culture in Canberra During the 1960s and 1970s ..................... 51
   2.6 Federal Funding through the Australia Council for the Arts from 1968 .............. 58
   2.7 Lines of Difference ....................................................................................................... 62
   2.8 Chapter Conclusion ........................................................................................................ 63
3. The Rapid Growth of Local Arts and Culture: 1978 to 1989 .......................... 65
   3.1 The Rise and Funding of Community Arts ......................................... 68
   3.2 Arts Community Needs and Government Responses: 1981 to 1985 ............ 74
   3.3 The Pascoe Report ............................................................................ 87
   3.4 Unique Local Solutions ...................................................................... 101
   3.5 The Brickworks, Studio One, and aGOG ............................................. 110
   3.6 The Campaign for Free Admission ..................................................... 114
   3.7 Chapter Conclusion ............................................................................ 122
4. Self-Government and the Arts ................................................................. 123
   4.1 Steps to Self-Government ................................................................. 124
   4.2 The Select Committee on the Establishment of a Casino ...................... 127
   4.3 The Select Committee on Cultural Activities and Facilities .................. 128
   4.4 Other Initiatives .................................................................................. 134
   4.5 The Standing Committee on Planning, Development and Infrastructure . 136
   4.6 Part One Conclusion .......................................................................... 142
5. Case Study: Bitumen River Gallery—Evolution and Early Years ............... 143
   5.1 “Don’t Do It If You Don’t Need Art”: Canberra’s Subcultural Homogeneity
       and the Birth of Collective Spaces ........................................................ 146
       5.1.1 The Genesis of Megalo ................................................................. 152
       5.1.2 The Genesis of BRG .................................................................... 154
       5.1.3 Bill Posters Appreciated ............................................................... 156
       5.1.4 Dreamtime Machinetime .............................................................. 164
   5.2 CSA and BRG: The Beginnings of a Symbiotic Relationship ................. 169
       5.2.1 Mandy Martin: Background and Impacts ...................................... 171
   5.3 Feminist Politics and Art: Intersections ............................................... 184
5.3.1 Cherylynn Holmes and the Utopian Ideal ................................................. 187
5.3.2 Vivienne Binns .......................................................................................... 197
5.4 Slut ................................................................................................................. 200
6. Transition: BRG to CCAS .............................................................................. 217
   6.1 Anne Virgo ................................................................................................. 218
   6.2 Amalgamation: From Collective to Contemporary Art Space .................... 231
   6.3 Notions of the Collective: Defining BRG .................................................. 243
   6.4 Chapter Conclusion ..................................................................................... 246
7. Transformation: Transcending the Local ...................................................... 248
   7.1 Changes in the Definition of Curators and Contemporary Art Spaces ...... 249
   7.2 A New Direction: Trevor Smith ................................................................ 254
      7.2.1 Romantisystem .................................................................................... 258
      7.2.2 Satellite of Love .................................................................................... 266
   7.3 Jane Barney ................................................................................................. 273
      7.3.1 Beautiful Home .................................................................................... 278
   7.4 Exhibiting Minorities and Touring Exhibitions at BRG/CCAS:
      A Comparison ............................................................................................... 287
      7.4.1 Tony Ayres .......................................................................................... 297
      7.4.2 eX de Medici and CCAS: Minorities and Touring Exhibitions .......... 301
      7.4.3 A Second Wave .................................................................................... 317
   7.5 Canberra/Brasilia ......................................................................................... 323
8. Conclusion ........................................................................................................ 333
Bibliography .......................................................................................................... 339
List of Figures

Fig. 1. Memorial Advertisement submitted by S. Brown

*(Canberra Times, November 16, 1985, 9S)* ..................................................... 97

Fig. 2. David Morrow, *Well I’ve Never Heard of You Either*. Screen print,
postcard, BRG opening invitation for April 4, 1981. CCAS image archive
................................................................. 157

Fig. 3. Alison Alder, *Share the Shitwork: Even a Man Can Do It*. 1981, brown
paper bag, screen print, 25cm x 20cm. In *Bill Posters Appreciated*, BRG
opening exhibition. CCAS image archive ................................................. 158

Fig. 4. *BRG 5th Birthday Show*, March 26–April 13, 1986. Unattributed poster
evidencing issues around women’s equality, installation photograph.
CCAS image archive ................................................................. 192

Fig. 5. *BRG 5th Birthday Show*, March 26–April 13, 1986. Unattributed posters
evidencing issues around women’s equality and tenants’ advice,
installation photograph. CCAS image archive ............................................. 193

Fig. 6. *BRG 5th Birthday Show*, March 26–April 13, 1986. Unattributed posters
evidencing the last 5 years of social concerns including Rape Crisis Centre,
Artists Against Uranium, and Vote Social Democracy; installation
photograph. CCAS image archive .......................................................... 194

Fig. 7. Julia Church, *Super Doreen*. 1982, poster, 102cm x 76cm; private
collection, photograph by Brenton McGeachie ........................................... 196
Fig. 8. Catriona Holyoake, *I Won’t See You in Paradise (Slut)*. 1983, screen print, 100cm x 80cm. Collection of the National Gallery of Australia. Photograph by Brenton McGeachie. CCAS image archive 202

Fig. 9. Post-Atomic Card!: Working Art! Black and white scan of colour postcard, designed and printed by the Fallout Committee for the Post-Atomic Postcard Show, 1984 207

Fig. 10. BRG group exhibition, *Salon Coda: The Making of History*, June 10–July 5, 1987. Installation photograph, detail. CCAS image archive 238

Fig. 11. Arthur Wicks, *Mobile Observatory*. Wooden machine (working), main blades 4m, total length 2.0m x 1.3m. Installed in gallery in *Site Specific City*, CCAS group exhibition, July 10–August 2, 1987. CCAS image archive 239


Fig. 13. Bronwyn Sandland and Paull McKee, *Beautiful Home: Just What is it that Makes Today’s Home So Different, So Appealing?* CCAS, July 11–August 8, 1998. Installation photograph. CCAS image archive 279

Fig. 14. *Nowhere Utopia*. BRG touring group exhibition at THAT Space, Brisbane, March 3–14, 1987. Installation photograph. See far right: eX de Medici’s *Pistol*. 1985, gridded black and white laser-copied image, 1200cm x 1600cm, printed on Canon’s first prototype laser photocopier as a 16-piece gridded image. CCAS image archive 303

Fig. 15. eX de Medici, *United Colours*. Gridded colour laser-copied image, in Goethe Institute’s international travelling exhibition, *I Am You; Artists*
Fig. 16. eX de Medici, *60 Heads*. Exhibition detail, laminated inkjet prints, 59.4cm x 84.1cm, CCAS travelling exhibition, ACCA, Melbourne, January 24–March 2, 1997. Installation photograph by K. Pleban. CCAS image archive .................................................................

Fig. 17. eX de Medici, *60 Heads*. Laminated inkjet prints, 59.4cm x 84.1cm, CCAS travelling exhibition, ACCA, Melbourne, January 24–March 2, 1997. Installation photograph by K. Pleban. CCAS image archive ..................315

Fig. 18. Shane Breynard and Marta Penner, *Canberra Brasilia*. CCAS artist exchange and travelling exhibition at CCAS, September 8–October 20, 2001. Installation photograph. CCAS image archive ........................................328

Fig. 19. Shane Breynard and Marta Penner, *Canberra Brasilia*. CCAS artist exchange and travelling exhibition at CCAS, September 8–October 20, 2001. Installation photograph. Hammocks strung between apartments in the Currong apartments, Canberra. CCAS image archive ....................331

Fig. 20. Patricia Piccinini, *Skywhale*, 2013. Photo: Martin Ollman ..................333
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Full Form</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ABS</td>
<td>Australian Bureau of Statistics</td>
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<td>ACA</td>
<td>Arts Council of Australia</td>
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<td>ACG</td>
<td>Arts Council Gallery</td>
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<td>ACP</td>
<td>Australian Centre for Photography</td>
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<td>ACT</td>
<td>Australian Capital Territory</td>
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<td>ACT ADB</td>
<td>ACT Arts Development Board</td>
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<td>AETT</td>
<td>Australian Elizabethan Theatre Trust</td>
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<td>AGNSW</td>
<td>Art Gallery of New South Wales</td>
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<td>aGOG</td>
<td>A Girls Own Gallery</td>
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<td>ANCA</td>
<td>Australian National Capital Artists</td>
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<td>ANG</td>
<td>Australian National Gallery</td>
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<td>ANU</td>
<td>Australian National University</td>
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<td>ANU SOA</td>
<td>Australian National University School of Art</td>
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<td>Australian Print Workshop</td>
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<td>ASOC</td>
<td>Artists’ Society of Canberra</td>
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<td>AWM</td>
<td>Australian War Memorial</td>
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<td>BRG</td>
<td>Bitumen River Gallery</td>
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<td>CAM</td>
<td>Canberra Arts Marketing</td>
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<td>Canberra Rep.</td>
<td>Canberra Repertory Society</td>
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<td>CAOs</td>
<td>Contemporary Arts Organisations Australia</td>
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<td>Capital Art Patrons’ Organisation</td>
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<td>CAS</td>
<td>Contemporary Art Society (Australia)</td>
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<td>Abbreviation</td>
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<td>CAST</td>
<td>Contemporary Art Space Tasmania</td>
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<td>CCAE</td>
<td>Canberra College of Advanced Education</td>
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<td>CCAF</td>
<td>Canberra Community Arts Front</td>
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<td>Community Development Program</td>
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<td>Council for the Encouragement of Music and the Arts</td>
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<td>Community Employment Program</td>
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<td>CIT</td>
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<td>CMAG</td>
<td>Canberra Museum and Gallery</td>
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<td>CPAML</td>
<td>Communist Party of Australia Marxist Leninist</td>
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<td>CPI</td>
<td>Consumer Price Index</td>
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<td>Commonwealth Science and Industrial Research Organisation</td>
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<td>CYSS</td>
<td>Commonwealth Youth Support Services</td>
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<td>Canberra Youth Theatre</td>
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<td>DCT</td>
<td>Department of the Capital Territory</td>
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<td>DTLG</td>
<td>Department of Territories and Local Government</td>
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<tr>
<td>EAF</td>
<td>Australian Experimental Art Foundation</td>
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<td>EASS</td>
<td>Emerging Artist Support Scheme</td>
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<td>FCAC</td>
<td>Federal Capital Advisory Committee</td>
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<td>FCC</td>
<td>Federal Capital Commission</td>
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<td>IMA</td>
<td>Institute of Modern Art</td>
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<tr>
<td>acronym</td>
<td>full form</td>
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<tr>
<td>Megalo</td>
<td>Megalo International Screenprint Collective; Megalo Print Studio and Gallery</td>
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<td>NATEX</td>
<td>National Exhibition Centre</td>
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<td>NCA</td>
<td>National Capital Authority</td>
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<td>NCDC</td>
<td>National Capital Development Commission</td>
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<td>NCPA</td>
<td>National Capital Planning Authority</td>
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<td>NETS</td>
<td>National Exhibitions Touring Support</td>
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<td>National Film and Sound Archives</td>
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<td>NGA</td>
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<td>National Portrait Gallery</td>
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<td>OzCo</td>
<td>Australia Council for the Arts</td>
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<td>P&amp;A</td>
<td>Pastoral and Agricultural Association</td>
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<td>PAM</td>
<td>Progressive Art Movement</td>
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<td>PLO</td>
<td>Palestine Liberation Organisation</td>
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<td>SA SOA</td>
<td>South Australian School of Art</td>
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<td>ANU School of Art Gallery</td>
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<td>SRC</td>
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<td>Through Art Unity</td>
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<td>UC</td>
<td>University of Canberra</td>
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<td>VAB</td>
<td>Visual Arts Board</td>
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<td>WEL ACT</td>
<td>Women’s Electoral Lobby ACT</td>
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1. Introduction

[The visual arts are] not particularly strong in Canberra. Because of this an injection of funds to create a professional infrastructure might have been attractive. However, I came to the contrary view. . . . In the ACT, the Australian National Gallery fulfills most of the roles of a State gallery; compared with craft there is not the same foundation on which to build; nor is the strength of the School of Art so distinctive; there does not appear to be the same opportunity for uniqueness.¹

Arts consultant Timothy Pascoe penned these less than prescient words in 1985, justifying his decision to leave the visual arts out of the core strategy of his eponymously titled ACT Arts Development Board (ADB) commissioned report, Arts in the ACT: Funding Priorities and Grant Administration. While Pascoe’s antithetical statement might seem like an unusual beginning to a study of the history of contemporary art in the Australian Capital Territory (ACT), it serves two important purposes. It illustrates the lack of knowledge and understanding of the circumstances preceding and surrounding the emergence of contemporary visual arts practice in Canberra, and it therefore underlines the great need for this previously untold history.

Although scholars have begun to approach Canberra’s history from multiple viewpoints, it has not yet been examined from a perspective that privileges art and

¹ Timothy Pascoe, Arts in the ACT: Funding Priorities and Grant Administration (Canberra: ACT Arts Development Board, Commonwealth of Australia, 1985), 57.
culture as a generative force in the city’s development. Based on an extensive use of primary sources, this dissertation considers the Australian capital from this innovative perspective, unfolding the complex circumstances that gave rise to a citywide arts practice that became, in opposition to Pascoe’s quote, entirely distinctive.

What began as a comparative study between the artist-run space Bitumen River Gallery (BRG)—established in Canberra in 1981 and known as Canberra Contemporary Art Space (CCAS) since 1987—and other Australian contemporary art spaces, became transformed by the fascinating possibility that a local contemporary arts practice had developed as a result of the junctures between two distinct iterations of space: national capital space and local space. In other words, that arts practice was the product of a complex set of circumstances that occurred as the notions of national capital butted up against the realities of local life. This dissertation contends that the contemporary arts community that emerged was unique because this community evolved within and against the vastly more powerful and insistent construction of national space being advanced by federal politicians. This pre-eminent iteration of place—the political centre of a young but advanced democracy—ensured that fertile tensions arose that directly impacted on the genesis and development of the city’s contemporary arts practice in ways not seen elsewhere in the country.

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2 See footnotes 12 to 17 in this chapter for further information on these various histories.
3 Extensive archival research has been conducted in the archives of Canberra Contemporary Art Space. These comprise some 40 boxes of uncatalogued materials dating back to the formation of Bitumen River Gallery. Henceforth, these materials will be referred to as the CCAS archives.
While there are similarities between BRG/CCAS and other Australian contemporary art spaces, Canberra’s position as national capital has meant that the trajectory of contemporary practice in this city is different to that in other Australian cities. And, while partial histories of these other spaces have been written, they have not been set within the history of the cities in which they developed. The examination of BRG/CCAS within a wider history of arts development in Canberra is one of the distinguishing features of this dissertation.

The primary thrust of this thesis is the triumph of local arts practice and community over the powerful nation-building cultural imperatives of a national capital. An examination of the citywide development of local arts and culture from the 1920s to 2001 leads to a case study of the launch and development of BRG/CCAS from 1978 to 2001. Women are shown to have exerted a profound influence over the wider development of Canberra’s arts and in this important contemporary art space, in contrast to the trend of the male-dominated art scene in the rest of late-twentieth-century Australia. The strength of Canberra’s interconnected arts community, entwined social and arts activism, the impact of politics, and the influence of the Canberra School of Art (CSA) are also important recurring strands throughout this history. In sum, this dissertation traces the trajectory of arts practice in Canberra as a response to critical social and cultural needs within the national capital space, to a humanising local practice that transcended the capital’s national and international cultural imperatives.

The key contributing factors in the birth and emergence of local contemporary art in Canberra were the effects of Commonwealth control, the rise of

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4 See footnote 34 in this chapter for a list of these histories.
social activism, the central role of women in the arts community and the strength of the arts community overall. CSA, which opened in 1976, also played a crucial role in bringing national and international artists to the capital to educate new generations. Another crucial factor was the impact of the Commonwealth Youth Support Services local job creation organisation, Jobless Action, which aimed to combat the difficult economic and social circumstances arising as a result of government policies introduced by the Liberal Fraser Government elected in 1975. Jobless Action worked with many of Canberra’s interconnected emerging artists, activists and musicians who together comprised what artist Tony Ayres identified as a unique subcultural homogeneity.\textsuperscript{5} It was also during this period that Canberra reached its federal political fulcrum, ultimately released from Commonwealth control in 1989 as the ACT transitioned to a local government system. These intertwined factors contributed to the development of a unique contemporary arts culture.

The strength of the local community forms a strong narrative in this study. From the earliest days of the formation of arts societies and the activities of the Australian National University (ANU) to a broad array of community endeavours, there is much evidence of Canberra’s arts community’s commitment to expanding a

\textsuperscript{5} Regarding Jobless Action: The steps taken by Jobless Action’s Julian Webb were pivotal to the establishment of both BRG and Megalo International Print Collective (Megalo). In 1992, Alison Alder, a principal founder of both organisations, remembered late 1970s Canberra as “a hotbed of political activism” with high local unemployment resulting from the fiscal policies of the 1975 elected Liberal Fraser government: “For this reason Jobless Action was a very important organisation. It not only gave support to unemployed people, but actively put together schemes to give some hope of earning an income and self-determination, and as a by-product, also gave some focus to political activism.” Alison Alder, quoted in Brendan Dahl ed., \textit{Megalo: Printing History: 18 Years Of Megalo Access Arts} (Canberra: Canberra Museum and Gallery, 1998), 2. Alder particularly recalled the small, tightly knit community working in and around the Performing Arts Café at Gorman House, the theatre group Standard Operating Procedures, Megalo, the arts magazine \textit{Muse} and graffiti artists.

local cultural agenda from within the confines of Commonwealth-controlled funding and political ideology. As the 1970s and 1980s progressed, social activism became a forceful expression of this community strength. Political engagement was evidentially hardwired into Canberra life, itself a product of the continuing tussle between national and local politics. Social activism was evidenced in Canberra in 1927 when Dr Beatrice Holt, together with the Women and Children’s Committee, established the “innovative” Canberra Mothercraft Society. It emerged as a powerful force in the early 1970s, resulting in a raft of by then desperately needed social initiatives including the 1973 establishment of Beryl, Australia’s second women’s refuge. By 1978 social activism was an instrumental factor in the birth of contemporary arts practice as fledgling local print and poster makers began responding to local, national and international social concerns. Throughout the 1980s activists became increasingly insistent in Canberra, alerting Federal government and local representatives to rapidly growing needs in local arts and culture. They ensured that by the time the ACT achieved self-government in 1992, the territory’s Legislative Assembly members were fully aware of the community’s desires and needs and were determined to act to fulfil them.

The control wielded by the Commonwealth Government, whose uncertain commitment to Canberra over the first half of the twentieth century was transformed

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7 Megalo and the National Gallery of Australia (NGA) have a large collection of prints and posters from Canberra artists. The majority of early works remain unattributed. As we approach 40 years from 1978, there is an urgent need for resources to be allocated to attribution while there are still artists alive who may remember the particular circumstances under which these early posters were made. For posters evidencing the work of Jobless Action, see for example: Paul Ford, *Unemployment: The Creative Alternative—Jobless Action* (1981-82) and David Morrow, *May Day ’81: March for Full Employment* (1981). Both examples are held in the Megalo Poster Archives.
under Liberal Prime Minister Robert Menzies in 1958, also forms a strong narrative. From the late 1960s, based on the arts funding models of the UK, Canada and USA, the Commonwealth sought to develop nationally recognised flagship performing arts companies entirely at odds with the realities of local need and desire and of Canberra’s small population. During this period, the emphasis on performing arts came at the expense of the visual arts. The 1970s and 1980s were marked by increasing tensions between the Commonwealth and the local community as the latter vigorously sought to control their own local arts and cultural trajectory from within this national imperative. In the visual arts, the drive for national excellence promulgated by the Commonwealth led Pascoe to erroneously conclude, in 1985, that local artists enjoyed higher investment and outcomes in comparison to their

8 There are distinct similarities between the development of national arts policy in Australia from 1967 and the policies of the UK and USA which were developed in 1964 and 1965 While this dissertation does not investigate these links, indications of similarities in language and policy development can be found as follows:


For companies nominated as flagship companies, pre-1985: in Theatre—the Canberra Theatre Trust; in Dance—Human Veins Dance Theatre; in Opera—Opera ACT; in Music—Canberra Symphony Orchestra. Pascoe Report recommendations from 1985: in Drama—Theatre ACT; in Dance—Human Veins Dance Theatre; in Crafts—Crafts Council of the ACT; in Music—CSO.
colleagues in other Australian cities because of the presence of the National Gallery of Australia (NGA) [founded in 1982 as the Australian National Gallery (ANG)].

The transition to self-government in 1989 was of fundamental importance to the maturing art scene. Foremost among the positive benefits flowing from the release from Commonwealth control that followed full self-government from 1992 was the ability of early successive local governments to drive a local arts and cultural agenda in an extraordinarily coherent and bipartisan manner.

Women played a critical role in the development of the visual arts in Canberra. They set up creative women’s groups during the 1960s and 1970s to combat the loneliness and lack of extended support groups that were a feature of Canberra life because of the small and transient population, and they established the first commercial galleries in the 1960s and 1970s. Their influence is felt throughout the history of BRG/CCAS: as teachers and mentors; as students and activists who went on to establish printmaking workshops and exhibition venues; and as coordinators, curators and artists who collectively influenced the development of local practice.

1.1 Histories of Canberra

Studies of Canberra’s history are increasing in number and breadth as writers respond to the inherent complexities of national capital development. Recent
publications have covered its Indigenous history;\(^{11}\) its conception, planning and execution as a national centre;\(^{12}\) the relationship of Canberra to its national cultural institutions;\(^{13}\) notable Canberra buildings and general architecture;\(^{14}\) its citizens;\(^{15}\) and its broad history.\(^{16}\) It has been the custom for some of the national cultural institutions to publish widely in their areas, from the single sheets outlining aspects of Canberra’s development issued by the National Archives of Australia to that


\(^{12}\) See for example six booklets from the Canberra Centenary: Greg Wood, *The Community That Was* (Canberra: Chief Minister’s Department, 2009); David Headon, *Crystal Palace to Golden Trowels* (Canberra: Chief Minister’s Department, 2009); Ian Warden, *Think Of It! Dream Of It! In Six Snapshots* (Canberra: Chief Minister’s Department, 2009); Greg Wood, *Maps and Makers* (Canberra: Chief Minister’s Department, 2009); David Headon, *Those Other Americans* (Canberra: Chief Minister’s Department, 2009); David Headon, *Beyond the Boundaries* (Canberra: Chief Minister’s Department, 2012).


\(^{14}\) For specific buildings: see for example principally Lenore Coltheart, *Albert Hall: The Heart of Canberra* (Sydney: UNSW Press, 2014); Sarah Rood and Belinda Ensor, *Olims Hotel Canberra: Through the Ages* (Sydney: C.L. Creations, 2007).


\(^{16}\) See principally Brown, *A History of Canberra*; also see Paul Daley, Canberra, City Series, (Sydney: UNSW, 2012).
institutions’ ambitious centenary research guide *Government Records about the Australian Capital Territory*, to the wealth of material held by the National Library of Australia (NLA) and made available online.\(^{17}\)

The Centenary of Canberra in 2013 provided further impetus for projects such as the Australian Women’s archive project *From Lady Denman to Katy Gallagher: A Century of Women’s Contributions to Canberra*.\(^{18}\) Small booklets have been recently produced by those involved in social initiatives such as the women’s refuge Beryl, Toora Women Inc. (established in the early 1980s) and Majura Women’s Group (founded in 1981).\(^{19}\) These have all contributed to a fuller picture of Canberra’s development.

Studies of important Canberra art institutions have also appeared in recent years. Michael Agostino’s *The Australian National University School of Art: A History of the First 65 Years* (2009) gathers together rich archival material relating to the development of that institution from its years as Canberra Technical College to the history of CSA’s workshops and lecturers, visiting artists and arts initiatives.\(^{20}\)

To coincide with the centenary, Megalo Print Studio and Gallery (Megalo) published 

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\(^{18}\) Henningham, “A Century of Women’s Contributions to Canberra”.


Megalomania: 33 Years of Posters Made at Megalo Print Studio 1980-2013, an abridged history that includes a selection of hundreds of prints produced by artists working with that organisation over 30 years, an introduction, and interviews that expand the knowledge base of this era. Another centenary publication was a short history of the Australian National Capital Artists (ANCA) studios and gallery, Intensity of Purpose: 21 Years of ANCA, which was published to coincide with an exhibition of the same name at Canberra Museum and Gallery (CMAG). As well, former NGA director Betty Churcher, assisted by Lucy Quinn, collaborated on Treasures of Canberra, a book of selected artworks from Canberra’s national cultural institutions. Particularly relevant to Canberra’s contemporary visual arts have been the exhibitions and catalogues produced by CMAG (opened in 1998), such as Something in the Air: Collage and Assemblage in Canberra Region Art and Imitation of Life: Memory and Mimicry in Canberra Region Art. Yet to date there has been no synthetic study of these ACT institutions that interrogates the fertile tensions between local and national space, which this dissertation proposes has been fundamental to the development of a thriving contemporary arts community in Canberra.


The publication coincided with an exhibition of the same name at Megalo Print Studio and Gallery in Canberra, ACT.

22 Intensity of Purpose: 21 Years of ANCA, edited by Alison Bell (Canberra: Australian National Capital Artists, 2013) exhibition catalogue. The publication coincided with an exhibition of the same name at CMAG in Canberra, ACT.


Ideas regarding the formal beginnings of Canberra as an art centre go back to the 1940s. In 1941, Charles Bean, chair of the Australian War Memorial (AWM), proposed that Canberra should be developed as such and establish its own art school. Taking up the idea in the 1960s, Richard “Dick” Kingsland, then secretary of the Department of the Interior, with the support of H. C. “Nugget” Coombes, then Governor of the Reserve Bank, invited Adelaide-based art educator Donald Brook to Canberra in 1965 to progress the idea of a serious art school at Canberra Technical College. Brook’s experiences were mixed. “In the early nineteen sixties”, recalled Brook:

it seemed like a good idea that Australia’s national capital should have a serious art school. . . . Even half a century later it is not entirely clear that it can be done.

Brook’s opinion on the efficacy of CSA was probably influenced by his own less than happy memories of Canberra but it is also evidentially incorrect. Before the school was established in its current location in 1976 and then greatly expanded as a Bauhaus-inspired group of art and craft workshops under inaugural director Udo

25 Brook, currently Emeritus Professor of Art History at South Australia’s Flinders University and described by Artlink’s editor Stephanie Britton as “Australia’s most revered art theorist”, in editor’s note preceding Donald Brook, “The Art School Way Back When”, Artlink 31, no. 3 (2011): 80, was a seminal figure in the development of Australia’s contemporary art spaces. In Adelaide in the early 1970s, he spearheaded the campaign for a small gallery run on a collective basis by artists, for artists. His work led to the founding of Adelaide’s Australian Experimental Art Foundation (EAF) in 1974.

26 Brook, ibid.

27 At the time, the NSW Department of Education had responsibility for education in the ACT. Brook’s employment at Canberra Technical College lasted less than 12 months, foundering on the ignorance and obduracy of NSW Education Department officials. This is in spite of the overt support of Kingsland and Coombes (soon to be the proponent and chair of the Australian Council for the Arts and Chancellor of ANU).
Sellbach from 1977, art classes had been taught at Canberra Technical College. Following this, from 1977 onwards CSA attracted lecturers and produced artists of national and international importance, becoming a central player in the development of the city’s unique arts practice.

Brook’s personal commentary about his experience at Canberra Technical College is at odds with Agostino’s history of the school, which Brook described as “a highly sanitised version” of events. The discrepancy between the two accounts shows what Julia Peers has characterised as “the flexible nature of the historic record”. In claiming his own recollections as being more accurate than Agostino’s research, Brook raises important questions about the discourse around the nature of history: how to “get at it”, how to “tell” it; how to “represent it”. These questions resonated through my research as the complexities of local arts development in the national capital were subsequently revealed.

1.2 Contemporary Arts Organisations

The case study of this thesis is an examination of the development and activities of BRG/CCAS that reveals the growing maturity of the local arts scene. Predicated on the local, the organisation displayed both local and national relevance from its inception and, in the 1990s, an increasingly international outlook as well. First, the national context requires elaboration. When meetings were first held in Canberra in 1980 to canvas the idea of a collective gallery, it was the

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29 Brook, “Art School,” 80. In spite of Brook’s recollection, Agostino’s singular work stands as the first comprehensive history of the ANU School of Art.
Commonwealth-funded job creation organisation Jobless Action that, in the absence of government funding alternatives, provided initial support for the establishment of Megalo in 1980, and then for BRG 12 months later. By 1986, the ACT and the Northern Territory (NT) were the only states or territories without a contemporary art space. Between the opening of BRG in 1981, and 1986 when the first public meeting was held seeking interest in forming a contemporary arts space in Darwin, the Visual Arts Board (VAB) of the Australia Council for the Arts (OzCo) had committed to supporting contemporary art spaces in all Australian states and territories.\(^3\) During this 1986 meeting the VAB outlined its willingness to provide “in-principle support and potential funding.”\(^4\) CCAS was established through a merger of BRG with the Arts Council Gallery (ACT) in 1987, continuing BRG’s important foundational work. By the end of the 1980s it was one of twelve contemporary art spaces in Australia’s six states and two territories that united under the national support organisation Contemporary Arts Organisations Australia (CAOs). They were funded by state and federal government arts bodies and they supported and presented work by living artists across a range of media. With the exception of the Contemporary Art Centre of South Australia, which opened in 1942, most of these spaces were founded in the 1970s and 1980s.\(^5\)


\(^4\) Ibid.

Seven of the CAOs member organisations have produced partial histories in various formats that review or examine periods in their development: Institute of Modern Art (IMA); Performance Space; Contemporary Art Space Tasmania (CAST); 24HR Art; EAF; Gertrude Contemporary and CACSA.\textsuperscript{34} PICA, Artspace, the CCP and the Australian Centre for Photograph (ACP) have no published

In addition to the above organisations, the George Paton Gallery at the University of Melbourne was an extremely important space, the first experimental art space to be supported by an institution. From 1973–1980 under the visionary direction of Kiffy Rubbo, the gallery provided a home for the Women’s Art Register and the Women’s Art Movement and championed women’s and political art, performance and video, photography and sculpture.

\textsuperscript{34} In South Australia: Stephanie Britton, ed., \textit{A Decade at the EAF: A History of the Experimental Art Foundation 1974–1984} (Adelaide: Australian Experimental Art Foundation, 1984). This publication gathers together images and recollections of exhibitions and events, and includes essays from Donald Brook that speak eloquently of the pace of change in 1970s art practice in Australia. Subsequently to this, in various years, the EAF has produced small booklets covering EAF exhibitions. Also, finishing in 1986, is Dean Bruton, ed., \textit{The Contemporary Art Society of South Australia 1942–86: Recollections} (Adelaide: The Contemporary Art Society of South Australia, 1986).


In Tasmania: In 1983, following the amalgamation between Chameleon in Hobart and Arthouse in Launceston, CAST produced an exhibition and publication called \textit{Chameleon: A Decade}, edited by Victoria Hammond, (Hobart: Contemporary Art Space Tasmania, 1983) which considered Chameleon over its ten-year history.

In NT: McKinnon, \textit{The Hottest Gallery in the World}. Both the CAST and 24HR Art publications use voices from a variety of ex- and current members whose stories privilege place and whose writing is lively and compelling.

In NSW: \textit{21 Years of Hybrid Arts Practice} (Sydney: Performance Space, 2004). Released to mark Performance Space’s 21st birthday celebrations, this publication includes a list of presented works based on the organisation’s incomplete archive. In addition, Mike Mullins, who founded Performance Space and whose exhibition \textit{Long, Long Time Ago} (aka \textit{New Blood Two}) opened Performance Space in 1983, wrote his masters thesis, held in the form of a 2-hour video at COFA, on aspects of the organisation’s history. The ACP publication \textit{Photofile}, first published in 1983, provides a comprehensive history of contemporary photography practice in Australia.

histories, although the latter organisation’s publication *Photofile*, first published in 1983, provides a comprehensive history of contemporary photography practice in Australia.

BRG arose in response to particular local social, political and cultural factors but was also in line with national developments regarding the development and exhibition of contemporary art. While this study does not compare the history of BRG/CCAS with the other 11 CAOs members, it is useful to compare the beginnings of the ACT’s contemporary arts space with NT’s 24HR Art in Darwin and Tasmania’s CAST in Hobart because of their important similarities, despite the fact that the emergence of these three groups happened over a decade and there are vast differences between the three cities in which they are located.

The ACT, Tasmania and NT are home to the country’s smallest populations. The NT has the nation’s highest non-urban Aboriginal population. Both the NT and Tasmania are geographically isolated from other Australian cities while the ACT covers the smallest geographical area. Of the three capital cities, Darwin, which is geographically orientated toward Asia, is the most culturally diverse although the ACT cultural ecology benefits from more than 80 international embassies based in Canberra. The ACT and the NT face similar arts funding challenges with restricted legislative agency. Tasmania, the ACT and the NT are separated by thousands of kilometres and despite similarities in population numbers are vastly different in make-up. Yet the published histories of both 24HR Art and CAST highlight a key concern shared by Canberra, Darwin and Hobart.\(^{35}\) None of these cities offered their art school student graduates or emerging artists continuing exhibition opportunities

outside of the art school paradigm. Artists in all three places were therefore compelled to create their own galleries.

Inaugural BRG coordinator Alison Alder reflected on the need for a gallery to promote the work of local ACT artists in a national forum in 1983:

The Art School was the pivot of art activity which was closed to artists outside of that system. There were no collective studios, although a number of people had tried to set up artists’ studios which had failed, mainly, I think, because of the small number of graduates remaining in Canberra and also from the lack of space due to the artificial nature of the city.\(^{36}\)

Alder’s comments about the founding of BRG to provide local Canberra artists with opportunities to develop their practice and further their careers is echoed in statements by the founders of spaces in Tasmania and the NT. Bo Jones, founding member of Chameleon in Hobart (later CAST), recalled that “the Art School wore the responsibility for the whole visual art scene.”\(^{37}\) Once the idea for a local contemporary artist-run collective was established in Hobart, “the idea took off like wildfire.”\(^{38}\) Likewise 24HR Art’s inaugural director Chris Downie remembered the period directly prior to its establishment in 1989: “There’s been nowhere for

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\(^{37}\) Bo Jones, quoted in Hammond, \textit{Chameleon: A Decade}, 8.

\(^{38}\) Ibid.
graduates from art school to go, most of them leave the Territory the minute they graduate.”39

Similarities can also be found in the ways that the three collectives developed their exhibition spaces. They were all reclaimed sites: BRG was a derelict shelter shed attached to the grounds of a church and primary school; 24HR Art a decaying petrol station earmarked for demolition; and Chameleon the abandoned Blundstone Boot factory. The sites of these galleries inspired their names. Alder remembers BRG as being named for the evocative sighing of the wind through the trees that edged the large bitumen car park that served the church and school; 24HR Art referenced the 24 hours a day opening times of the Go-Lo petrol station whose premises it colonised. The buildings reclaimed for the display of contemporary arts practice, and the names given to them, reflect the “do-it-yourself” mentality with which these organisations were formed.

Unlike other states and territories, however, the ACT is the nation’s capital and home to its premier art, cultural and educational institutions. These institutions mark Canberra as the national capital space. Within a small population, this has given rise to citizens who are, broadly speaking, politically and culturally literate and who extended support, in unique ways, for the growth of a local arts practice during the final two decades of the twentieth century.

1.3 Canberra Women and Contemporary Art

Another exceptional aspect of the contemporary art community in Canberra is the profound influence exerted by women on its development. As drivers of social change in the 1970s, women were responsible for instigating much-needed social reform initiatives within Canberra’s unusual population demographic that by the 1960s saw a majority of women and children within the population. These statistics created unique circumstances for active community engagement with women’s social problems, including isolation, housing, domestic violence, and public safety issues. Women’s political activism went hand-in-hand with international and national social and political movements, including women’s liberation, opposition to the Vietnam War, the countercultural movement, the fight for Indigenous rights and the campaign for nuclear disarmament. This led to poster making that was practiced largely, though not exclusively, by women as an instrument to champion social change and cohesion, shaping the beginnings of a local contemporary arts practice.

Poster making was an ideal tool for communication and agitation. While the printing process was physically arduous, the production process was cheap and accessible to all who wished to engage in it. It was, therefore, an ideal collective

40 In 1961, in a total population of 58,856, there were 10,885 women aged from 20–44 and 20,651 children under 14 years old. By 1966, in a total population of 96,013, there were 22,206 women between 20–44 and 31,708 children under 14 years old. Except where otherwise footnoted, all population data throughout this thesis is extrapolated from: 3105.0.65.001 Australia Historical Population Statistics, 2014. Table 2.17 Population (a) (b), age and sex, ACT (b), 30 June, 2011. Australian Bureau of Statistics 18, September, 2014.
endeavour. Its ability to be rapidly deployed overnight throughout an urban environment made it unparalleled as a public message machine.

The influence of women in the history of Canberra’s arts is usefully illustrated by a statistical anomaly: BRG/CCAS is distinguished as the only contemporary art space in Australia that has continuously exhibited a higher percentage of female artists than male. This unusual statistic was revealed during a compilation of exhibitor statistics at BRG/CCAS from 1981 to 2012 in preparation for the exhibition *Bad Girls: Twenty Witness 1000*, that I curated in February 2013. The exhibition comprised 28 artworks from 20 female artists who had exhibited at BRG/CCAS from April 1981 to December 2012 and reflected the tremendous diversity of ideas addressed over the period and the local, national and global frames of reference in which the artists couched their practice. The artists in exhibition were representative of the more than 1000 women who had shown at the organisation over the preceding 32 years. For a relatively small regional contemporary art space, this is an extraordinary record.

Under the pseudonym the CoUNTess, artist and academic Elvis Richardson has been recording gender bias in the art world since 2008. Her research confirms that in all art schools, including Canberra/ANU School of Art (ANU SOA), the number of enrolled female students is significantly higher than that of male

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students. An examination of graduating student lists from the school since 1977 confirms that this statistic holds true across all years. With a national and occasionally international focus, Richardson has compared graduating numbers with women artists represented in exhibition. For 2011 she compiled statistics from the six state CAOs member organisations and the NT, with the exception of CCAS. In contrast to art school enrolment statistics, Richardson’s data reveals a significantly higher number of male exhibitors across the country. Only at 24HR Art during that year were a greater number of female artists exhibited. The NT’s higher figures can be accounted for by the prevalence of Indigenous women exhibiting at 24HR Art.

That more female artists have exhibited at BRG/CCAS might be explained by the leading role of women in its administration. Indeed, of the eight coordinators/directors over 32 years, six have been women. Men have in the main held directorial positions at art galleries, including at contemporary art spaces. Of the two male directors, Trevor Smith was joined in his second and final year by Jane Barney in the role of curator. Nevertheless, incumbent director David Broker’s

45 “Educating and Exhibiting Artists”, CoUNTess.
46 CCAS exhibition data is not represented in these figures as the CCAS website was down during the period that 2011 figures were being compiled. CoUNTess [Elvis Richardson], email to the author, February 21, 2013.
47 “Educating and Exhibiting Artists”, CoUNTess.
48 In the eight years from 2005–2012, 24HR Art showed more female than male artists in four of those years, with 14 more female artists showing overall for the period. 24HR Art, email to the author, February 26, 2013.
49 The NT has the highest concentration of Indigenous Australians and therefore the greatest number of Indigenous artists. The largest number of Indigenous artists are women. If the anomaly was due, say, to a smaller population base then it would be expected that CAST in Hobart would also reflect a greater number of female exhibitors, whereas its greater ratio of male exhibitors is in keeping with national and international trends.
48 Alison Alder, Anne Virgo, Erica Green, Brenda Runnegar, Jane Barney and Lisa Byrne.
tenure since 2006 has also been characterised annually by a greater proportion of female to male exhibitors, suggesting that there are other important factors at work. I contend that women artists, lecturers and gallerists played an unusually dominant role in the founding of the contemporary arts community in Canberra. This can be seen in the influence of female print and poster makers; the example of women artists/lecturers at CSA; the presence of Helen Maxwell’s australian Girls Own Gallery (aGOG 1989–2000); and Canberra’s position as a political fulcrum for concerns impacting on women.

1.4 The Global and the Local

The growth of international biennales and triennials over the last two decades is evidence of an increasingly globalised art world with a commensurate flattening of discourse across international boundaries that casts an opaque film around the representation and value of local practices. The production of local histories of art has provided an important antidote to this. Australian art historian Terry Smith, who gave one of the first public lectures at BRG in 1984, in 2010 called for:

a variety of kinds of critical practice, each of them alert to the demands, limits and potentialities of both local worlds and distant

49 Note that “australian” is rendered all in lowercase.

worlds, as well as actual and possible connections between locality and distance. In practice, translocality amounts to a focus on local artistic manifestations, and on actual existing connections between them and art and ideas elsewhere.51

This dissertation answers Smith’s call with a deeply local history, rife with paradox and rich in narrative; an inspiring story of local endeavour pitted against national imperatives. It is in many ways a David and Goliath story that, until the handover to self-government was completed in 1992, saw emerging local expressions of art and culture struggle against the Commonwealth’s implementation of its national cultural agenda. This dichotomy, between the local and the national, lay at the heart of the immense difficulties surrounding the early understanding and funding of a local practice that manifested broadly through community, amateur and professional practitioners, firstly in the performing arts and then in the visual arts. Despite this essential locality, Canberra’s position as national capital meant that the ideas that influenced the community assumed national and international importance, ensuring that the development of practice was not parochial; it was evidentially informed by international and national viewpoints—translocality in practice.

This thesis, which primarily uses methodologies from art history and cultural history, is based on extensive local primary research, archival research and interviews, local and national government reports, the extrapolation and analysis of local population data, and documentation relating to arts funding locally and in Australia from 1912 to 2001. Through this research I have brought forward

previously uncollected, unconnected information to create an analysis about the factors in play in the establishment of a dynamic, locally invested, visual arts community in Canberra.

1.5 Transcending the National Capital Paradigm: The Evolution of BRG/CCAS

This study comprises two parts. The first part aims to examine and analyse the many factors and their complex intersections over the twentieth century. Beginning in 1912, it traces the origins of what is shown in this study to be an exceptionally active local contemporary arts community. The second part tracks the development of contemporary visual arts practice from 1978 through to 2000 through the case study of BRG (1981–1987) and its successor, CCAS (1987 to the present day). It investigates the changing roles and impacts of coordinators/directors Alison Alder, Anne Virgo, Trevor Smith and Jane Barney, and it also examines the role and impact of other key players, especially the CSA Print Workshop’s first tutor—artist Mandy Martin—and Canberra artist eX de Medici. Martin’s journey to Canberra encapsulates the political/artistic focus that inspired the founding members of BRG. de Medici’s career exemplifies the trajectory from local to international focus that charted the maturing of Canberra’s contemporary arts community.

Following the current introductory chapter, chapter 2 examines the years from 1913 to 1978 and the events and proclivities that laid the groundwork for the emergence of contemporary visual arts practice from 1978. It addresses and examines Canberra’s unique socio-political duality as federal/national capital and as regional/local community, the background to and rise of women as agents of social change, the trajectory and impacts of federal arts funding nationally and locally, the
growth of commercial galleries and other exhibition spaces, and the historic, physical make-up of Canberra’s suburbs. This broad exploration of the city’s wider arts and cultural manifestations is continued in the third chapter, which examines formative issues of the 1980s that influenced the development of the city’s unique local arts practice.

Chapter 3 proposes the 1980s as the decade of the genesis of local contemporary visual arts practice. With the ACT under the control of the Commonwealth, and local government therefore hampered by restricted legislative agency, the chapter examines unique local solutions to rapidly growing need in the broad arts sector. These included a lack of studio and exhibition spaces for visual artists, a continued unsuccessful focus on funding performing arts as flagship companies and inadequate funding and forward planning for the entire arts sector. The chapter is anchored by a close reading of the 1985 delivered Pascoe Report into arts funding in the ACT. This report, which considered local arts as an expression of national capital space culture, was entirely at odds with the growing needs and desires of local arts and culture practitioners. In response to the report’s delivery, the chapter charts the robust community reactions that assisted in alerting the incoming, self-governing ACT Legislative Assembly to the power and relevance of local contemporary arts.

If the 1980s can be characterised as the decade of the genesis of local contemporary practice in the visual arts, then the 1990s saw a powerful confluence of local support mechanisms delivered via an intelligent, bipartisan approach to arts and cultural development and funding. Although the national public and federal government perceptions were still bound up with Canberra’s position as national capital space and federal power base, in the 1990s local arts and culture conclusively...
claimed their own space. Nowhere was this more evident than in the visual arts. In considering the 1990s, chapter 4 examines the path to self-government and the impacts of successive local governments on arts development during the decade. An analysis of two major committees established by the ACT Legislative Assembly that enabled rapid sector-wide growth reveals an unprecedented depth of government engagement with the arts community.

Beginning part two of this study, Chapters 5 and 6 continue the examination of Canberra’s unique social/political duality, focusing on the case study of this dissertation: Bitumen River Gallery/Canberra Contemporary Art Space. The scope of chapter 5 begins at 1978 with an investigation of the factors leading up to BRG’s founding and concludes at the end of 1983 with Anne Virgo’s arrival at BRG as co-coordinator. Chapter 6 examines the process and impacts of BRG’s amalgamation with the ACG to form CCAS in 1987. Together, the chapters contend that the process from unfunded collective to fully funded contemporary art space was marked by a particular set of circumstances unique to Canberra. The chapters examine the impact of these circumstances on the growth of contemporary art practice, as evidenced in BRG/CCAS’s journey through case studies of groups and individuals. These trace the growing maturity of Canberra as an art centre from the youthful dynamism that characterised BRG to the progressing of national relationships and capacity building through CCAS.

The study is concluded in chapter 7 with a focused investigation of expressions of arts practice through BRG/CCAS. This begins with an analysis of the gallery’s history under the two directors, Trevor Smith and Jane Barney, who steered the organisation through the 1990s. The chapter charts the paradigmatic changes in the roles of curators and directors during this decade and examines the gallery’s
declining preoccupation with the local. This is followed by an examination of minorities in exhibition through the 1980s and 1990s and a comparative analysis of travelling exhibitions mounted during these decades. A close reading of exhibitions, including *Satellite of Love* (Dale Frank), curated by Smith and Christopher Chapman, and exhibitions curated by Barney including *Beautiful Home* (Bronwen Sandland and Paull McKee), *60 Heads* (eX de Medici), *Canberra/Brasilia* and *Black Books*, reveal the narrative arc that moved the organisation from its earlier preoccupation with establishing a local space to a mature engagement with international themes and markets. The chapter as a whole places CCAS within its national and international contexts through these examinations of personnel, exhibitions and artists.
2. The National Capital Space and Arts Practice: Impacts and Development—1913 to 1978

This chapter examines the factors prior to 1978 that provided the impetus for the birth of a local contemporary arts practice in the ACT. This historical examination is critical to the contention that the birth and development of contemporary art in the nation’s capital is unique. BRG/CCAS did not arise in a vacuum; numerous fertile tensions were created throughout the twentieth century as the ideals of a national capital butted up against local needs and desires.

Understanding these historical factors is also critical because the ACT’s population during the broader period covered in this thesis was marked by rapid growth and a degree of transience unprecedented in other Australian cities. Such transience resulted in a lack of continuity and this has meant that the majority of Canberrans, including contemporary arts practitioners, have remained largely unaware of the rich history of arts and cultural development in Canberra and therefore have been unable to critically interrogate this history. If we are to examine who we are now it is essential to understand from where we have come.

Canberra’s two distinct iterations of space—that is, as federal/national capital and as a regional/local community—comprise a unique socio-political duality. Therefore, this chapter’s central concern is to uncover and examine the fertile tensions inherent in and created by this duality; to reveal why and how these tensions began to manifest artistically by 1978, and to understand why the genesis of a local contemporary arts practice occurred at this point in Canberra’s history.

To this end, the chapter broadly examines three interwoven historical threads whose combined effects created the unique conditions for the rise of Canberra’s
contemporary arts and cultural practice. These are: the various constructs of Canberra as federal/national capital, regional centre and local polis; the critical role played by women, firstly as agents of social change and secondly in the development of community arts and commercial galleries; and the trajectory and impacts of federal arts funding nationally and locally. The chapter concludes with an assessment of the historical physical make-up of Canberra’s suburbs, which resulted in a concentration, from the late 1970s onwards, of like-minded young arts and social activists centred around Canberra’s inner north.

2.1 Capital Constructs

The pre-eminent construct of Canberra as Australia’s national capital, “the centre of our national ideas”,¹ is both symbolic and actual. As a federal capital city, Canberra provides the physical site for Australia’s governing institutions. Principal among these are: the Federal Parliament located in Australia’s Parliament House; the federal administrative departments clustered in the Parliamentary Triangle; and the nation’s supreme judiciary body, the High Court of Australia.

Canberra is also home to national institutions—which provide actual services to both national and local users, but where symbolism is implied in the naming of the institutions as “National” or “Australian”—and in the national ceremonies and commemorative functions that they coordinate. The first of the national cultural institutions, the AWM, opened in 1943. This was followed by the

opening of the NLA (1968), the NGA(1982)\(^2\), the National Portrait Gallery (NPG—1998, initially sited in old Parliament House) and the National Museum of Australia (NMA—2001). The foundation stone of the National Archives of Australia was laid in 1920, followed by the National Film and Sound Archives (NFSA) in 1935. The latter became an independent cultural organisation in 1984. The ANU was ratified by a Bill of Parliament in 1946. From 1992, ANU assumed the CSA, which had opened on January 1, 1976.\(^3\) Additionally more than 80 foreign embassies contribute to the city’s national cultural landscape.

The carving out of an actual, functioning local space within this overarching idea of a national capital is complex because the nature of a national capital is, primarily, national in focus and in actualisation. While the federal capital city has been identified as encompassing both “good physical environments where people live out ordinary lives, as well as symbolically rich [environments] that capture the qualities a state wishes to portray to the larger world”\(^4\), it has also conversely been identified as more likely than state capitals to become a contested site. This is because a federal government seeks:

\(^3\) Prior to this date, Canberra Technical College provided various art and craft courses.
to control and develop the capital in the interests of the nation as a whole, while the people of the capital naturally wish to govern themselves to the greatest extent possible.5

The national capital is therefore a unique and dynamic city construct that allows the possibility for multiple tensions to arise along the boundaries where the symbolic and actual national capital meet the functioning local. These dynamic interplays, which heralded the birth of Canberra as a modern city, began to manifest in the late 1960s.

Prior to this—from the city’s establishment in 1913 within the newly excised land named as the Australian Federal Territory, and then from 1927, when the Federal Government relocated from Melbourne to the newly constructed Parliament House—Canberra existed, firstly symbolically and then actually, as Australia’s federal capital. In 1938, the Federal Capital Territory was renamed the Australian Capital Territory suggesting “changing views . . . to a national centre rather than [simply] a federal meeting place.”6 The idea of Canberra as a national centre arguably attained its initial concrete form in 1943, when within a population of less than 15,000, the first of Canberra’s national cultural institutions, the AWM, opened its doors.

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6 Brown, A History of Canberra, 94.
2.2 Population Growth and Social Impacts to 1978

Population numbers remained low in Canberra in the 1940s with slow growth experienced until the late 1950s. Although the city had been imagined as the seat of Federal Government from the beginning and inchoately as a national centre, funding and the political will to develop the city was fraught, as factionalism in successive Federal Governments, and cataclysmic world affairs—World War I, The Great Depression, World War II—constantly intervened to prevent any smooth fulfilment of the capital’s promise. In the late 1950s, the Liberal Government led by Prime Minister Robert Menzies renewed its commitment to Canberra and the city began to experience dynamic growth, largely driven by Menzies’ desire to make Canberra “a worthy capital”. To this end, the Federal Government committed to further transfers of public servants to Canberra, and in 1958, it instituted the National Capital Development Commission (NCDC) to oversee the government’s renewed commitment to planned development. The impact of these decisions on growth was such that the population of Canberra trebled over 12 years; from a base of 30,356 in 1954, numbers began to rise rapidly, to 58,856 in 1961 and then to 96,013 by 1966. The population continued to escalate over the next twelve years, reaching 217,981 by 1978.

7 It is possible that this rapid upwards population trajectory is unique among federal capitals. Only one other national capital, Brasilia, the capital of Brazil, was purpose built. This similarity provided fertile curatorial ground for the Jane Barney curated exhibition Canberra Brasilia at CCAS in 1998. See section 7.5, pp. 323–332 for a close examination of this exhibition.

The brunt of the negative social impacts that resulted from this rapid growth was borne by the large numbers of women who, as new residents of the national capital, had to carve out a functioning local space from within a national capital city construct that was ill-equipped to serve their growing social welfare needs or the needs of their young families.

An historical precedent to the social activism practiced by women in the 1970s occurred in 1927. In March of that year, when Federal Parliament was officially welcomed into the provisional Parliament House, the Federal Capital Commission (FCC), the forerunner of the NCDC, estimated Canberra’s population at 7,384 people.\(^9\) The population included parliamentarians housed in the newly built Hotel Canberra and Kurrajong Hotel, public servants homed in hostels and houses in Ainslie, Reid, Forrest, Kingston and Yarralumla, and workers housed under canvas in construction camps.\(^10\) This socially varied, small population included many young families who shared a common need for child and maternal welfare services—services not yet provided by government.

As previously noted (see chapter 1, p. 5), in 1927, early local engagement with women’s welfare needs was evidenced when Dr Beatrice Holt and the Women and Children’s Committee established the Canberra Mothercraft Society. This organisation, “one of the most active and useful of the many [social] organisations in Canberra”,\(^11\) adopted “innovative approaches to child and maternal welfare”\(^12\) that sought to provide services across Canberra’s early and diverse social divides.

Reports presented at its third annual general meeting on July 24, 1929 indicated that,

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\(^10\) In, for example: *Brown, A History of Canberra*, 77.

\(^11\) *Sydney Morning Herald*, “Canberra Mothercraft Society”.

\(^12\) *Brown*, 83.
over the previous year, “the sister-in-charge had paid 897 visits to homes, and that there had been 2,155 attendants at the society’s clinics.” This number of 2155 attendants indicates that 29.18% of the 1928/1929 population comprised pregnant women. The preponderance of women of childbearing age, and the young families this statistic implies, reached unprecedented levels from 1961 to 1978.

The continuous rapid increases in population over consecutive census dates directly contributed to the rise of women as progressive, radical, social activists during the late-1960s and the 1970s, because it was women, particularly those with young families, who were most negatively impacted by the unique circumstances of life in the national capital. Statistical data indicates that over seventeen years Canberra’s population almost quadrupled from 58,828 in 1961 to 217,981 in 1978. Negative impacts included the effects of transience and isolation on residents, both inbuilt factors in a population largely dedicated to realising the government’s renewed commitment to consolidating Canberra as the national space. A large percentage of Canberra’s population during this period comprised public servants, who, whether single or in family groups, were posted to the city for periods of two years. The isolating effects of transience were compounded by the loss of extended

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13 Sydney Morning Herald, “Canberra Mothercraft Society”. The society was subsidised by the FCC. Transport for the sister-in-charge was provided by “Mr and Mrs Barton”.

14 In 1961, in a total population of 58,856, there were 10,885 women aged 20–44 and 20,651 children aged under 14. By 1966, in a total population of 96,013, there were 22,206 women aged 20–44 and 31,708 children aged under 14. In 1973, in a total population of 173,306, there were 45,703 women aged 20–44 and 55,387 children aged under 14. In 1978, in a total population of 217,961, there were 46,049 women aged 20–44 and 65,856 children aged under 14.

familial and friendship support mechanisms, left behind in other cities and towns.¹⁶ Additionally, within the overwhelmingly young demographic, there were few older women who might otherwise have extended support to young mothers.¹⁷ The emphases throughout this period were on physically building the national capital, governing the nation, and providing services that supported these endeavours and those engaged in them. Nominally through these decades, the provision of social services for local women and children was the responsibility of the Federal Government, but with the renewed, principal focus on establishing Canberra as a “worthy” national capital, government agencies were slow to recognise growing local, social needs.

By the early 1970s the number of women and children requiring a broad range of social services reached a critical mass. In 1973, in a total population of 173,306, the combined number of women aged 20–44 and children aged under 14 reached 100,190 or 57.81% of the total population. Transience and isolation led to increasing levels of domestic violence and other family dysfunctions, and the need for support services became acute.¹⁸

The resulting sociopolitical effects of this dramatic rise in population over the period 1961–1978, coupled with the politics of feminism and the wider women’s

¹⁶ “Women in Canberra frequently lacked any of the traditional supports to women at home, they often lacked family and old friends. They had a strong need to create a new community to build up supportive networks.” Paula Simcocks, Majura Women’s Group Newsletter, 2005, quoted in Majura Women’s Group: Celebrating 25 years (Canberra: CMAG 2006), 2. Commemorative booklet that accompanied the exhibition at CMAG.

¹⁷ In 1961, for example, there were only 1,667 women in a total population of 58,856, aged 50–60.

¹⁸ Statistical information to backup this claim is not available because domestic violence and family dysfunctions in general were not recognised as social problems and therefore not included in statistical gathering at this time. Many attempts were made to source statistics. The claim is upheld through anecdotal stories from Canberra woman who lived in Canberra and brought up their families at this time and through the fact that the provision of these services from the beginning of the 1970s indicated need.
movement from the beginning of the 1970s, stimulated the rise of young, radical, progressive, social-activist women. It was these women, in the absence of government-funded support mechanisms, who conceived and enacted service solutions to Canberra’s emerging social problems during the 1970s. These services included: in 1970, Sexual Health and Family Planning ACT; in 1971, Canberra’s first Family Planning clinic; in 1972, the Joint Women’s Action group; in 1973, Canberra’s Incest Support Centre, known from 1976 as the Rape Crisis Centre and operated as a feminist collective; in 1975, Beryl was established, as was The Women’s House in O’Connor, which housed the headquarters of Canberra Women’s Liberation (CWL) in Canberra; and in 1978, The Women’s Information and Referral Centre opened as a shopfront service in the city centre.

This rise of women as social activists also occurred during was the rise of the CWL movement, active in the capital from 1970. The various impacts of the women’s liberation movement were felt, to a greater or lesser degree and at different times, in other Australian cities. However, Canberra women, well-educated and often administratively skilled, were uniquely positioned, living in the national capital with access to political decision makers, to respond to need and then to effect community change with government support. At this time, they were also directly

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19 See section 5.3 Feminist Politics and Art: Intersections, pp. 184–186 for further information on women’s liberation in Canberra.

Canberra’s small female demographic around this time is evidenced by an extrapolation of ABS population data available for 1933 and 1947. In 1933 the number of females over 20 years old in the ACT was 2,445; in 1947 they numbered 4,807.
supported by the progressive social policies of the Whitlam Labor Government, elected on December 2, 1972. Whitlam had been three times Dux of Canberra Grammar and had attended Telopea Park High School, a period he credits with “[strengthening his] . . . convictions about the role of the national Government in the nation’s affairs”. Arguably, this period in Whitlam’s life may also have inculcated a belief in Canberra as a vibrantly local, as well as national, centre.

Beryl, run by the Canberra Women’s Refuge Collective, was opened on International Women’s Day in 1975 by then 78-year-old Canberran Beryl Henderson (1897–1990). Henderson’s involvement in first wave feminism in Australia provided inspiration and impetus to second wave feminists agitating for social change. As previously noted (see chapter 1, p. 5), Beryl was the second women’s refuge in Australia; it was the second of around 50 women’s refuges established in the country by the end of the 1970s. The first was Elsie, which began as a squat in the Sydney suburb of Glebe in 1972. Inspired by, but in contrast to this, Beryl was established in a three-bedroom house in Adams Place, Watson, then on the northern edge of Canberra, after successful submissions to the Federal Government. A grant of $4,000 from the Department of the Capital Territory (DCT) was allocated to run the refuge. Julia Ryan was a founding member of CWL in 1970. She recalled:

21 Brown, 88. Telopea School opened in 1923 and was “one of the earliest public buildings undertaken by the [Federal Capital Advisory Committee] and the first school completed by the Commonwealth”. Brown, 87.

22 “We were very aware of what was happening in Sydney around the formation of Elsie, and that was our inspiration”. Julia Ryan, quoted in Choudhury, ed. Opening a New Door, 23.
Being Canberra people . . . we thought we would ask the
government for a house. . . . [I]t was the Whitlam government and
we thought we could talk them into it, which we did. 23

2.3 Developing Arts and Culture to 1978

From 1927 art was considered integral to establishing a national perception
of Canberra as culturally literate. 24 In these early days this was imagined as a
community-based endeavour:

As a centre of culture Canberra will be dependent in the early stage
on the establishment of its University, but meanwhile art societies
and the like may accomplish useful endeavour. 25

Historically, the earliest of the art societies was the Artists’ Society of
Canberra (ASOC), active from June 28, 1927. 26 In recess from July 1934, it re-

24 Brown relates what is arguably the first instance of a local artist presenting work
that is particularly identifiable as Canberran, when in 1927, the artist Eirene Mort offered a
book of her drawings to the FCC to mark celebrations of the opening of the Federal
Parliament: “She evoked,” writes Brown, “an agrarian landscape of nostalgic decline, as if to
set it against the coming city, and to confer its own legitimacy on the growing city.” Brown,
A History of Canberra, 90.
26 From 1952 to c. 1966: at Riverside Centre, Barton; from 2004–2006: at Canberra
Technology Park, Watson; from 2007–July 2010: at Unit 2, Geils Court, Deakin West; from
August 2010: at Blaxland Centre, 25 Blaxland Crescent, Griffith. Data collated from ACT
Heritage Library visual arts ephemera collection.
emerged in August 1945. Also founded in 1945 was the Canberra Photographic Society, followed in 1948 by the Canberra Art Club.

The 1940s saw the beginning of art classes at Canberra Technical College. Agostino reveals that in 1941, it was Charles Bean, then chair of the AWM, who proposed to the Leader of the Opposition Joseph Collings, “that Canberra be developed as an art centre, and that an art course be established at Canberra Technical College.” The following year, the first art classes in Freehand and Model Drawing and Landscape Painting were offered. By 1952, the ACT Pastoral and Agricultural Association (P&A) began inviting staff at the College to assist in an expanded Arts and Craft section at the P&A’s annual show—held in the far northern suburb of Hall—envisaging that the “increased competition” this would encourage would add to “cultural relations between rural and city sections of the population.”

The developments in the cultural scene accelerated in the 1960s and 1970s, evident in the fast-growing numbers of informal and formal groups and associations. Among the informal initiatives was the 1960s Wednesday Group, an example of women who, in the absence of extended families, came together in meetings that, while nominally social, provided a focus for creative initiatives. In the 1970s, the Thursday Group, which comprised around 15 women potters associated with the


29 Agostino, ANU School of Art, 3.

Craft Association of the ACT (formed in 1970) continued this example, as did the Majura Women’s Group (convened in 1981). Throughout the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s, these groups acted in much the same way as art societies, providing a sense of social cohesion and opportunities for creative community expression.

A key formal development was the growth of craft-based activities. The Craft Association of the ACT was established at the Canberra Theatre Centre (CTC) in 1970. From the beginning it displayed a high degree of activity, coordinating weekend workshops, discussions, slide and film evenings and an annual members’ exhibition. Professionalism was foregrounded, with members admitted after an assessment process requiring that work be of a “consistent high standard and . . . [an] original design.” By October 1977, when the organisation held its inaugural annual exhibition at its new premises in Watson, a large contingent of 37 craft workers exhibited 170 works, marking, according to Sasha Grishin, “an important stage in the growth of the crafts in Canberra.” This dynamic and enduring community organisation changed its name in 1973 to the Craft Council of the ACT and again in 1998 to Craft ACT: Craft and Design Centre. By the mid-1980s, as evidenced in

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31 The Craft Association of Australia (NSW) was formed in 1964, signalling the beginnings of a national focus for the many craft groups operating throughout the country. In 1971, following the emergence of Craft Associations in all states and the ACT, these Associations convened a peak body, the Craft Council of Australia.


chapter 3, the demonstrated strength of the work by the organisation’s members would lead arts consultant Timothy Pascoe to conclude that the crafts constituted the pre-eminent plastic arts form in Canberra.\footnote{36 See Pascoe, \textit{Arts in the ACT}, 57.}

Another sign of growing civic maturity was the increasingly broad range of employment on offer in the national capital. It therefore followed that many of those who accepted postings to Canberra from larger Australian cities and from overseas countries were educated and visually and culturally literate. Art societies had indeed “accomplished useful endeavour” from the 1920s, and from the 1940s, the New South Wales (NSW) founded Council for the Encouragement of Music and the Arts (CEMA), along with its national successor the Arts Council of Australia (ACA), provided local access to travelling visual arts exhibitions. Missing from the visual arts landscape, however, were local commercial galleries and the opportunity they provided to view and to purchase contemporary Australian visual art. By 1962, with the city’s population at around 60,000,\footnote{1961 population: 58,828.} Hendrieka (Riek) Le Grand (1922–1985) judged the national capital ready for such an endeavour and, in that year, established Canberra’s first commercial art gallery, Studio Nundah, at her home in Macarthur Avenue, O’Connor.

Riek Le Grand, mother of Canberra sculptor Michael Le Grand, settled in Canberra in 1955 with her husband Henri, who had accepted a position in the early 1950s at Canberra Technical College, the forerunner to the CSA. The couple, who had been partners in a pottery business in Holland, immigrated to Sydney in 1950. Studio Nundah was renovated in 1965 by modernist architect and Canberra resident Theo Bischoff, and renamed Nundah Gallery. Bischoff’s architectural features—
which included cypress pine floors, matte black ceilings and hidden lighting tracks—provided the young Michael Le Grand with “an education in sophistication and taste” and memories of “‘artists tramping through the house’ during his school years.”


Joy Warren (1923–2015) settled in Canberra in 1952, with her architect husband Robert (Bob) Warren (1920–2002). Bob had been “enticed by the possibilities the relatively fledgling city offered” to design and build “good quality housing at affordable prices.”

Joy was a performer for 15 years with Canberra Repertory Society (Canberra Rep), (for whom Robert designed many sets), and opened an eponymous public relations company. By 1973, when she had established her gallery at 2 Solander Court, Yarralumla, Canberra’s population had reached 173,306. Warren’s background in business and public relations helped to ensure the gallery’s success and in June 2013, Solander Gallery celebrated 40 years of continuous operation. A talented and inveterate self-promoter, Warren recalled on this 40th anniversary that:

we had absolutely nothing to look at, not from the government, no National Gallery, no National Portrait Gallery, nothing like that. If you wanted to see art, you had to come to Joy’s place. . . . It has

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40 From August 1986 to 1997: at 36 Grey Street, Deakin; May 1997–closure in 2014: 10 Schlich Street, Yarralumla.
been my aim and privilege to bring top Australian painters from all over Australia to the capital.\textsuperscript{41}

This talent for self-promotion resulted in the promulgation of an erroneous fact, oft-repeated in Warren’s obituaries, that Solander Gallery was the first commercial gallery in Canberra. That title belongs to Studio Nundah/Nundah Gallery. The perpetuation of this error reinforces the lack of historical knowledge in Canberra regarding the beginnings of arts practice and exhibition in the capital and is a further indication of the importance of this history.

It was a testament to the large segment of Canberra’s population who could be considered wealthy, established and visually literate, that Warren was able to show and sell Indigenous art as it contemporaneously emerged from Australia’s Western Desert, as well as continuously show the majority of Australia’s mid-career and established artists. In addition, she exhibited “Papua New Guinean, Indonesian, African, Eskimo, Turkish, Mexican, Peruvian, Indian and Japanese art . . . some of the earliest exhibitions of such art to be held in the nation’s capital.”\textsuperscript{42}

Ruth Prowse’s Gallery Huntley joined Nundah Gallery and Solander Gallery in 1974. Prowse (1920–2005) settled in Canberra in 1959 with her husband Keith, who had accepted a job with the Department of Primary Industry. She worked variously as a nurse at the Canberra Hospital, as a secretary at the British High


Commission and at ANU. A degree in zoology and cell biology at that institution was followed by her enrolment as a PhD candidate. In 1974, the year after Warren opened Solander Gallery in Yarralumla, Prowse left her PhD and established Gallery Huntley at her home in Savidge Street, Campbell, where, for the next 30 years, she exhibited and sold Australian and international art and built “an extensive private collection”. Gallery Huntley closed in 2005. Prowse had a lasting influence on the development of a local contemporary arts practice; she often travelled to Europe where she met printmaker Jorg Schmeisser (1942–2012). Gallery Huntley represented both Schmeisser and printmaker Petr Herel before their respective appointments to CSA as head of the Printmaking Workshop (in 1977) and head of the Graphic Investigation Workshop (in 1979). According to Sasha Grishin, the inaugural head of the ANU Department of Fine Art (established 1977), it was Prowse who “played an important role as conduit” in encouraging both artists to settle in Canberra.

Abraxas Gallery also opened in 1974 (mid-1974–end-1978), in La Perouse Street, Manuka. Founded by two women, Susan Stanton and Lindsay Moloney, it was considered as “more radical” than other Canberra galleries, providing the only opportunity in Canberra to view conceptual, post-object art contemporaneously with galleries in southern capitals. Many Australian artists, including Gary Shead, Jenny Watson, Keith Looby and Richard Larter, held early exhibitions there. Stanton and


Moloney also held monthly meetings at the gallery from 1976 to discuss issues such as “Art and Art Criticism”, “Radicalism and Art” and “Sociology and the Arts”.\textsuperscript{46} In 1975, Ron and Betty Beaver established their eponymous Beaver Galleries at their home in Red Hill, specialising mainly in three-dimensional craft works. During the 1980s, Beaver Galleries moved into its current location comprising four galleries under one roof, designed by the Beavers’ architect son, Ross. Since 1991, under the second-generation ownership of son Martin and wife Susie, Beaver Galleries has exhibited a broad range of Australian artists working in various mediums and at various stages of their careers.

In 1976, the last of the important commercial galleries to open in Canberra during this period was Judith Behan’s Chapman Gallery. Behan (1934–2008) moved to Canberra with her husband Ron, who was posted to the Royal Military College, Duntroon in the early 1970s. When Ron was promoted to Colonel and transferred to Melbourne, Behan chose to stay in Canberra with their two young children. In 1976, she established Chapman Gallery in their home at 15 Beaumont Close, Chapman, where she “pioneered” the “ethical and professional display,” of Indigenous art.\textsuperscript{47} She brought an element of taste and discrimination to exhibitions and became close to the artists she supported. The gallery would remain open under her directorship until 2007 and for a further seven years under Behan’s chosen successor, Kristian Pithie.

\textsuperscript{46} Peter George, “For Art’s Sake”, \textit{Canberra Times}, April 29, 1976, 3.

This meant that between 1962 and 1976, six commercial art galleries were opened in the city, five of these in the 1970s, and five of them initiated and run by women. Four of these women, arriving with husbands who had been posted to or who had chosen to relocate to the national capital, had come from various other careers in other centres and in Canberra. In addition, three of the women—Warren, Prowse and Behan—enrolled, after establishing their galleries, in art history courses at ANU under Grishin. The galleries respectively remained open for 13 years, 40 years, 30 years, 11 years, 40 years as of the present date, and 37 years. Until the 1980s, they dominated the commercial art market in the nation’s capital.

As well as these important commercial galleries, a number of smaller galleries opened and closed during the period. The first of these, the Centre Gallery, was operated by Dr Darcy Williams from 1958 to 1961.48 This was the first instance of Canberra’s penchant for home-based galleries, a predisposition that in 1984 would lead the NCDC to release a draft proposal concerning the location of art galleries in residential areas.49 Anna Simons Gallery was registered from the early 1960s until c. 1977 and active prior to 1967 and from 1975 to 1977.50 Gallery A (Canberra) opened in the Town House Motel in 1964 and closed after 1966, and Macquarie Galleries Canberra was established in 1965 and closed after 1978.51 Macquarie Galleries hosted Rosalie Gascoigne’s inaugural exhibition in 1974 and was closely

48 At 33 Ainslie Avenue, Civic, just off London Circuit. Owner: Dr Darcy Williams.
49 See chapter 3, p. 74.
50 Early 1960s: established and initially operating at Simon’s home in Campbell, then at CTC Playhouse where Simons was also managing Macquarie Galleries, Canberra. 1969: moved as Macquarie Galleries to 23 Furneaux Street, Forrest; remained at Forrest when Macquarie Galleries withdrew in 1972; c. 1977: closed (deregistered 21 February 1977). Data extrapolated from ACT Heritage Library visual arts ephemera collection.
associated with both Anna Simons, who directed Macquarie Galleries from 1965 to 1975, and Macquarie Galleries Sydney. Further dedicated gallery spaces included the Australian Sculpture Centre (which opened on June 5, 1966, and with whom Donald Brook exhibited in that year), Narek Galleries (from 1972), and Fantasia Galleries (established in 1973). Fantasia Galleries hosted Australia’s foremost feminist artist Vivienne Binns’ first Canberra exhibition, titled *Experiments in Vitreous Enamel—Silk Screened Portraits of Women*, in May 1977. Arunta Galleries was active from 1973, as was ceramicist Hiroe Swen’s Pastoral Gallery, with Lasseters Gallery (from 1975), Griffith Gallery and La Perouse Gallery (active between 1976 and the end of 1980).

The exhibition scene was extremely diverse during the 1960s and 1970s. As well as the six important commercial galleries and the fluctuating numbers of smaller galleries, a variety of non-dedicated exhibition venues arose prior to and during these decades. Prior to 1960, occasional venues included the 2CA Theatrette (established in 1943), the Riverside Gallery (active from the 1950s to 1966) and Wesley Uniting Church (Wesley Centre—founded in 1955). Canberra’s large civic

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52 83 Dominion Circuit, Deakin. Director Lesta O’Brien.
54 Firstly in Scullin and then in Manuka, specialising in prints. Proprietor: Susan Gillespie.
55 As advertised in *Canberra Times*, Saturday, 8th May, 1977, 12.
56 Limestone Avenue, Ainslie.
57 Bimbimbibi, Old Cooma Road, via Queanbeyan. In 1974, Pastoral Gallery director Hiroe Swen started Bimbimbibi Potters in the same location.
58 Rudd Street, Canberra City.
59 14 Bremer Street, Griffith.
60 57 La Perouse Street, Manuka.
buildings provided important exhibition spaces in the 1960s. They included Albert Hall, ANU (from 1963) and CTC (from its opening on June 24, 1965). Within CTC were Playhouse Gallery, Canberra Theatre Gallery and Link Gallery. In the 1970s, venues used for occasional exhibitions included: the department store David Jones (from 1971); Yarralumla Marine Centre (active from 1972 to c. 1991); YMCA (for a brief period from 1971); Albert Hall; Deakin High School (from 1975); Tuffin’s Music Studios (active from 1976); and John Curtin House and the National Jewish Centre (in 1978). Exhibitions held in these venues included those from local community groups, schoolchildren, special interest groups and traveling exhibitions.

In considering Canberra’s galleries during the 1970s, it is important to note the role played by the opening of the ANG, first mooted for 1974. The Commonwealth’s commitment to building Australia’s pre-eminent manifestation of visual arts in Canberra compounded the difficulty of discerning the needs of local emerging visual artists within the national capital paradigm. The erroneous perception that local visual artists would be the best resourced in the country once the ANG opened gained currency as the 1970s progressed. A pertinent nexus between the local fledgling contemporary arts sector and the ANG is examined in chapter 3.

Another focus for emerging visual arts practice was the annual Civic Permanent Art Award created in 1971. In 1976, the award was won by Indigenous artist Trevor Nickolls. Nickolls’ significance to the early exhibition calendar at BRG

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61 Civic Square, Canberra City. CTC opened June 24, 1965; Playhouse opened August 18, 1965 and was rebuilt in 1998; Canberra Theatre Gallery was established in June 1966 and closed after 1978; Playhouse Gallery was established on May 1, 1969; the new Link building opened October 2006. Data collated from ACT Heritage Library visual arts ephemera collection.
and to the trajectory of Urban Indigenous art in Australia is examined in chapter 4. \(^{62}\)

A further indication of the growing health of the ACT as a locus for emerging contemporary arts and activism occurred in March 1975 when the Festival of Creative Arts and Sciences, which became known as the Down to Earth ConFest was held at the Cotter River. This public expression of the countercultural movement brought many interstate activists and artists to Canberra, some of whom, such as early BRG member Cherylynn Holmes, would return in the early 1980s to study at CSA. \(^{63}\) The significance of the festival and expressions of the countercultural movement in Canberra are likewise examined within the context of the case study on BRG/CCAS in chapter 5.

### 2.4 Federal Government Commitment to Public Art

The Federal Government displayed a strong commitment to an ambitious public art program in the national capital with the NCDC responsible for its activation. In 1961, with Canberra’s population at 58,928, the Commission unveiled the first major civic sculpture: a totemic 4-metre-high bronze titled *Ethos*, by Australian sculptor Tom Bass, centrally located in Civic Square. Its commission and placement can be seen as a symbolic articulation of Canberra as a future centre of enlightenment and culture. \(^{64}\) Sponsored by the Chamber of Commerce, *Ethos* was one of only a handful of public artworks present in Canberra in 1961. Other works

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\(^{62}\) See section 5.1.4, pp. 164–169, for further information on Trevor Nickolls and *Dreamtime Machinetime*.

\(^{63}\) See chapter 4, p. 187 for a fuller account of this period and Cherylynn Holmes.

\(^{64}\) “Sculpture and Artworks in the ACT, Policies and Practices Prior to 1982”, NC–76/00122, Archives ACT.
swiftly followed at ANU, including bronze and iron screens and “an abstract piece of sculpture in the courtyard of the Physics building.”

Prime Minister Robert Menzies took a direct interest in the ACT’s proposed public sculpture program. In September 1963, he requested information from Gordon Freeth, Minister for the Interior, about some “proposals the NCDC had in mind for pieces of sculpture to be placed in Canberra.” Freeth’s reply enclosed notes from NCDC Commissioner Sir John Overall that detailed the Commission’s progress and thinking to date. Acknowledging a “growing public interest in this and other arts”, Overall explained that “so far the Commission has done very little due principally to the difficulty in obtaining work which is considered suitable.”

Overall advised that he had sought the opinions of senior administrators including: eminent art historian Sir Kenneth Clark; Professor of Town Planning at University College, London, Sir William Holford; and Sir Colin Anderson, who the Menzies government had invited to advise on Canberra’s planning and development.

Following this, Overall had appointed a “small committee of experts” to advise on the selection and design of sculptural works. These experts included: director of the National Gallery of Victoria (NGV) (1942–1956) Sir Darryl Lindsay; deputy vice-chancellor ANU and master of University House Prof. Arthur Trendall; Herald chair of Fine Arts at the University of Melbourne (1947–1978) Prof. Joseph Burke; and Dean of the Faculty of Architecture and Professor of Town and Country Planning at

65 John Overall, Notes, September 18, 1963, Personal Papers of Prime Minister Menzies, NAA M2576, 44, Canberra, 39.

66 The sculpture in the Physics building courtyard, titled Pursuit of Scientific Knowledge, is by Lithuanian artist Vincas Jomantas.

67 John Overall, Notes, 39.
University of Sydney Prof. Denis Winston. The calibre of Overall’s initial advisers and subsequent committee members indicates that the NCDC and the government were exceptionally serious in their approach to public sculpture in the ACT. Menzies confirmed his interest by responding “Could I have a talk with Mr Overall on this subject at some convenient time?”

In its sixth annual report of 1962/63, the NCDC explained that “Sculpture, used with care and restraint, must add interest to buildings and landscape.” The words “care and restraint”, and the careful selection of advisers, indicate a conservative, cautious but above all ambitious approach to public art in the national capital. Commissioner Overall would undoubtedly have felt great responsibility given the precedents the NCDC was setting and the personal interest of the Prime Minister.

From the end of the 1950s, commissioned artwork in all new ACT schools became “a requirement stipulated in architectural design briefs”—an enlightened innovation that showed the NCDC’s commitment to widespread public art. The first of these, completed in September 1960, marked the entrance to Lyneham High School. Painted by Sydney artist Cedric Flower, it comprised 260 square feet of murals “depicting highlights of Australian history from first settlement”, no doubt encouraging a national historical perspective among students. The commitment to public art and sculpture was particularly important during the 1960s, both in service

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to the Federal Government’s desire to build a worthy national capital and, in examples such as the commitment to art in schools, for the benefit of the local population. It was designed to encourage civic and national pride and arguably indicated that the government viewed the arts as integral to a balanced society.

Liberal governments have traditionally sought private investment in arts and cultural funding. Thus, the Commission’s hopeful—though unfounded—belief that the provision of public sculpture and art was among the “opportunities for development open to private benefactors which the Commission hopes will be taken up in future”\(^{72}\) aligned with the Government’s wishes. The NCDC retained responsibility for the placement of public art until the beginning of the handover to self-government in 1989, when this responsibility devolved to the Commonwealth and ACT Governments.

### 2.5 Funding Arts and Culture in Canberra During the 1960s and 1970s

The delivery of funding to arts and cultural programs in Australia has historically been problematic, given the vast distances between the country’s population centres. In Canberra, the nexus between the city’s status as national capital and the cultural needs of its small local population created additional difficulties. On one hand, for the local population, Canberra was predominantly an urban/suburban community and a regional centre. On the other hand, as national capital, it was the locus of national governmental, administrative and, increasingly, national cultural functions. Explicitly understood in these national cultural functions

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\(^{72}\) NCDC, *Sixth Annual Report*, 17.
was that Canberra would begin to reflect a national identity of excellence in arts and culture, both to the rest of Australia and internationally.

The problem throughout the 1960s and 1970s was that the population was simply too small to sustain the national flagship companies that the Federal Government envisaged as appropriate for the national capital. From the establishment of the Australian Council for the Arts in 1967 until the advent of the Australia Council for the Arts in 1973, the Federal Government’s definition of arts, almost without exception, was concerned entirely with the performing arts.\(^\text{73}\) In this, it closely followed the funding path previously set from 1954 by the Australian Elizabethan Theatre Trust (AETT). The focus on funding performing arts was to have an important bearing on the developing visual arts sector in Canberra from the 1970s through to the completion of the handover to self-government in 1992. This narrow definition of the arts, and the insistence on funding the development in Canberra of flagship companies seen as appropriate for a national capital, would

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\(^{73}\) This is recognised historically, in Speaker Bill Hayden’s response, in the House of Representatives on November 2, 1967, to the Government’s announcement that H. C. “Nugget” Coombs, current chairman of the ETT and Governor of the Reserve bank would be appointed both Chairman of Aboriginal Affairs and Chairman of the new Australian Council for the Arts: “I wish,” said Hayden, “in no way to detract from the qualities of Dr Coombs as a central banker and public servant and one of Australia’s most able public administrators. What I want to do is to bring to the Government's attention the tremendous amount of criticism that is being voiced concerning the way in which the affairs of the Australian Elizabethan Theatre Trust have been handled and the concern of people involved in arts and letters.” Calling for a public enquiry into “the state of arts and letters”, Hayden concluded that “[t]he Government is virtually just establishing a body that will be manipulated by the same old brigade that has been running the Elizabethan Theatre Trust for too long. In addition, it is obvious that the Government’s propositions in this field are related only to the performing arts. These are only one segment of the field of arts and letters in the Australian community.” Bill Hayden, “Aboriginals.” Commonwealth of Australia. Parliamentary Debates. House of Representatives. Procedural Text. Hansard, November 2, 1967: 2629. Accessed February 11, 2015. http://historichansard.net/hofreps/1967/19671102_reps_26_hor57/#debate-22. For further examples of the continued emphasis on the performing arts see: John Gorton, “Recommendations of the Australian Council for the Arts for 1969/1970”, News Release, P.M. NO. 85/1969, December 3, 1969. Accessed February 11, 2015, https://pmtranscripts.dpmc.gov.au/release/transcript-2145
result in extreme reactions among local arts and cultural practitioners by the mid-1980s. This is examined in chapter 3.

The historic and important exception to this vision of the arts as performance-based was the setting up of the Commonwealth Art Advisory Board in 1912. This Board constituted the first commitment to federal government funding of visual arts in Australia and was the first instance of an Australian Federal Government’s awareness, under majority Labour Prime Minister Andrew Fisher, that the power of visual art could be harnessed to building the nation’s cultural memory. The Board comprised artists and those working in the arts, and its purpose was to advise the Historic Memorials Committee (also established in 1912), on the commission and collection of portraits, by Australian artists, of notable Australian Government figures. It was replaced in 1973 by the Acquisition Committee for the proposed ANG in Canberra, when its increased responsibilities included “advi[sing] the Commonwealth government, building a national collection, providing works for official buildings in Australian and overseas, and for touring exhibitions.”

Historically, prior to 1967 when the Federal government set up the Australian Council for the Arts, funding for the arts fell largely to two key organisations; the AETT, established in 1954, and the ACA from 1966. The first of

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74 Professor Ruth Bereson has written, in relation to the Commonwealth Art Advisory Board, that “structures that were intended to link government's interests and the arts had been sewn into the fabric of government after Federation (1901).” Ruth Bereson, “Advance Australia-Fair or Foul? Observing Australian Arts Policies” *Journal of Arts Management, Law, and Society* 35.1 (Spring 2005): 49-59.

75 Professor Margaret Seares, with assistance from John Gardiner-Garden, *Cultural Policies in Australia* (Sydney: Australia Council, June 2011), 8.

76 From 1943, when NSW adopted the British model of community arts delivery with CEMA/ACA, through to the late 1960s when the Federal Government—after reviewing funding mechanisms in the USA, Canada and Great Britain—largely adopted the British model of professional arts funding delivery with OzCo, successive federal governments have looked to Australia’s colonial forebear for arts funding models. Thus, broadly speaking, in
these, the privately funded NSW-based AETT, can be usefully considered as the (only) forerunner to the Australian Council for the Arts, given its focus on excellence in the performing arts. It was funded with £90,000 of private money (equal to $2,842,000 in 2013) and £30,000 pounds from the Federal Government (equal to $947,000 in 2013). Dr H. C. “Nugget” Coombes, (from 1968 to 1974 inaugural Chairman of the Australian Council for the Arts), was instrumental in raising the private funds that allowed the Trust to be convened as a non-profit public company limited by guarantee. Over the next 15 years, individuals and companies investing in the arts via the Trust were entitled to generous tax concessions. Its funding provides an early example of the combination of government and private sector partnership funding for the arts that would become a foundational concept of arts funding from the 1975 Liberal Fraser Government onward.

The influence of the AETT was vast and its reverberations continue today, despite its liquidation in March 1991. Although it provided “significant financial support for performing arts organizations through tax breaks and through Musica Viva, a semi-autonomous agency still in existence”, it continually garnered Australia as in England, arts funding has been directed into these twin areas: firstly, what could be termed professional excellence, with a view to encouraging and supporting those artforms that would improve the national mindset and represent the country as broadly cultured and internationally educated; and, secondly, what could be termed domestic art and culture for the masses, or art and culture based in and run by and for communities. This latter model was exemplified through ACA.

77 The AETT was established following the visit to Australia of the British Queen Elizabeth and Prince Phillip. Bereson writes that it was “a de facto arts agency [that] had a considerable impact on what was considered to be artistic production for one and a half decades.” Bereson, “Advance Australia-Fair or Foul?”, note 4.

78 In October 1955, the premiere performance of Medea, the first production of the AETT-formed Australia Drama Company, was held in the city’s Albert Hall, arguably in a nod to Canberra’s national capital status. The Hall’s history is revealed in historian Dr Lenore Coltheart’s Albert Hall: the Heart of Canberra, wherein Coltheart defines the building as Canberra’s “unofficial town hall” (126) and, for 37 years, as its “both theatre and concert hall for professional artists performing in Canberra” (129). Albert Hall relinquished that status in 1965 with the opening of CTC, the first federally-initiated performing arts centre completed in Australia.
significant criticism, including the lack of arts practitioners on the Board. Speaker Bill Hayden was aware of the AETT’s domination of “national arts and letters”, referring to it “as a sort of ruthless ogre”. And yet, the AETT wrought profound changes in Australia’s cultural landscape, providing funding that would otherwise not have been available to performing arts companies. Additionally, it was responsible, in part or in whole, for the establishment of a number of major organisations, many of which are now deeply embedded in Australian cultural life.

In the history of arts funding and development in Canberra, the second key organisation, the ACA, played a crucial role from 1948 to the end of the 1980s. It began in 1946 in NSW, and was modelled on the state’s CEMA (established in 1943), whose own historical precursor was Britain’s CEMA (established in 1940). It was comprised of various state and territory Arts Councils that, in 1966, became the ACA. This national body received its first funding from the Australian Council for the Arts in 1969. The purview of the ACA was, as in Great Britain, to provide artistic and cultural experiences for regional communities and schools. This was seen to be particularly important in Canberra because although the Federal Government had renewed its commitment to developing the city as a national capital in 1958, its geographical location and small population confirmed it as a regional centre well beyond this date.

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79 Bereson, “Advance Australia-Fair or Foul?”.  
80 Hayden, “Aboriginals”.  
81 These included the Australian Opera Company in 1956, the Trust Ballet Company in 1957, the Young Elizabethan Theatre Players in 1958, The Australian Ballet Foundation in 1961, The Australian Ballet School in 1963 and, with the University of New South Wales (then the New South Wales University of Technology), the National Institute of Dramatic Arts (NIDA) in 1959.  
82 From 1953 to 1961: lapsed; February 1962: reconstituted; 1993: became Arts Council (ACT).  
83 Established by the Pilgrim Trust, the organisation was founded in 1930 with a £2 million endowment from American railroad entrepreneur Edward Harkness.
The ambitious idea of Canberra as a future national centre for the arts remained strong throughout the 1940s. This was indicated again when CEMA’s president Sir Robert Garran changed the name of the ACT branch of the organisation to the Arts Council Australia (ACT Division) on May 26, 1948, at a time when Australia’s state and territory Arts Councils were identified only by the name of their state or territory. This also anticipated the Arts Council’s national status by almost 20 years. Annual fees were modest: in 1948 an annual subscription increased to 5 shillings [with Consumer Price Index (CPI): approximately $14 today.]

Planned events for that year included a Brahms and Schubert festival at Albert Hall in June and a Great Britain handicrafts exhibition, accompanied by a travelling curator, in October. Although it showed a loss for the year of 3 shillings/8 pence, (with CPI: $10.41 today) Garran explained that “CEMA was not out to make money but to bring culture to the people.”

The ACA (ACT) was pivotal in the development of Canberra’s cultural landscape over the next 40 years, with the exception of the period from 1953 to 1961 when the organisation lapsed. Through its committees, the organisation: delivered musical, theatrical, dance and literary events; hosted diverse community meetings; organised summer schools and festivals such as Canberra Day celebrations and Canberra youth and folk festivals; involved itself with education and the arts, including in dance and theatre; hosted varied community workshops and ran a diverse schools program, including school holiday programs. From 1969, it also redistributed small amounts of funding to a broad range of community arts

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84 CEMA in the ACT was established in October 1945 as ACT Division of CEMA.
85 $55 using GDP (relative average income).
organisations from funds allocated to it by the two iterations of the federal funding body the Australian Council for the Arts/Australia Council for the Arts. The organisation consistently lobbied at federal and local level for increased funding to the arts. From its earliest days it ran a program of visual arts exhibitions, mostly travelling exhibitions hosted in turn by each of the state and territory Arts Councils.

The organisation’s most egalitarian venture was Sunday in the Park. This ran from the mid-1970s through the 1980s in Commonwealth Park. Beginning in 1975 with a six-week season over summer, the following year it extended to ten weeks from the first Sunday of December, finishing in late March. More than 100,000 Canberrans, out of a population of 230,000, enjoyed the ten weeks of entertainment during the 1976 summer season. Over the period, Sunday in the Park remained a multicultural affair with a cyclic array of various national dance troupes, plays, puppetry, folk music, jazz, circus, brass bands and stalls, and was at different times assisted with funding from the DCT, the Apex Club of Ginninderra and the Canberra Times.

More than any single event over the two decades, Sunday in the Park exemplified residents as avid consumers of a broad range of community-focused, local cultural products. This citywide pull towards the local remained at odds with the insistent desire of funding bodies, particularly throughout the 1980s, as examined in chapter 3, to develop and fund one ‘flagship’ company in each of four

87 Records of the Arts Council of Australia, MS 4570, NLA. (Canberra).
88 Mr Valentine McKelvie, Administrator, ACT division of the Arts Council, quoted in Canberra Times, “‘Sunday in the Park’ Praised.” October 26, 1977, 9.
89 In 1988, after an absence of two years, Sunday in the Park made a one year return under the auspices of the Canberra Theatre Trust, funded with a grant from the Local Government Initiatives Grant Scheme as an Australian Bicentennial Authority project.
90 See 3.3 The Pascoe Report (pp. 87-101) for an examination of the Pascoe Report and surrounding events of the mid-1980s.
core areas in dance, music, theatre and opera, in line with federal arts funding policy nationally. This desire to reflect excellence in performing arts in Canberra was concerned with the city as national capital space, and therefore as the face of national excellence in the arts. Arguably this intention had been flagged in 1965 when the first Federal-Government-initiated performing arts centre in Australia, the CTC, was completed. By the 1980s, as chapter 3 reveals, this disjunct between federal funding of Canberra arts in service to the national agenda and the increasing needs of local arts and cultural initiatives would reach an eruptive head.

2.6 Federal Funding through the Australia Council for the Arts from 1968

Canberra’s performance-based cultural organisations began to receive small amounts of funding from the Australian Council for the Arts’ initial grants round in 1968. With a popular of around 100,000, the city’s performance venues then included Albert Hall and the new CTC.91 The allocations were announced on December 11, 1968 and included: $3,200 to Canberra Rep, $7,000 to Canberra’s Spring Music Festival; and $15,000 to the Canberra Theatre Trust to fund a visit from Sydney’s flagship theatre company the Old Tote Theatre. Canberra Rep’s president Ken Farnham, commented on the allocation to Canberra as “welcome only because it is more than Canberra has received previously.”92 From these small beginnings, funding amounts rose modestly over the next four years.93

91 1966 population: 96,013.
93 Allocations for 1970 included $15,000 to the Canberra Theatre Trust and $3,500 to Canberra Rep, with the ACA’s Federal Division, based in Canberra, receiving $40,000 for administration and country touring programmes and a further $35,000 in reserve for future activities. In 1971, funding for the Federal Division of the ACA increased to $110,000,
Funding also rose modestly immediately following the election of the Whitlam Labour government on 11 December, 1972. The next day government announced allocations for 1973 that included $20,000 to the Canberra Theatre Trust and $6,000 to Canberra Rep. It is notable that in the press release announcing the grants, Whitlam included painting, craft work and sculpture as being among the “diverse pleasures” which would ensure that “the leisure time of all Australians will be enriched.” This intimated a changing federal focus from wholly performing-arts based funding to a broader, more holistic definition of arts and culture.94

While the ACA’s state divisions continued to receive grants from their state governments, the ACA’s Federal Division, based in Canberra until 1971, was funded by the Australian Council for the Arts from 1970.95 Over a four-year period, the Federal Division’s funding rose from $75,000 in 1970 to $175,000 in 1973, following Whitlam’s decision to “give increased assistance to bodies like the Arts Councils which cater for the needs of country people.”96 The increased funding supported costs associated with national administration, as well as the delivery of touring programs and regional arts programs into Canberra and throughout Australia,

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95 In 1969, the ACA was funded through the AETT, itself funded in that year by the new Australian Council for the Arts.
in line with the Whitlam Government’s desire to “foster this general community interest [in the arts]”.\textsuperscript{97}

In his election policy speech of November 13, 1972, Whitlam had flagged his intention to comprehensively overhaul the Australian Council for the Arts.\textsuperscript{98} The renamed Australia Council for the Arts was set up as a new statutory body, “to provide the direct and specialised administration which the arts require”.\textsuperscript{99} It comprised seven boards, including, for the first time, the VAB. These promising forward moves towards increased national and ACT federal arts funding were adversely affected from 1975 as the incoming Fraser Liberal Government instituted cost cutting measures across all sectors. One of these measures, however, provided new opportunities in the development of community arts.

Arts organisations that could demonstrate strong community engagement links in Canberra benefitted from successive Federal Government job creation initiatives from late 1976 onwards. These included, most importantly, the Community Youth Support Scheme (CYSS) created in 1976. The Scheme was a critical factor in the development of contemporary arts practice in Canberra because it signalled the rise of the job creation enterprise Jobless Action.

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{97} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{98} “We believe that the existing Commonwealth agencies should be brought within a single council set up by statute. The Council will be based on a number of autonomous boards with authority to deal with their own budget allocation and staff. The following boards would be established: Theatre arts (opera, ballet, drama); Music; Literary arts; Visual and plastic arts; Crafts; Film and Television; Aboriginal arts. These boards would have substantial independence and authority to make decisions. Indeed, in their own field of responsibility they would be the major sources of initiative in policy and in communication with those involved in the Arts. Gough Whitlam, “It’s Time”, Labor Party Election Policy Speech, Blacktown Civic Centre, Sydney, November 13, 1972. Accessed May 24, 2013, http://whitlamdismissal.com/1972/11/13/whitlam-1972-election-policy-speech.html
\item \textsuperscript{99} Whitlam, “Major Grants for the Arts”. December, 1972.
\end{itemize}
Jobless Action, established in 1976, was a home-grown, highly effective, direct action provider of skills to disadvantaged and unemployed persons. Initially funded through the CYSS, the organisation was enabled through all iterations of federal community job creation programs to deliver short-term jobs, including art and craft programs, to the Canberra community. Jobless Action quickly became a locus for passionate, creative, young social justice advocates, and a pivotal catalyst for the rapid growth of grassroots, youth-led music and collective arts enterprises from the late 1970s. Among its founding workers were Julian Webb, Annie Kavanagh and Jill Lang.

The organisation’s initiatives included employing young activist printmakers to produce socially motivated prints, posters and t-shirts advertising Jobless Action initiatives. Many of these printmakers were both Jobless Action members and students of the first intake, in 1978, of the new CSA Printmaking Workshop. Jobless Action reflected a particular, identifiably Canberran do-it-yourself ethos, a needs-driven response to disadvantage that encouraged the growth of Canberra’s unique, northern-suburbs-based, homogenised subculture. This subculture would then go on to actively carve out, through a contemporary printmaking culture, a local identity among the principal rhetorics of federal government and national capital space. As examined in chapter 5, Jobless Action’s significance was ongoing in the respective geneses of Megalo and BRG in 1980 and 1981.

100 Successive programs were the Fraser Government’s Wage Pause Program (agreement made December 7, 1982) and the Hawke Labor Government’s Community Employment Program (CEP) (legislated May 19, 1983, with the program launched in August 1983). These two programs aimed to pause wage rises among the Australian public service.
2.7 Lines of Difference

In considering the broad factors that laid the groundwork for the growth of contemporary arts practice, there was one more crucial element in play: the physical nature of Canberra. It was no coincidence that the new community-oriented arts/activists practices were located in two suburbs in the inner north, Ainslie and Braddon, that reflected the historical division of the city along lines of relative wealth and poverty from the first land releases.

The city’s physical structure was set down in 1921, when the W. M. Hughes Nationalist Party government created the forerunner to the FCC, the Federal Capital Advisory Committee (FCAC). The way the FCAC allocated housing blocks led to an artificial creation of economic and social difference in the settlements to the north and south of the nominal city centre. Deemed workers’ suburbs, Ainslie and Braddon were located to the north of the vast empty space, that was destined by 1963 to contain the man-made lake, Burley Griffin, which divided the two halves of Canberra. Building costs were set at £700 per quarter-acre (at that time the standard Australian house block) and an all-timber construction was allowed. In the suburb of Reid, still in the north but closer to the proposed Parliament House that hugged the inner southern perimeter, building costs for the houses that would accommodate skilled workers and mid-level public servants were set at the significantly higher rate of £1,000 and brick construction was mandated. Further to the south, at Mugga Heights where it was envisaged that senior public servants would live, building sites increased to three acres with a rise in building costs set at £3,500.101 Manual

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101 Brown, 70.
labourers were housed under canvas in a number of small settlements south and north of the centre. Though these were conceived of as temporary structures, in reality they continued to house labourers and then a growing number of unemployed workers well into the 1950s.

The legacy of the initial land release decision may not have been deliberately intended but it was profound. By the late 1970s, the entrenched geographic, social and economic divide was inextricably linked to the growth of a homogenised subculture in the city. A contemporary arts practice relies for its veracity and impetus on having an establishment to push against. Canberra, in the nature of its foundation and development, provided this. By the 1970s, with the influence of the women’s movement, the Vietnam War and the countercultural movement, in addition to the galvanising support of the Whitlam Labor Government, the artificially created, yet no less real division between wealthy educated citizens and poor educated activists came to a head. As examined in chapter 5, the culture of the Printmaking Workshop at CSA, and the proximity to federal government, encouraged social activism and established contemporary arts practice in the garages of the northern suburbs of Ainslie and Braddon, and then in the initial location of Megalo Screenprint International in Ainslie Village.

2.8 Chapter Conclusion

This chapter has dealt with the broader social, political and economic factors that encouraged the tensions leading to the growth of local contemporary arts up to 1978: the city and its manifestations as national capital and local community; the central roles played by women in the development of social services, community arts and commercial galleries; and the complex, evolving arts funding scenarios.
Chapter 3 continues this examination of Canberra’s wider arts and cultural
development, focussing on the 1980s up to the beginnings of the handover to self-
government in 1989. This exceptionally active decade was marked by increasing
activism within the arts community as the need for funding and infrastructure
support began to rapidly outstrip meagre available resources. In the same way that
women had actively and successfully campaigned for and instituted critical social
services from the beginning of the 1970s, Canberra’s broader arts community
campaigned vigorously on its own behalf from 1980, conceiving and enacting
unique solutions to the decade’s pressing concerns of lack of space and funding for
the emerging contemporary visual arts. The community’s focus as the decade
unfolded became how to develop, manage and fund local practice from within
Canberra’s increasingly powerful construct of national capital space. This
local/national dichotomy was exemplified in the commissioning and delivery of the
Pascoe Report in 1985, and thus chapter 3 is anchored by a close reading of the
report’s processes, findings and impacts.
3. **The Rapid Growth of Local Arts and Culture: 1978 to 1989**

This chapter examines factors in the national capital in the 1980s that impacted the unique development of the city’s local arts community. They include: artist campaigns alerting government to the increasingly critical need for studio and gallery spaces for emerging artists; the opening of the Kingston Art Centre as an early assertion of an enlightened approach to providing such spaces; and the colonisation of the Yarralumla Brickworks by artists for use as an alternative studio space. The founding of Helen Maxwell’s aGOG and the printmaking workshop Studio One are also examined as part of Canberra’s unique solutions to the lack of exhibition spaces for local artists. Community arts practice that continued to evolve in this decade is discussed, as are three innovative local solutions to communications and funding in the under-resourced sector: the establishment of the arts magazine *Muse*, the creation of the Capital Arts Patrons’ Organisation (CAPO) as a fundraising enterprise, and the development of the Emerging Artist Support Scheme (EASS) by David Williams, head of CSA. Also examined are the exceptionally close links between the art school and arts development—more tightly woven than in larger cities—as well as the Campaign for Free Admission to ANG in 1982 when the tiny Bitumen River Gallery members took on the country’s pre-eminent national art institution and galvanised a national response.

The chapter is anchored by the decade’s defining event: the commissioning, research, delivery of and reaction to the 1984/85 Pascoe Report. The processes and findings of the report exemplified the critical and ultimately unsolvable challenge of the 1980s: that is, how to deliver responsive, appropriately-resourced government funding to the developing local arts sector in the context of the growing and vastly
more powerful imprimatur of Canberra as national capital space. Throughout the
decade, this difficulty, which was compounded by ongoing attempts to privilege and
establish performing arts companies as flagship companies, was at the centre of
consistent lobbying from an increasingly vocal arts sector. The chapter therefore
makes a close reading of models of government support for the arts in Canberra. It
specifically considers the Pascoe Report as an outmoded analysis of the art
community’s needs that did not accord with that community’s perceptions or desires,
and it examines the robust community response that followed the report’s
methodological flaws and disappointing outcomes. This analysis concludes with the
beginning of the handover to self-government in 1989, which is closely examined in
chapter 4.

In the 1980s, the arts debate in Canberra was marked by expressions of
frustration from the arts community and genuine but largely ineffectual attempts
from government agencies, within an increasingly complex governance scenario, to
respond to the rapidly changing milieu. In fact, the complexities of three-tier
governance in the ACT, although not new, became more difficult to navigate as the
demand for services increased with the growing population. Canberra’s population
had reached 227,581 by 1981 and, despite the economic downturn that occurred in
the early part of the decade, it had swelled to 282,211 by the end of the 1980s.
Although the increased population progressively demonstrated their desire to claim
and manage that strand of arts and culture in the national capital that could be
considered local, the pressing question, in the face of decreasing federal
commitment, became how to fund developing need.

The Commonwealth, whose political commitment to the ACT as a local
community waned during the decade, remained focussed on delivering national arts
and cultural outcomes of excellence. During this period, under-resourced local advisory bodies struggled to respond to increasing demands and to provide adequate support structures. Within the dominant national capital paradigm and without the legislative freedoms and arts infrastructure development that self-government would bring in the 1990s, local arts practitioners felt themselves to be unheard and largely invisible. The way forward during the 1980s, although it proved exceptionally difficult to navigate, was forged by an intelligent and politicised community for whom activism was a familiar mode.

As closely examined from chapter 5 through the central case study of BRG/CCAS, the visual arts demonstrated growing relevance and importance as the 1980s progressed. This was anchored by CSA, which from 1978 onwards attracted some of the finest art teachers in the country to its Bauhaus-inspired workshops and enrolled and graduated an annually expanding student body. These graduates bore a peculiar burden. As they were often reminded by federal funding bodies, particularly from the mid-1980s as the number of national cultural institutions increased, Canberrans enjoyed a city that was arguably the best culturally resourced in the country. And yet, outside CSA, the conditions in which young visual artists lived and worked were ad hoc and make-do.

The concerns of the local arts community—expressed through a remarkable number of meetings and forums, as held in Canberra and in regional towns Yass and Braidwood throughout the decade—centred on the lack of four critical support factors. These factors were: a suitably resourced local arts funding body, consultation with the federal funding body, a cohesive community arts plan, and an overarching cultural and arts development plan for the Territory. Additionally, major issues for visual artists were the lack of artist studio space and exhibition venues for
contemporary visual art, and the continued primacy of performing arts within the arts funding debate.

During 1983 and 1984, activity around the above factors began to coalesce. In the following section, I chart the intersections of concurrent community and government actions in response to these growing concerns. Their eventual denouement would be the release of the 1985 Pascoe Report into funding arts and cultural development in the ACT, commissioned by the ADB and authored by Timothy Pascoe.

3.1 The Rise and Funding of Community Arts

Performing and visual artists were most often conflated with community arts, particularly during the first half of the 1980s. This was particularly so in the emerging contemporary visual arts. Therefore, as this naming characterised funding and debate during the 1980s, the following discussion deals with matters relating to community arts in the ACT over the period.

The principal instrument of local arts administration in the ACT in the 1980s was the ADB, which was created in 1981. It replaced the ACT Advisory Committee on the Arts, which was itself preceded by the ACT Committee on Cultural Development, established in 1949 by Labor Prime Minister (1945-1949) Ben Chifley. The ADB—as were its antecedents—was responsible for advising the Federal Minister responsible for the ACT on grant allocations for the arts and on arts development policy in the Territory.
The locus of Canberra’s community arts organisations from the 1970s to 1980 was Reid House. (It was demolished in 1980, after being partially destroyed by fire, to make way for the Canberra Convention Centre).¹ Reid House was home to a number of performing arts initiatives that were modestly supported, most often from the ACT Community Development Fund (CDF), itself funded through gambling revenues accrued from licensed ACT clubs. (This use of gambling revenue for arts development provided a precedent for the application of the $19 million casino premium to arts infrastructure in 1992.) Reid House tenants included: Canberra Youth Theatre (CYT), which was formed in 1972 by Carol Woodrow; Jigsaw Theatre Company, which was established out of CYT in 1976 as a cooperative providing theatre for schools and community venues locally and in Adelaide, Sydney, Brisbane, Melbourne and country centres, and Oops Multiarts, running school holiday drama/multiarts programs for children, led by CYT members. Fools Gallery Theatre Co., a full-time experimental ensemble performance group was formed in 1979 by Carol Woodrow with a director’s grant of $10,000 from OzCo.²

In the same year, the Women’s Theatre Workshop was founded by Camilla Blunden and Robyn Alewood, making work concerned with women’s issues and women in the arts. The Women’s Theatre Workshop attracted a small amount of funding from the DCT towards its 1979 productions of Sylvia Plath’s *Three Women*, directed by

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¹ Reid House, which had originally been moved to Canberra from Victoria to serve as a low-cost hostel, was closed by the Federal Government in 1972. With little low-cost housing available in the city, squatters began moving into the accommodation wings in 1974. *Woroni*, “The Story of Reid House”, March 4, 1974, 5.

² Canberra, as evidenced in chapter 5, provided a focal point for legislative gains for women during the height of second wave feminism. Fools Gallery Theatre Co. had spent two years developing a series of four plays whose concern was the history of patriarchy and the liberation of rejecting sexist philosophy.
Alewood, and David Selbourne’s *Alison Mary Fagan*, directed by Blunden.\(^3\) Also at Reid House was the Canberra Community Arts Front (CCAF), initiated by Peter Sutherland. It was a collective of independent community artists formed to develop community arts in Canberra and to offer an administrative and supportive base for its members. CCAF coordinated children’s activities for Sunday in the Park and presented, on Canberra’s arts station 2xx, the radio program *Good Goose—A Proper Gander at the Arts*. (This program was a forerunner to *A Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galleries*, the latter radio program initiated by Bitumen River Gallery in the 1980s.)

Most of the groups at Reid House were later relocated to the Gorman House Arts Centre, which was remodelled for the purpose of providing spaces for community groups and the ACG.\(^4\) Also, from 1979, Strathnairn homestead provided a base for the Blue Folk Community Arts Group, led by Domenic Mico, which provided community engagement opportunities for schools and groups.

All of the above-mentioned, early examples of community arts practice provided the base for the formation, post-self-government in the 1990s, of standalone community arts infrastructure and personnel in the growing town centres of Tuggeranong and Belconnen. A desire from the arts community to extend Canberra into the regions for the first time occurred in May 1983. This was a logical progression building from the powerful sense of community that had been evidenced in Canberra through Sunday in the Park during the 1970s and through the formation of a variety of small organisations—as discussed above—that were based firstly at Reid House and then at Gorman House Arts Centre from 1981. The sense of

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\(^3\) Blunden recalls that *Alison Mary Fagan* had been written for one woman but that she used several women in the play. Camilla Blunden, email to the author, July 5, 2016.

community had also been established in the growth of women’s groups who moved from social gatherings into art and craft practices—as seen with the Majura Women’s Group from 1981—and through the cross-fertilisation of young artists (particularly print and poster makers), students, activists and musicians as the 1980s continued. The first industry-led moves towards acknowledgement of Canberra’s regional arts status would culminate in the opening of the CMAG in the late 1990s.

The possibility of forming a regional Community Arts Network began to be canvassed in 1983 during a day-long meeting in Yass, involving members of the Canberra, Yass, Goulburn, Queanbeyan and Cooma districts. Following this meeting, Ben Grady, then director of the ACG, wrote to Alison Alder at BRG in June, asking the collective to consider becoming part of the proposed network, to contribute to “the process of exploring the relationship between arts and the community.”

This sequence of events was in line with the growth of the community arts sector internationally and in Australia. The international rise of community arts had begun with the alternate arts movement in Britain in the 1960s. In Australia, Community Art Networks began operating in NSW and Victoria in the early 1970s as support organisations for artists working in the community, developing opportunities for community engagement. Their national growth was assisted through OzCo’s Community Arts Board from 1973. Vivienne Binns, whose relationship with Canberra is examined in chapter 5, was Australia’s early foremost exponent of community arts practice.6

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5 Ben Grady and Edwin Relf, letter to Alison Alder, June 10, 1983. CCAS archives. Correspondence file, 1983.
6 See section 5.3.2, pp. 197–200.
A development in the evolution of local government agencies responsible to the arts and cultural sector occurred at the end of 1981, when the ACT Advisory Committee on the Arts was replaced by the ADB with Sir Richard Kingsland as chair. Although the change of name flagged an awareness of local arts as a growing sector, the previous eight members of the Advisory Committee comprised the new board’s members. A change of name alone was not enough to guarantee forward development. Kingsland, a committed advocate for the arts, was a recently retired senior public servant who had held the inaugural chair at the Canberra School of Music from 1972 to 1975 and had chaired CSA from 1976. Canberra’s status as national capital space and the performing arts as the signifier of culture were uppermost in his mind:

As the physical focus of national self-awareness, Canberra must play a significant part in the development of all aspects of artistic performance and expressions and participation. . . . Canberra is much more of a theatre and concert going public than any other comparable city. We are a participating group, a city with a soul.7

While this was a strong acknowledgement of Canberrans’ broad cultural literacy, Kingsland’s belief that young people were absent from these theatre-going audiences, “because they watch television or their parents cannot be bothered taking

them to performances” indicated his lack of awareness of the growing cross-arts youth culture.⁸

Arts ventures in Canberra that could demonstrate links to the community continued to be assisted through the Federal Government’s Wage Pause and Community Employment Programs (CEP) in the first half of the 1980s and by the (CDF) throughout the decade. However, Funding requirements for CEP required some clarification. In April 1984, CEP officers wrote to the Canberra Symphony Orchestra (CSO) General Manager Maeve Galloway to clarify the rules under which community organisations could apply for job creation funding. The rules stipulated that: CEP funding for the arts was not to be viewed simply as an alternative funding source; the program required that at least 70% of the grant sought must be committed to the wages of previously unemployed people; CEP positions must be filled from priority unemployed groups; jobs should require a low level of experience and skills.⁹ This was a big ask for small arts organisations; logically, the number of jobs available that required low-level skills was small.

Jobless Action took a leading role in advocating for changes to the CEP programs. Following the clarification from the CEP to the CSO, Jobless Action Project Officer Annie Kavanagh wrote to Canberra arts organisations, suggesting that both the Wage Pause and CEP programs had previously been inundated with requests for funding from individuals and organisations who fell outside the criteria. Additionally, unskilled applicants to job positions had been rejected by community organisations due to the high degree of self-reliance, motivation and commitment

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⁸ Ibid.
⁹ CEP, letter to Maeve Galloway, GM of the CSO, April, 1984 (CCAS archives, communication folder 1984/2).
required under Wage Pause and CEP requirements. Kavanagh’s solution, which the CEP accepted, was that the CEP needed to modify its requirements and approach community groups with a view to the training of unskilled workers rather than their immediate employment. In order to streamline information sharing and CEP funding application processes, Jobless Action’s Julian Webb took on the additional role of Community Development Officer and was tasked with assisting community groups to apply for CEP funding. As the CEP program then evolved to include this funding for training unskilled workers, Jobless Action provided additional employment to young printmakers who were leading programs that developed printmaking skills among local groups of unemployed persons. This was to prove crucial for the growth of a strong printmaking community in Canberra.

Increasing need and diversity in local arts and culture was indicated when CEP provided more than $340,000 to arts organisations and projects in 1983/84. Of this, Megalo International Screenprint Collective received $80,000, supporting full-time employment for four persons and allowing the fledgling organisation to provide classes and services to the Canberra community, including through Jobless Action. Other arts organisation beneficiaries were able to offer full- and part-time positions through Wage Pause. In 1983/84, these were the Arts Council (ACT), Crafts Council of the ACT, Australian National Eisteddfod Society, Blue Folk Community Arts Association, Café Boom Boom, CCAF, CAPO, and Stagecoach Theatre School.

3.2 Arts Community Needs and Government Responses: 1981 to 1985

Revealing an awareness of the growing local visual arts sector within the national capital space, the NCDC, the federally appointed body responsible for Canberra’s development, released the first draft land use policy concerning art
galleries on residential leases in June 1983.\textsuperscript{10} The policy’s opening phrase, “Properly conducted, art galleries on residential leases have cultural value…”\textsuperscript{11} implied a growing awareness of Canberra’s lively home-based gallery scene (with the first opening in the late 1960s—see chapter 2, pp. 40-45), and to activity generated since the 1981 opening of the BRG collective in the inner south suburb of Manuka, Canberra’s then premier residential, shopping and dining suburb. It also implied a growing understanding that the relationship between artists and the community, mediated by accessible artwork, had positive cultural resonance “of benefit to both the community and the artist.”\textsuperscript{12} The draft’s end statement commenting on “the generally low economic viability of galleries dedicated solely to the display of artworks”\textsuperscript{13} reflects the number of smaller galleries that continued to open and close during the period. The difficulty in accessing affordable space was also recognised by the report’s authors:

Without this form of [home] gallery the bulk of the artwork might not be displayed at all, because of the severe limitations in Canberra on the availability of leasable public gallery space [and] the high rents demanded for commercial premises.\textsuperscript{14}

\textsuperscript{10} As discussed in chapter 2, the NCDC was responsible for development in Canberra insofar as it impacted on the original Griffin Plan.
\textsuperscript{12} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{13} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{14} Ibid.
There were already considerable strictures around the operation of galleries in private homes. *Canberra Times* art critic Sonja Kaleski reported in September 1981 that:

Canberra gallery directors live under constant fear of closure by the Department of the Capital Territory. Each year the directors are presented with an official form and are obliged to supply details of their operations such as provisions for parking, number of visitors, number of cars and other pieces of administrivia. The DCT has the power to close galleries if the answers on the forms appear unsatisfactory, while gallery directors claim that the system is unduly authoritarian and exists nowhere else in Australia.¹⁵

Members of the fledgling BRG collective were understandably preoccupied with identifying and securing visual arts spaces. Their Future Directions Forum, in mid-1983, considered all potential ACT spaces beginning with 21 commercial galleries. Of these, they recorded, 15 dealt in “the import/export trade of used consumables of ‘pre-loved art’, such as Salvador Dali prints”, while the other six were seen to deal with “craft objects” produced outside the ACT.¹⁶ These conclusions reflect the disjunct between BRG members and the local commercial gallery scene. Fourteen other possibilities included occasional spaces such as shopping centres, schools and colleges. As discussed in chapter 2 (see p. 46), these


occasional spaces were an important avenue for community exhibitions during the 1960s and 1970s and a potential for emerging artist exhibitions. Seven institutions with gallery potential were ANU (four spaces in total), Canberra College of Advanced Education (CCAE), AWM, NLA, Alliance Française, Goethe Institute and St. Johns Baptist Church at Reid. Goethe Institute was considered to be “the most exciting while the others tended to be fairly conservative and have well drawn parameters”. Indeed, none of the above were suitable for exhibitions for emerging artists. The ANG and the CSA were regarded as “institutionalised Taj Mahals and hardly public art spaces where you can bring your own art object along”. This last conclusion speaks eloquently to the wide change occurring locally and nationally in contemporary art communities. The newly purpose-built ACG at Gorman House was identified as a potential space for larger exhibitions organised by groups such as BRG. This last venue suggestion was the forum’s most prescient conclusion.

The developing needs of Canberra’s arts community were discussed at a high level. On July 6, 1983 the incumbent Minister for Territories and Local Government, Tom Uren, met with arts community representatives and Senator Susan Ryan, federal Labor Senator for the ACT (December 1975–January 1988). At the meeting, the ADB, then chaired by Kingsland, with two Minister-approved community representatives—Simon Dawkins (Administrator of the Arts Council (ACT)) and George Whaley (the new General Manager of CTC)—committed to formulating a discussion paper on arts development in the ACT. This was a most promising development. The paper’s proposed ambit included mechanisms for

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17 Sasha Grishin, quoted in Stephanie Radok, ibid.
18 Radok, Ibid.
19 Ibid.
20 Ryan was both the ACT’s first female senator and first Labor senator.
policy formulation and grants allocations, a policy for arts development in the Territory, appropriate administrative arrangements, and the level of support for the arts from the CDF. In an interview the following day, Uren commented that “the paper would meet a clear need, expressed at yesterday’s meeting, to promote wide discussion concerning arts development in the ACT.”

The ADB committed to circulating the discussion paper for public comment in early August.

However, no such paper had appeared by October. Concerns over the lack of a cohesive vision around the development of local art activities were growing. In that month, in the most significant meeting to date concerning the general state of the arts in Canberra, executive officers from nine of Canberra’s arts organisations met at Braidwood. To contest Canberra’s status as a planned city, attendees believed that opportunities existed to develop a unique cultural face for the city that was “adventurous, eccentric and innovative.”

Nine important recommendations were made. One was that the ADB should “conduct discussions with the Canberra Development Board and the NCDC regarding the arts in the overall development strategy of Canberra”, indicating attendees’ understanding of the complexity of planning and decision-making at that time in Canberra. Another was that the ADB “should commission an appropriate organisation to gather statistical data on the patterns of involvement in the arts in the

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22 They included representatives from BRG, Blue Folk Community Arts Association, Arts Council (ACT), CSO, CYT, Canberra Opera, Jigsaw Theatre Company, CCAF and Theatre ACT.
24 Ibid.
ACT”, reflecting a belief that the ADB were not up to undertaking this task themselves.25 A further recommendation was that the ADB:

should investigate the placement of Arts Officers in the Belconnen and Tuggeranong areas to identify needs, facilitate networking and put the [ADB] in contact with grass roots demands.26

The latter would come to fruition post-self-government in the 1990s. The meeting also recommended that, as the ACT was under-represented on OzCo with only two representatives out of 56 members, there needed to be “closer consultation between the Australia Council and arts funding bodies in the ACT.”27

Lack of provision for studio space was a crucial issue undermining the development of a vibrant local arts community. As the number of graduating students from CSA continued to increase, this became a driving factor for the loss of artists post-graduation to capital cities elsewhere in Australia. The warehouses and abandoned industrial sites that had been repurposed as art spaces in Melbourne, Sydney and Adelaide since the 1970s were simply not in evidence in a young

25 Ibid.
26 Ibid., 3.
27 Ibid. Further recommendations were that: the ADB should be requested to give direct and indirect employment impact statements in relation to its funding decisions; funding strategies should ensure that projects are funded to realistic levels and provide for appropriate remuneration for professional arts workers involved; supplementary to General Grant provisions to professional organisations, the Community Arts Program and Special Projects Grants, which in the past have provided valuable assistance and a flexible response to Canberra’s needs, be maintained and appropriately serviced; the ADB is encouraged to consult with NSW and Victorian Government arts funding authorities about funding for ACT groups touring to those states. The meeting further emphasised that any policy guidelines developed for the ACT will have to perform two basic functions: provide a perspective for the development of the arts in relation to total cultural programs and provide reliable information to arts groups on funding criteria.
planned city. There had been some hope that the 1981 revamped Gorman House Community Arts Centre, previously a hostel for single public servants, could provide some artist studios, but its spaces were quickly filled with the community organisations that had been relocated from the 1980 demolished Reid House, and with the refurbished spaces of the new ACG.

In response to these pressing issues around lack of availability of studios, a Space for Artists Campaign was convened in 1983 by a group of art school graduates, students, musicians and activists. In July, they staged a multi-day mural paint-in of the public toilets in Garema Place, reported in the Canberra Times as a “creative demonstration”. Their action aimed to reverse the government’s decision to allocate the centrally located Beauchamp House to the Academy of Science and, instead, to turn it over to artists. This particular claim for studio space was unsuccessful. However, the tendency to conflate artists with community groups (which had yielded funding benefits from both of the Federal Government’s Wage Pause programs and the CDF) proved useful once again when a Campaign for Community Space was run concurrently with the Space for Artists Campaign. Members of the former had succeeded in gaining access to the old motor registry in Mort Street, Braddon and to spaces in the Griffin Centre in Canberra city for community groups to carry out activities and hold meetings. The combined lobbying of both campaigns resulted in the allocation at the end of 1983 of the converted three-storey building, previously home to the Australian Archives in Leichhardt Street, Kingston, as a community arts centre. This was a landmark victory.

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28 The reclamation of parts of Ainslie Village in 1980 by Megalo Screenprint International and the repurposing of the old bus shelter at St Christopher’s School in Manuka by the BRG collective in 1981 are discussed in chapter 4.
The preceding three years had brought tremendous changes to the local arts and cultural landscape. By the end of 1983 neither the federal minister, the NCDC or local advisory bodies could have been left in any doubt that a determined, effective and broad-based arts lobby was aggressively seeking appropriate government support. Changes included the 1980 establishment of Megalo Screenprint International, the 1981 launch of BRG, the 1981 refurbishment and opening of Gorman House Community Centre and the 1982 opening of ANG. As well, there had been an acknowledgement of the growth of visual art galleries from the NCDC, concerted joint activist actions from community groups and arts groups, a number of comprehensive meetings involving the wider arts community and government, and the allocation of the first dedicated studios/gallery spaces for the visual arts. The increasingly politically savvy arts community continued their immense pressure for expansion over the next three years, which was marked by rapid response to government-initiated discussion papers and reports.

The much-awaited *Arts Development in the Australian Capital Territory: A Discussion Paper* was released by the ADB in January 1984, between the announcement of the allocation of the Kingston Art Centre at the end of 1983 and its opening in March. While acknowledging that the last five years had seen a “visible growth and diversification of the arts in Canberra”, Kingsland, the ADB’s outgoing chair, remarked that gaining “consensus”, including among members of the ADB, “on some aspects [of arts administration] is a task of exquisite difficulty”.

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31 Ibid., v.
The statement is unsurprising. Peer assessment of grant applications and arms-length funding were foundational concepts of the federal funding body, the Australia Council for the Arts, established in 1973. Neither was evident in the make-up of the ADB, whose nine members included Kingsland, two non-arts senior public servants, one from the Department of Home Affairs and Environment and one from the Department of Territories and Local Government (DTLG), and arts bureaucrat Catherine Santamaria who would shortly replace Kingsland as chair. Of the four remaining members, only poet Geoff Page and visual arts critic and ANU head of Art History Sasha Grishin were involved with contemporary arts practice. Eight board members filled the 16 positions on each of four artform committees comprising theatre, music, visual and community arts, thus sitting on a minimum of two committees each. Consensus was impossible.

The continuing primacy of performing arts, including music, and the treatment of visual arts as expressed through craft and community arts, is demonstrated in the discussion paper. Statements around performing arts, music, craft and community arts accounted for 17 of the 22 points in the overview. Four points were specifically allocated to the visual arts, the principal expression of which was considered to be the ANG. Importantly, however, the discussion paper directly recognised the ANG as “a national institution with no formal responsibility to the ACT community”.

Growing calls for a regional art/heritage museum were addressed in the following statement:

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32 Ibid., 5.
The location of national institutions in Canberra seems to have led Government to overlook the need for cultural and other institutions—including art and heritage museums—at the Territory and municipal levels.\textsuperscript{33}

CSA’s wider involvement of staff and teachers in the local community was recognised. However the discussion paper credits CSA with the formation of BRG, ACME Silkscreen Workshop, the Artworkers Union and “the current campaign for community space for artists.”\textsuperscript{34} This reading indicated that there was no understanding of the critical role of Jobless Action and Canberra’s young social activists not connected to CSA in the formation of all of the above, except for ACME.\textsuperscript{35} Finally, the overview listed, among a number of writers and musicians, some “less visible” individual artists, with a shortlist comprising painters Michael Taylor and Robin Wallace-Crabbe, sculptor Rosalie Gascoigne, ceramicists and CSA staff Alan Watt and Alan Peascod, and printmaker and CSA director Udo Sellbach. Again, this reading reveals only a superficial knowledge of what was actually occurring in the burgeoning visual arts scene.

The discussion paper called for general feedback on the wider arts milieu, as well as specific submissions around the management of the General Grants Scheme of the Arts Development Program. Having already delivered a comprehensive series of recommendations last October, the wider arts communities’ general frustration with the slow progress of response from the ADB was growing. Clearly the sector

\textsuperscript{33} Ibid. 5.
\textsuperscript{34} Ibid., 6.
\textsuperscript{35} ACME’s support from CSA’s Print Workshop tutor Mandy Martin is discussed in section 5.2.1 Mandy Martin: Background and Impacts, pp. 171–183.
was now looking for concerted action rather than continued invitations for
discussion.

Some relief for visual artists was provided by the opening of Kingston Art
Centre on March 30, 1984. The centre was funded by CDF and managed by Arts
Council ACT. The first facility of its kind in the city, it provided multiple artist
studios, fee-free gallery hire and spaces for a number of commercial galleries. In
opening the centre, Tom Uren, Minister for Territories and Local Government,
“signaled the Government's intention to establish similar projects in other parts of
Canberra.”36 Simon Dawkins, then administrator of the Arts Council (ACT) (no
doubt additionally buoyed by the January release of the *Arts Development in the
Australian Capital Territory: A Discussion Paper* by the ADB), said the opening
marked “a new era in art”.37 There is little doubt that Uren’s awareness of the
pressing need for space and his intention to build infrastructure capacity was
genuine. At the press conference that followed the opening, he urged the successful
lobbyists to “campaign for other groups in other areas of Canberra”.38 In spite of
this, it would not be until the advent of self-government in the 1990s that purpose-
built community art centres and standalone artist studio complexes would adequately
service arts and community cultural groups.

Lobbying for support continued apace throughout 1984. The timed release of
grant monies was the focus of a sector-wide letter sent to 17 Canberra arts

36 Debbie Cameron, “Kingston Space Launched for Art”, *Canberra Times*,
March 31, 1984, 9.
37 Ibid.
38 Ibid.
organisations on June 21 from the CCAF. The letter, evidencing growing frustration with the cycle of meetings and discussion papers, concluded with:

Finally, could we draw your attention to a discussion at your meeting with arts groups and the Arts Development Board on 4 July 1983 [eleven months before]. Arts groups made representations of this nature to you, and the Departmental representative undertook to follow the matter through.40

The letter sought written support to back up a request to Uren to change the payment of arts grants from quarterly instalments to bi-annual instalments payable in April and November.41 Concerns regarding the efficacy of current arrangements included the working capital deficits sustained by “almost all of the large professional arts organisations in Canberra”.42 These were caused by “the rapid expansion of these organisations, their full and effective usage of all grants received, and the lack of opportunity for them to build adequate working capital reserves”,43 and resulted in the use of overdraft facilities in November and December. The letter reflected the cyclic nature of performing arts in the city and the desire to reduce requests to the ADB for accelerated payment of grants, thereby reducing the growing

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39 These were Bitumen River Gallery, Arts Council (ACT), Blue Folk Community Arts Group, Canberra Stereo Public Radio, Crafts Council of the ACT, Theatre ACT, CYT, Canberra Dance Ensemble, CTC, Canberra Opera, Human Veins Dance Theatre, CSO, Stagecoach, Canberra Rep], Megalo Screenprint Workshop and Gorman House Community Arts Centre.
41 Ibid.
42 Ibid.
43 Ibid.
administrative overload on under-resourced companies. In 1984, five companies including CCAF, Canberra Opera, CYT, Human Veins Dance Theatre and the Arts Council (ACT) had found it necessary to apply for accelerated funding. The requested change sought to bring the ACT into line with OzCo practices, which were already servicing clients with payments in two instalments.

In fact, by 1984, the wider process of developing a comprehensive arts and cultural policy for the ACT seemed unlikely. Continuing population growth was matched by rising local unemployment and decreasing Federal Government commitment to Canberra. Numerous local advisory committees, with reporting and advisory responsibilities to Federal Government, operated across government departments, creating increasingly expensive and unwieldy overall management of the Territory.

Clearly the task of formulating a comprehensive Territory-wide arts and culture strategy was beyond the under-resourced ADB, now chaired by Santamaria who had replaced Kingsland at the beginning of the year. Additionally, the political and economic climate in which the ADB was attempting to devise a forward plan was not conducive to long-term planning. In response to the previously detailed persistent lobbying from an increasingly visible and vocal extended local arts community, the ADB decided to engage a consultant to undertake a review of the General Grants Scheme of the Arts Development program, alerting arts organisations to this decision on October 31, 1984. Issues the consultant was required to address included:

The range and nature of arts activities which should be supported, the level of funding appropriate in the territory, the balance of
support between professional, semi-professional and amateur organisations, the contribution of different activities to the cultural and community life of the ACT and the limitations on funds available under the Arts Development Program and from other sources.\textsuperscript{44}

The consultant appointed was Timothy Pascoe.

3.3 \textbf{The Pascoe Report}

At the heart of the problem of developing funding that responded to existing local needs and provided opportunities for growth in local arts was the difficulty of separating the construct of Canberra as national capital space from the real and rapidly developing needs of Canberra’s local arts community. The complexity involved in developing funding mechanisms that supported local arts within this national space was exemplified in the commissioning and research processes, Pascoe’s resulting report and the ensuing fallout.

Timothy Pascoe was commissioned by the ADB in October 1984 to deliver to them, in the following March, a report titled \textit{Arts in the ACT: Funding Priorities and Grant Administration}. Pascoe had just completed a 3-year term as executive chairman of OzCo (1982–1984). He had previously been based in Canberra as federal director of the Liberal Party of Australia in 1974/75. It is likely that the ADB felt that both these factors made Pascoe an appropriate choice to conduct a survey

\textsuperscript{44}\,ACT Arts Development Board, letter to Canberra arts organisations, October 31 1984, (correspondence file 1/1984, CCAS archives).
whose outcomes would enable the ADB to adjust their funding parameters in order to meet increasingly vocal concerns and needs around local funding.

Rather than confer a bias towards the local, however, Pascoe’s OzCo role and his political role in the mid-1970s were overtly linked to Canberra firstly as national capital space and secondly as the locus of federal politics. Additionally problematic was that he carried out his research over the summer of 1984/85. The following section examines these three difficulties, beginning with Pascoe’s connection to the Commonwealth arts funding body.

For almost 20 years, the two iterations of federal government funding for the arts, that is the Australian Council for the Arts and its successor the Australia Council, had garnered significant criticisms. Among these was the ever-present criticism of elitism. This stemmed from the core decision made by OzCo to fund major or ‘flagship’ performing arts companies as internal and external signifiers of a nation civilised by culture. So much money had been invested in these companies by the beginning of the 1980s that it was impossible to conceive of them failing, with the resulting widespread perception that they exerted undue influence over the Commonwealth funding body.

This entrenched tendency to continue to fund performing arts companies regardless of economic or artistic justifications was increasingly obvious in Canberra during the period from the end of the 1970s to the onset of self-government in 1989, and it was one of the major contributing factors to the growing unease among the arts community in the capital. This was particularly pertinent to the continued unsuccessful attempts to develop a professional theatre company in the capital.

Nationally, between 1983 and 1985, there emerged the possibility of a major policy shift in the way that OzCo funding was allocated. In 1985, one quarter of all
OzCo funds went to the Australian Opera, the Australian Ballet and the two major orchestras. Debate centred around whether OzCo should continue to support, with limited Commonwealth funding, these major companies—who it was felt should be able to attract corporate and private sponsorship—or whether funds should be directed away from these and other large dance and theatre companies and towards smaller companies making more experimental works.\(^45\) Labor Party rhetoric appeared to support a change in funding focus and Pascoe was bipartisan in his support for this change. In the middle of his three-year term as executive chair, Pascoe urged OzCo “to support a shift in funding from assumed excellence to genuine creativity”.\(^46\) This insider knowledge of Commonwealth funding mechanisms and politics and his public support for the funding of creative, community and regional art development provided compelling reasons in support of the ADB commissioning Pascoe to write an ACT arts funding report.

And yet, the opposite of Pascoe’s public views is evident in the finished report. It contains clear indicators that its author, though willing, struggled to distinguish between Canberra as national capital space and Canberra as home to a growing local arts community. This is not surprising. Pascoe’s time as executive chair of OzCo coincided with the opening of the ANG in October 1982. The establishment of the gallery was the ultimate cultural signifier of both national capital space and civilised nation that had been in train since Holt simultaneously announced the formation of the Australia Council for the Arts and the commitment

\(^{45}\) Dr. John Gardiner-Garden, *Commonwealth Arts Policy and Administration*. Social Policy Section, Parliament of Australia, (Canberra: Department of Parliamentary Services, May 7, 2009), 9. The 1984 OzCo-commissioned Throsby Report supported the change in policy “to shift the emphasis of its overall financial policy towards individual artists.” See also *The Age* “Australia Shuns its Artists: Inquiry”, February 1, 1984, 3.

\(^{46}\) Ibid.
to a Canberra-based national gallery in November 1967. Since that time, successive federal governments had variously approved, rescinded, re-proposed and completed various national cultural monuments in Canberra. Pascoe was thus surrounded by the rhetoric and problems of culturally funding Canberra as national capital space.

Secondly, Pascoe’s experience of Canberra, where he had been based during 1974/75 in his capacity as federal director of the Liberal Party, was inexorably tied to the construct of Canberra as the seat of Federal Government. Federal politicians and federal party directors left Canberra, as they do today, on Thursday or Friday afternoons during sitting weeks and were absent from the capital during non-sitting weeks. Pascoe may have attended, during the working week, events at the CTC. If so, he could have seen travelling performances from Old Tote Theatre Company, Nimrod Theatre, Hungarian State Symphony Orchestra, Marcel Marceau or Kamahl, Australian Opera, Melbourne Symphony Orchestra, Barry Humphries, Cleo Laine or Roy Orbison, all of which were held in 1974/75. Local offerings were diverse, including performances from Canberra Rep, Canberra Philharmonic Society, Canberra Theatre Trust, Tempo Theatre, CSO, Canberra Youth Orchestra, Canberra School of Music faculty in concert, the first and second Canberra Film Festivals, Woden Valley Youth Choir and Canberra Opera.47 However, it is unlikely that Pascoe was a regular Canberra Theatre attendee; his business during those two years of sitting weeks was politics, not art and culture.

Finally, the research phase of the report was initiated in the lead up to and during the 1984/85 summer holiday period, beginning on Wednesday November 28.

Research during this period was unlikely to foster a deep understanding of Canberra’s cultural development needs. Pascoe understood the local scope of the report saying, “I think the challenge of the study is to do something about Canberra’s needs.”

But then, as now, a large number of Canberrans left the Territory for extended summer holidays in southern NSW coastal towns and elsewhere. Not only were audiences absent but also the majority of galleries were closed. CSA and ANU, which provided ongoing forums for local arts and culture events, had no students during the November to February period when Pascoe conducted his research.

Pascoe admits that he sometimes had to make do “with an external inspection and peering through windows.”

There were a number of wide-ranging events on at CTC, some of which he may have attended. In November, December, January and February, he could have seen the Beverley Flanagan School of Classical Ballet, Queensland Ballet, Melbourne’s Playbox Theatre Company, the Australia tour of the Oxford Revue Group, Canberra’s Philharmonic Society performing The Sentimental Bloke, Canberra theatre company Women on a Shoestring and Canberra Opera. In February, Theatre ACT performed the Kathy Lette written, Carol Woodrow directed *Perfect Mismatch* and Human Veins Dance Theatre presented a week of lunchtime dance.

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50 *Canberra Theatre Centre Ephemera*.

51 The Canberra-based touring company Human Veins Dance Theatre was founded by Don Asker in November 1979. It was envisaged as the flagship carrier of dance in the national capital, and funded in this and continuing guises until 2006 by OzCo. It disbanded in 1988 when Asker took up a Churchill Fellowship, and it reformed as the Meryl Tankard Company. In 1992, it metamorphosed into Vis-a-Vis Dance Canberra under the directorship of Melbourne’s Sue Healey, who left in 1995. A rethink saw the company change to the Choreographic Centre, directed from 1996 by Mark Gordon, and then expanded in 1999 under Ruth Osbourne’s Quantum Leap Youth Choreographic Ensemble, becoming the
Both during Pascoe’s 1974/75 period of flying in and out of Canberra and the 1984/85 summer months when he conducted research for the report, his impression of arts in Canberra would have been of performing arts as expressed locally and as imported as part of the national touring circuit. In terms of visual arts, it was the NGA that remained open over the summer period, where art was a cultural function of the national capital space. It was too much to expect that Pascoe would be able to view the city through local eyes or to conceive of a broader arts practice that was unequivocally local in expression and requirements. The imprimatur of national capital space was powerful.

The Pascoe Report was submitted to the ADB in mid-March 1985. “As an input to the debate that will follow”, Pascoe, positing several scenarios for discussion, concluded, “There is no right answer.” Arguably the ADB were looking for clarity in the way forward and a funding model that had a higher percentage possibility of success and consensus. On both counts they would have been disappointed.

The bias towards national capital space is clear in Pascoe’s comments in the introduction that characterise Canberra as the city best served by arts funding in the country. Central to this argument was the presence of the ANG, but surely it was the nation in whose service this gallery functioned. Roger Butler, the inaugural Curator of Australian Prints, Posters and Illustrated Books, had been vigorously collecting the work of Canberra-based printmakers—along with prints and posters from wider

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Australian Choreographic Centre in 2001. Triennial funding was not renewed in 2006. The centre closed in 2007 and re-launched as QL2 Youth Dance Ensemble in 2008 under Ruth Osbourne as artistic director and continuing until the present day. The continued success of QL2 is due in no small part to the programs run by the centre over the period of Mark Gordon’s leadership.

52 Pascoe, Arts in the ACT, 17.
Australian print and poster makers for the national collection since the late 1970s. However, ANG was inextricably tied to the conception of Canberra as national capital space. Many of Pascoe’s recommendations were likewise tied to the development of professional, performing arts organisations whose success in the national capital space would reflect well on Australia. This in spite of the fact that he was writing his report in the middle of the wider funding debate that suggested a movement away from flagship companies towards more experimental arts ventures, a movement he himself had publicly supported.

In apparent opposition to his own public calls for increased funding on experimental artforms and in opposition to ACT arts community desires, but in line with historical funding trajectories, Pascoe recommended funds go to four core areas with only one company in each of these four areas being selected for funding. Additionally, he recommended that these companies be funded with the proviso that they attain a level of excellence reflecting their position as national flag bearers resident in the national capital. Given that Canberra’s small population of 220,000 citizens displayed an immensely diverse arts and cultural practice, it is clear that Pascoe’s recommendations centred on funding the national capital space and not the local community.

Pascoe summarised his recommendations under three headings: core strategy, supplementary strategy, and administration. Under core strategy he wrote:

“[T]he ADB should provide on-going, operating funding to achieve a small core of world-class, full-time, fully professional activity in a limited number of areas.”

These were: classical and contemporary drama, through Theatre ACT; contemporary

53 Ibid., 57.
dance, through Human Veins Dance Theatre; craft, through extending the role and facilities of the Crafts Council of the ACT; and community arts, by building on the Arts Council (ACT). In the report’s introduction he wrote: “As a final note, I should point out that my study has not covered the delegated Community Arts Program. However it does get a passing mention towards the end of the report.”54 This omission, given that Canberra’s community arts scene was such an integral component of its arts and cultural landscape, reveals his low-level engagement with and understanding of the realities of the communities’ arts and cultural needs.

The report’s core strategy did not mention individual artists, innovative and experimental artists and artforms, musical theatre or education in the arts, where Pascoe, shifting responsibility away from arts funding, wrote that “the ADB should work assiduously to have [education in the arts] funded within the education budget.”55 The supplementary strategy recommended upgrading studio and exhibition facilities for visual arts and craft, sustaining some non-core areas of professional endeavour and reserving some funds for other artforms. Administration recommendations included three grant categories: professional development, professional assistance and facilities, and special projects and equipment.

The omission of the visual arts from the report’s core strategy is further evidence of a disconnect from the realities of developing arts practice. Pascoe reported, as previously quoted in chapter 1 (see p. 1), that “this art-form is not particularly strong in Canberra”. For this reason, he continued:

54 Ibid., 6.  
55 Ibid., 58.
[A]n injection of funds to create a professional infrastructure might have been attractive. However, I came to the contrary view for three reasons—galleries tend to be the major professional and institutional structures supported by governments and their funding agencies. In the ACT, the Australian National Gallery fulfills most of the roles of a State gallery; compared with craft there is not the same foundation on which to build; nor is the strength of the School of Art so distinctive; there does not appear to be the same opportunity for uniqueness.\(^56\)

In between the release of the report to the community for comment on March 27, 1985 and prior to November 11 that year, when the ACT arts community was advised of grant decisions for the 1986 calendar year, the ADB held three meetings with arts community members\(^57\) and accepted 32 written submissions.\(^58\) Participants reported feeling that their concerns and suggestions, principal among which was for a diversification of resources, had been heard. Particular concerns were voiced around the major recipient of funding, Theatre ACT, and continued funding for Canberra Opera, the time of both of which were widely felt to be over.\(^59\)

On May 24, the chair, Cathy Santamaria reported that the ADB:

\(^{56}\) Ibid., 57.
\(^{57}\) April 9 (advertised in the *Canberra Times*, April 3, 1986, 18), May 11 (advertised in the *Canberra Times*, May 8, 1986, 36).
\(^{58}\) Ken Healey, “Practical Pascoe Sheds Light on Art Wars”, *Canberra Times*, May 12, 1985, 12.
\(^{59}\) Funding for both organisations would be withdrawn by 1987.
would not implement the Pascoe report in 1986 except where it was agreed that the report’s approach was appropriate. . . . Even where there is agreement the Board sees 1986 as an interim year with the full effects of any substantial change in approach not being implemented until at least 1987.

The *Canberra Times* additionally reported on the widespread misgivings surrounding the report’s implementation, writing that:

much concern [had been] expressed by the arts community that the recommendations would be accepted before there had been enough time for their implications to be considered.\(^{60}\)

Therefore, on November 11, when the ADB released funding allocations for the 1986 year that closely shadowed the recommendations of the report, the response from the arts community was swift and outraged. Quite rightly, they felt that both the carefully considered recommendations from meetings that were held in the first half of the decade and the feedback given and apparently accepted prior to the release of the 1986 grants had fallen on deaf ears.

On November 16, 1985, 5 days after the 1986 grants were announced, members of the ACT arts community placed an advertisement in the *Canberra Times* to draw attention to their profound disappointment (see Fig. 1 below).

\(^{60}\) *Canberra Times*, “Timing of Arts Funding Decision”, May 25, 1985, 7.
At the heart of the powerful negative response that swept the local arts community was the report’s primary recommendation that grants to core groups be increased by decreasing available funding to smaller groups. This was exceptionally
bad news for the lively local theatre scene, which included five active theatre
companies in addition to Theatre ACT, the Territory’s nominated flagship theatre
company. Theatre ACT received the majority of total arts funding—$170,000 for the
1986 year from the overall $210,000 allocated to theatre. Of the remaining $40,000,
Human Veins Dance Theatre received $10,000. Pascoe’s recommendation was out
of step with the concerns of local arts workers who deeply desired:

enlightenment under the present system. . . . [T]hat institutional
model, with four flagship companies, has failed in the ACT.
Institutionalisation is the last thing a developing industry like ours
needs.61

With no response to the memorial advertisement forthcoming from the ADB
by November 30, a number of ACT arts workers took the radical step of submitting
their resignations. They included, among others: Steve Brown, administrator and
artistic director of the Arts Council (ACT), who had arrived from Adelaide in mid-
1984, “where there is respect for the professional arts worker as well as support and
understanding”62 and who had submitted the memorial advertisement; Wendy
Taubman, administrator of Through Art Unity Theatre (TAU)63; Jim Koehne, music
coordinator at the Arts Council (ACT); and Gail Kelly, director of CYT. Pascoe had
recommended this latter organisation not receive increased funding, because he felt

61 Wendy Taubman, in Ken Healey, “Disheartened Arts Workers Leave Their Jobs:
62 Steve Brown, in ibid.
renamed UP Front Theatre in 1991—was one of the success stories of the CEP program,
continuing as it did beyond the initial six months of CEP funding.
the success of CYT was wholly dependent on its current director. “The predominant feeling, remarked Brown, “is one of despondency rather than anger.” 64

The provision of hidden subsidies from arts workers in the form of unremunerated working hours was of great concern. The Arts Council (ACT), which had demonstrated broad relevance across the arts sector for decades in Canberra, including—though not recognised in Pascoe’s report—as the instigator and driver of community arts projects, received $105,000 in funding for the 1985 year with a grant of a further $105,000 for 1986. Brown maintained that he had given around half of his working hours for no remuneration since arriving from Adelaide and taking up the job in 1984, a situation common then and now in the arts industry. 65 Taubman felt strongly that “[b]y continuing to provide such large hidden subsidies we are only continuing to cover up the ADB’s inadequacies.” 66

The final sally in the sector’s response to the release of arts grants for 1986 revealed extreme distress from the growing sector over the lack of direction and clear, appropriate policy from the overworked and understaffed Arts Activities section of the DTLG. On Thursday December 5, arts workers published an open letter to the new Minister for Territories, Gordon Scholes, the House of Assembly and the ACT community, demanding that all positions on the ADB be declared vacant and the Arts Activities section of the DTLG be restructured. 67 The meeting that developed the wording of the letter was organised by Anne Virgo, then coordinator of BRG, and Mark Ferguson. 68

64 Ken Healey, “Disheartened Arts Workers Leave Their Jobs” 18.
65 Ibid.
66 Taubman, 18. 67 Canberra Times, “Call for Change for Arts Sake”, December 5, 1985, 8.
The *Canberra Times*’ interpretation of the memorial advertisement as a “theatrical statement” by arts workers masks a much more pervasive exhaustion felt throughout the entire community, not just in the arts community.\(^6^9\) By the end of 1985, economic hardships were biting deep in Canberra. The slowing economy was matched by a growing paralysis around local decision-making as increasing population numbers and need were met by a decline in federal commitment to local endeavours in the national capital.

The passionate local response to the Pascoe Report marks an important moment in the development of contemporary arts in the mid-1980s. The ACT arts landscape had undergone dramatic change between 1978 and the release of the report in 1985, with local performing arts companies, community arts organisations and Commonwealth-funded cultural institutions being joined by an increasingly vocal contemporary visual arts sector that had gained considerable momentum. The commissioning of the report marked a chance to radically alter the funding landscape in response to local needs but in the end inertia prevailed and a bold leap into a better future for arts funding and development eluded the in-situ advisory bodies. It would not be until 1991, with self-government, that comprehensive change would occur in the sector. That year brought with it the handing down of the recommendations of the select Committee on Arts and Cultural Development in the ACT. The first recommendation adopted was the formation of the peak arts body the Cultural Council, which replaced the ADB. Most critical to forward development was the handover of the $19 million casino premium to the ACT Government and the decision to allocate the premium to the provision of arts and cultural infrastructure.

\(^6^9\) “Memorial Advertisement”, 9S.
As a result, the ACT entered an extended era of rapid and inspired growth in local arts whose trajectory was managed and directed by Canberrans themselves and whose legacy would transform the face of the city into the present day.

### 3.4 Unique Local Solutions

In the next part of the chapter, I turn my discussion to examine three significant local communication and funding solutions: the establishment of the arts magazine *Muse*, the creation of the fundraising group CAPO, and EASS.

As previously illustrated, the Commonwealth continued to grapple unsuccessfully throughout the 1980s with funding arts in Canberra not related to developing identified flagship companies. Additionally, the incumbent local arts advisory body, the ADB, whose responsibility was to advise the Federal Minister for Territories on local arts funding needs, was extremely under-resourced. Conversely, however, the national capital paradigm allowed the rise of unique solutions to the paradox of carving out the local from within the primary rhetoric of national capital space. Within Canberra’s highly educated and politicised population were passionate arts practitioners and supporters and experienced teachers, administrators and negotiators. The continued success of these local solutions, as outlined below, indicates that there were also community members with resources available to support the growing sector as consumers and buyers of locally created artworks.

Three innovative solutions were developed, two of which continue to the present day. The first was the arts magazine *Muse*, which from 1980 to 1998 provided a focal point for the rapidly developing arts community. The second was the unique arts funding model CAPO, which from 1983 to the present has provided an alternative non-government funding source for local arts practitioners. The third,
EASS, arose from CSA; from 1988 until now, EASS has extended funding and exhibition opportunities to CSA graduates from local individuals, businesses and organisations.

*Muse* provided an alternative voice for local arts in a city whose media coverage was dominated by the *Canberra Times*. It was deeply embedded in the local community from its inception and demonstrated lively topicality, relevance and commitment to Canberra’s arts and cultural practitioners for 18 years. During this time it remained true to its founding statement that as “The arts and entertainment provide a vital means of expression for the whole community . . . Muse will concentrate on the work of Canberra artists and groups.”

*Muse* was launched in June 1980, assisted by a $1000 grant from the DCT, and initially operated as a collective, coordinated by Robert Garran and staffed by volunteers. The free arts magazine, initially published six-weekly, included features and reviews, drawings, photographs and cartoons, stories and poetry, arts news and an arts and entertainment diary. Until 1987, *Muse* was published collectively by CCAF. In 1987, following protracted negotiations with the CCAF, whose paperwork—curiously for a volunteer arts organisation that attracted a level of government funding—implied ownership rather than custodianship of *Muse*, the Arts Council (ACT) assumed the role of publisher. Following this, *Muse* was awarded a grant of $20,000 from the ADB. By its 10th anniversary in 1990, funding had increased to $25,000 and *Muse* was additionally able to raise another $19,000 from advertising and sponsorship, conclusively demonstrating its relevance within and for the community. At the end of 1990, with the Arts Council (ACT) coming to an end, *Muse* became an

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incorporated association and in August 1991 the magazine celebrated its 100th issue with a party at Gorman House.

*Muse*, by employing local writers from its first issue, was instrumental in developing arts writing and criticism in Canberra. Arts journalist Helen Musa (who would become Arts Editor of the *Canberra Times* from 1995 to 2007) wrote for *Muse* from 1985 and was its editor from 1990 to 1996. During her editorship, the magazine was published monthly on the first of each month. Musa encouraged robust journalism, and “invited conflicts of interest and bias” by encouraging writer/practitioners in visual and performing arts to write and review within their disciplines. Among these, from 1984 to 1986, was Tim Ferguson, whose comedy trio the Doug Anthony All Stars learnt their craft busking on Canberra streets, and Australian author Cate Kennedy, a graduate of University of Canberra (UC). Long-time *Canberra Times* visual arts reviewer Sonia Barron first wrote for *Muse* before moving on to the *Canberra Times*, as did senior visual arts critic Kerry Anne Cousins. Musa herself employed Canberra artist Stephen Harrison, whose cartoons featured in every issue. Importantly, Musa presided over an expanded program where, in addition to providing local arts content, *Muse* hosted regular arts focussed events including political forums, public meetings with arts practitioners and, under the umbrella of the Canberra Critics Circle (itself founded by Musa in 1991), regular arts writing workshops.

The founding of *Muse*, its focus on the work of Canberra artists and groups, and its continued strong presence in the Canberra community over 18 years are testament to a growing awareness of the importance of local arts as the glue binding...
a strong local community and as a central marker of place. That it survived during economically difficult periods is proof of its relevance. Importantly, its longevity also indicates continuing and growing capacity within the local sector over the period.

The second unique local endeavour arose at the end of 1983. On Saturday November 12, CAPO held its inaugural gala banquet auction at the Lakeside International Hotel, where “500 people paid $60 each for a bidding stick”. CAPO was modelled on the Seattle, Washington State, organisation PONCHO whose president travelled to Canberra to act as auctioneer for the gala. The evening’s proceedings were managed by Richard Thorp, architect of Australia’s new Parliament House. The cost of the bidding stick covered the gala banquet’s considerable expenses; the monies raised through auction were distributed via a committee to arts groups and individuals who had successfully applied for funding.

It is unlikely that any other Australian jurisdiction would have been able to raise the level of interest in such an event or the kind of rewards available to bidders in early CAPO auctions. An extraordinary 182 gifts were donated for the inaugural event. Among them was a chestnut yearling colt called Gulliver, a carcass of venison, the opportunity to conduct an orchestra, local Olympian Robert de Castella’s running shorts, a skiing holiday in Aspen, Senator Flo Bjelke-Petersen’s pumpkin scone recipe printed for the occasion on Senate notepaper, an autographed copy of Labor Prime Minister Bob Hawke’s inaugural parliamentary speech, and a

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73 Between 1978 and 1983, PONCHO raised $4.4 million for the arts.
“commemorative banner of the opening of Parliament House on May 9, 1927… presented on parchment and extremely rare.”

Canberra provided a unique environment for CAPO’s success. The quality and number of donations says a great deal about the nature of its community at that time. On one hand, the nationwide period of economic decline that had followed the dismissal of the Whitlam Labor Government and the rise of the Liberal Fraser Government in 1975 was acutely felt in the national capital. By 1981, Canberra registered a net “out” migration of 262. Unemployment rose sharply with concomitant flow-on effects throughout the city, particularly among young job seekers. The public service, which in 1975 had accounted for 60 percent of the workforce, had contracted by almost 10 percent by the early 1980s. By 1983, homelessness and emergency housing issues affected 2396 adults and 276 children in a population of just over 238,983. By 1984, “an inquiry into welfare services in the ACT declared that the political will to develop Canberra had evaporated”.

In spite of the economic downturn, the city’s position as the seat of Federal Government and the Commonwealth public service and as home for the majority of embassies resulted in a culturally literate and educated population with high disposable income. The gala banquet auction format allowed an infusion of pleasure to surround the whole concept of support for the broader arts in the ACT. Philanthropy as practiced in this model, which was unique within Australia, allowed supporters to experience close engagement with contemporary cultural life.

75 Brown, 198.
76 Ibid., 202.
One individual and 23 Canberra-based arts organisations submitted 43 projects to CAPO for consideration in 1983. Ten were awarded funding.\textsuperscript{77} Most useful in supporting the growth of visual arts were small grants to Studio One to enable the provision of printing services to assist young artists, to the Crafts Council of the ACT to support tours of visual arts collections within Canberra and to the CCAF to enable it to pay small fees to \textit{Muse} contributors. The largest went to the oft-funded Theatre ACT, with the CSO, Canberra Opera, Jigsaw Theatre Company and the Canberra Children’s Choir representing performing arts. A proposed scheme that did not come to fruition from the Arts Council (ACT) to circulate the work of young artists among potential purchasers was funded at $5,500. A prescient grant of $6,540 was awarded to Canberra Stereo Public Radio to purchase digital recording equipment and to cover costs involved in an application if successful for a broadcasting license. Although the first application for a broadcast license was unsuccessful, this grant provided vital early support for the station that would become Artsound FM and that continues to inform and add cohesiveness to the broader Canberra arts and cultural community.

\textsuperscript{77} They were: Studio One to enable the provision of printing services to assist young artists; Crafts Council of The ACT for $1,160 to support tours of visual arts collections within Canberra; CCAF for $1,000 to enable it to pay small fees to contributors to \textit{Muse} magazine; Theatre ACT for $11,440 to employ a full-time actor for 1984; CSO for $5,904 to fund a two-day rehearsal and performance with a Japanese conductor, Hiroyuki Iwaki; Canberra Stereo Public Radio for $6,540 to purchase digital recording equipment and costs involved in an application if successful for a broadcasting license (this application was unsuccessful); Arts Council (ACT) for $5,500 to fund a proposed scheme circulating the work of young artists among potential purchasers; Jigsaw Theatre Company for $3,000 for designer fees and set construction for \textit{The Dream Circle}, a play about Marion Mahoney, who worked hand in glove with her architect husband Walter Burley Griffin on the design of Canberra; Canberra Children’s Choir for $900 to buy a sound system; Canberra Opera for $3,500 to hire a principal singer.

\textit{Canberra Times} reported that CAPO had reserved $4,000 of auction monies for auction expenses, with a balance of $11,000 retained for further future allocations to the arts. \textit{Canberra Times}, “Auction to Benefit Arts Organisations”, November 30, 1983, 9.
The *Canberra Times* reported a combined total of $150,000 raised over the first two CAPO auctions, with just over $100,000 distributed to practitioners; $46,694 in 1983 and $54,435 in 1984. The balance of around $50,000, raised from ticket sales, covered the costs of the gala evenings. The third gala ball in 1985 was advertised as *An Affair of the Arts*. Auction items on offer included a return trip to Europe, fine furs, jewellery, antiques, and a day at the races with Queensland politician, the Hon. Russ Hinze.\(^78\)

CAPO’s relevance extended into the period post-self-government. By 1990, CAPO’s raison d’être addressed the incumbent Liberal Federal Government’s need for partnership funding with non-government organisations. CAPO was very good news also for the fledgling ACT Government who demonstrated a growing awareness of the importance of local arts to the wider community but whose budget, one year into the three-year handover to self-government, was constrained.\(^79\) ACT Liberal Minister for Health, Education and the Arts, Gary Humphries, calling on the Canberra business community to support the 1990 auction, identified CAPO as being “unique in Australia” in that it raised funds from local businesses and individuals and dispersed those back to the local arts community. Humphries acknowledged the $500,000 raised since 1983 as an “extraordinary amount of money for a city the size of Canberra” and encouraged the continued flow of private monies to the sector:

\(^{78}\) *Canberra Times*, “Bid for Your Own Star”, April 26, 1985, 7.

\(^{79}\) Bill Wood, reminiscing on the first years of self-government on his last sitting day in 2004. “Self-government is a success, not without a large number of bumps, bruises and broken limbs along the way. Richard Madden was the first Under Treasurer. Wayne Berry, and I think Bill Stefania—not in the same cabinets—would remember the downward graph that he presented at budget time. ‘This is where we are folks,’ he would say. ‘This is where we have to get to.’ The only cabinet decisions in those times were where we would cut.” Bill Wood. Australian Capital Territory. Parliamentary Debates, Legislative Assembly. Hansard August 26, 2004, 4323.
Last year, the statistics showed that the arts are good business. Vigorous arts activity helps to create business for a number of different industries. . . . [B]y supporting CAPO, those industries are helping to support themselves. . . . The Alliance Government will continue to assist the arts in Canberra. However, arts organisations will increasingly require additional assistance.\textsuperscript{80}

The reality of Humphries’ statement was immediately borne out as the Federal Liberal Government reduced funding to the arts in real terms in the first half of the 1990s.

As the national capital experienced the slowing of business that gripped the rest of Australia by the mid-1990s, the extreme rewards available to bidders became more moderate. In the mid-2000s the board elected to change the evening’s format from the expensive gala banquets to a smaller cocktail party and auction. Reflecting the ascendency of visual art within the Canberra community, the bulk of items available at auction by then comprised artworks donated by the region’s senior and emerging artists, many of whom then attended the auctions. The evening became an opportunity for collectors and art enthusiasts to mingle with and to buy the work of local artists at very reasonable cost.

By 2013, CAPO had dispersed more than $2 million of non-government funding to the ACT arts sector over 30 years. Although the awards are, as they have always been, open to the broader arts community, the largest group of funding recipients since the 2000s have been visual artists. In this way, CAPO has become a

not-for-profit funding entity auctioning donated visual artworks to visual arts consumers and returning the majority of funds raised back to visual arts practitioners. Whether it is sustainable for visual artists to continue to support their own in this way remains to be seen.

The third unique concept, EASS, emerged from CSA. It was envisaged by the School’s second director David Williams as a 1988 bicentennial project designed to “complement the landmark International Master Workshops and Symposia” held at the School that year. As the advent of both self-government and Australia’s bicentenary of 1988 approached, CSA was graduating in excess of 70 students annually, increasing each year, across 10 workshops. The growing cohort of contemporary visual arts graduates and others not associated with CSA required more support than federal or local government could provide. Concern over the lack of appropriate artist studio space and the small number of suitable contemporary art exhibition venues was exacerbated by uncertainty due to the expected tightening of Commonwealth funds in a time of economic downturn and the unknown effects of impending self-government.

That Williams was able to attract support from individuals, businesses, art organisations and institutions indicated that, by 1988, CSA was deeply embedded in the Canberra community. As Canberra’s population continued to grow and local arts infrastructure continued to multiply rapidly from the early 1990s, EASS grew along with it. EASS extended opportunities to CSA graduates in the form of acquisition

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81 David Williams, foreword to Agostino, ix.
82 In 1986, the first year that CSA offered bachelor degrees, 74 students graduated. In 1987, 79 students graduated. In 1988, 62 students graduated, the only decline in numbers since 1978, and in 1989, 81 students graduated. The ten workshops were: printmaking, graphic investigation, painting, sculpture, textiles, wood, leather, gold and silver, glass and ceramics. Ibid.
awards, cash endowments, materials grants and many exhibition opportunities and provided concrete examples of widespread community support for emerging artists and the School. Then, as now, awards were conferred during the annual end of year graduate exhibition/open studios celebration, which is a highlight for the broad arts community of practitioners and workers, and the extended community of the national capital. The efforts of EASS to make it more viable to stay in Canberra and continue a valued and supported arts practice played a vital role in reversing the flow of young artists to other cities.

Canberra music and theatre commentator Ken Healey had opined in 1985 that, given the size of Canberra’s community, “innovation and experimentation [should] not be funded at the expense of emerging professional activity in established areas.”\(^{83}\) In fact, Canberra’s unique environment required that funding address both the innovative and experimental as well as the emerging professional; these two categories often overlapped. Clearly more money to support the growing sector was urgently required, and EASS and CAPO played critical roles in extending non-government opportunities for funding.

3.5 **The Brickworks, Studio One, and aGOG**

The lack of studio space continued to be an immense problem for the annually increasing numbers of graduates from CSA. Waiting lists for studios within the Kingston Art Centre were long, and with no other suitable studio space available in the city, some local artists devised an ad-hoc solution. The Yarralumla Brickworks, the first industrial complex built in Canberra, had from 1913 to 1976

\(^{83}\) Healey, “Practical Pascoe Sheds Light on Arts War”.
produced the Canberra Bricks from which many of the city’s homes were constructed. From the early 1980s, as the Brickworks’ buildings deteriorated, the site provided a number of visual artists with quasi-official studio space, rented on weekly leases.

Four of these artists were recognised as leaders in their field in Australia and had some profile in Europe and the USA. Between October 2–26, 1986, works from these four, together with works from three emerging artists who benefitted from the support of their more experienced fellows, were exhibited in *Prime Cultural Estate*, at the ACG. The exhibition comprised Jay Arthur’s paper works, Helen Wadlington’s bookbinding, James Whitehead’s photography, Gaynor Cardew’s feminist cartoons (printed on fabric at Megalo Screenprint), Brigitte Ender’s ceramics, Churchill Fellowship recipient Morgyn Phillips’ silk and paper works, and glass works from CSA’s head of Glass Workshop, Klaus Moje. Meredith Hinchliffe, in reviewing the exhibition, concluded that it “shows how important artists are to the Canberra community. The work is exceptional in every case.”

The exhibition’s title reflected the ongoing tussle between the local government, whose interest lay in developing the prime real estate that the Brickworks represented, and the cultural practitioners who made work within the site and believed that studio spaces could be developed there with minimal expense. The development impasse remained unsolved at that time and remains unsolved into the present day.

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84 Meredith Hinchliffe, “Fragile Tenancy but Exceptional Art”, *Canberra Times*, October 18, 1986, 7s.
85 Despite growing safety concerns around the site’s deterioration, a handful of artists continued to make work within its spaces over the ensuing decades. These included furniture designers Tom Harrington and Mark Spain, sculptors Stuart Vaskess and Peter Vandermark, painter Marie Hagarty, exhibition space Gallery Fred, Furniture Designer
Among the many smaller commercial galleries and art enterprises that continued to open and close in the city during the decade were two that had lasting influence on the Canberra and wider Australian art scenes. Both initially opened in the Kingston Art Centre. These were Studio One (1983–2001), which was founded by Meg Buchanen and Dianne Fogwell, and Helen Maxwell’s aGOG, which opened on March 16, 1989.

Studio One was an independent printmaking workshop servicing CSA graduates and providing printmaking facilities to the wider community. As evidenced in chapter 4, the Printmaking Workshop at CSA encompassed two quite different printmaking cultures during the early years: head of the Workshop and master printmaker Jorg Schmeisser’s European and Japanese aesthetic and Workshop tutor Mandy Martin’s politically charged poster aesthetic, which had been fostered in Adelaide. These differing, though not exclusively oppositional, practices continued to play out post-graduation at Megalo International Screenprint and at Studio One. Megalo, arising from progressive social activism and housed in the grungy surrounds of Ainslie Village, was broadly concerned with the poster as a voice for social cohesion and change. Studio One, housed at Kingston Art Space and initially specialising in intaglio and relief processes, was concerned with printing as fine art. Both organisations coexisted for eighteen years in Canberra. Studio One, incorporated in 1987 as Studio One Inc., is understood as having been extremely influential in Australian printmaking, and with the appointment of master printmaker

Thor’s Hammer and Geoff Farquhar-Still’s collaborative art/design studio Artillion. As well, Canberra’s radical theatre collective *Splinters* used Brickwork’s spaces for set construction, rehearsals and performances from 1989 to 1996.

For more on Splinters see *Splinters*, Canberra Museum and Gallery, 2013. Exhibition catalogue.
Theo Tremblay in 1993, it became nationally respected for its work with many of Australia’s best-known Indigenous artists.

Helen Maxwell’s aGOG was established to redress the historical and contemporary gender imbalance that consistently saw more male than female artists in exhibition. Maxwell recalls that when she decided to launch a gallery devoted to the work of women artists, “[a] number of people objected . . . and said it was sexist.” aGOG exhibited the work of Australian women artists, including Indigenous artists, from March 1989 to the end of 1998. The great success of the gallery over ten years speaks to the breadth and timeliness of Maxwell’s vision, with increased national research occurring over this time into the previously unwritten histories of Australian women artists of the twentieth century. Maxwell also required that works expressed each artist’s personal politics, evidencing “a stance that they are taking in their life” and, further, that “[the artist has] to know how to use their medium to successfully express their views.” These requirements lent tremendous depth to aGOG’s exhibition calendar. Additionally, Maxwell’s experience as an assistant curator in Australian Art at the NGA meant that her unique vision was underpinned with professionalism.

It is no surprise that Canberra was home to aGOG. Maxwell’s requirement for work that expressed personal politics was extremely apt in a city where social activism had been demonstrated since the 1920s. As examined in chapter 4, the national capital attracted feminists from around the country who participated in political lobbying, activism, forums and festivals. Art and politics were deeply

87 Ibid.
entwined from the late 1970s. Additionally, as noted in chapter 1 (see p. 19), BRG/CCAS, since its 1981 opening and in every year since, has consistently—against national and international trends—shown more female than male artists in exhibition. Women artists were highly visible in the city, and Maxwell and aGOG contributed enormously to their growing profile. After closing aGOG in late 1998, Maxwell re-entered the Canberra commercial gallery scene in 2000 with her eponymous Helen Maxwell Gallery (closed end-2009) in the inner city suburb of Braddon, exhibiting the works of both female and male artists, including many Indigenous artists.

3.6 The Campaign for Free Admission

I now examine a unique local campaign that highlighted the growing strength of the contemporary arts community in the capital; the Campaign for Free Admission to the ANG, which at the time was soon to be opened. The campaign was launched by BRG members in mid-1982 in response to a decision to impose a $2 entrance fee to the ANG. The campaign indicated the strength of political awareness and the commitment to political cultural causes among emerging young arts practitioners in the capital.

The Federal Government’s intention to establish an Australian National Gallery in Canberra was initiated by Menzies in 1965, on the urging of the Commonwealth Art Advisory Board, and it was formalised by Liberal Prime Minister Harold Holt in 1967. In the second week of June 1971 the design—by

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88 “I turn now to the second important decision the Government has taken to encourage the arts in Australia. The House will recall that my predecessor Sir Robert
architect Colin Madigan from the Sydney firm Edwards Madigan Torzillo and Partners—was publically released. James Mollison was appointed as acting director in October 1971 and as director in 1977. The ANG (which would be renamed on October 2, 1992 as the National Gallery of Australia) opened to the public in October 1982, eight years after its original 1974 completion date.89

As the ANG opened, almost 235,000 people called the national capital home. The burgeoning visual arts landscape then uniquely included both the nation’s new National Gallery and the nation’s newest artist-run space, BRG, separated by a physical distance of just two kilometres. Though widely divergent in intent, Canberra was small enough to ensure that the business of each was easily accessible to the other. Senior gallery staff were early and significant supporters of BRG including Mollison, the inaugural head of Australian Art, Daniel Thomas, and the inaugural Curator of Australian Prints, Posters, and Illustrated Books, Roger Butler.

In the lead-up to the opening, Press Gallery reporter Warwick Costin published a story in the Sunday Telegraph on August 19, informing readers of a

Menzies and his Administration decided that a national art gallery should be established in Canberra and in 1965 appointed a committee of inquiry to consider what form it should take, what its function should be and how it should be controlled. This committee, under the distinguished chairmanship of Sir Daryl Lindsay, completed its work last year and I would like to acknowledge here how comprehensive the report is and how valuable it has been to the Government. It has contributed significantly to the Government’s latest decision on the art gallery and is tabled in this Parliament for the information of honourable members. The Government has decided that work on the establishment of this national gallery will begin immediately. The National Capital Development Commission expects the planning, design and costing stage to take about 2 years. A site for the gallery is being considered. The gallery will house the national collection which at present consists of nearly 2,000 works of art. Future acquisitions will include Australian art past and present, art of the Asian and Pacific areas and art on a world-wide basis, beginning with the 20th century.” From Holt, Harold, Ministerial Statement, House of Representatives, Procedural Text, November 1, 1967, “Australian Cultural Activities”. Accessed at http://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/genpdf/hansard80/hansardr80/1967-11-01/0077/hansard_frag.pdf;fileType=application%2Fpdf.

89 For further information on the path to opening, see: Canberra Times, May 13, 1970, 8.
Cabinet decision to charge an admission fee to the ANG. Cabinet was responding to the Gallery Council’s recommendation to charge a $2 entrance fee to all members of the public, excepting the unemployed, pensioners, full-time students, children under 15 and “the handicapped”. Canberra’s socially progressive young arts practitioners were outraged and swiftly mounted the Campaign for Free Admission that rallied the nation and galvanised the arts community. The campaign was initiated and managed by BRG member and part-time administrator Karilyn Brown (who had been Noel Sheridan’s assistant during the latter part of 1975 at Adelaide’s EAF), and BRG members Dan Coward—the pseudonym of Megalo printmaker Raymond Arnold—and Toni Robertson. Robertson was then a leading figure in Australian political printmaking who had exhibited in BRG’s first exhibition in April 1981 as a member of the Earthworks Collective, and who was at that time lecturing in printmaking and photo-media at CSA. Although BRG was not mentioned by name in any of the materials concerned with the campaign, the return address for all such materials and for further contact was the BRG post office box. The leaflet produced by the Campaign for Free Admission pertinently asked:

92 Based at UNSW’s Tin Sheds in Sydney.
Should anyone be charged to enter what is a national institution, containing the National Collection, belonging to the people of Australia and paid for with our taxes?\(^{93}\)

Brown wrote a Letter to the Editor of the *Canberra Times* on September 14, beginning a campaign of letters from locals that continued until November of that year. Her letter reads in part:

The visual arts are an integral part of our cultural identity and the creation of the Australian National Gallery can contribute to promoting a more broadly based awareness, development and support for the visual arts in Australia, a process which will be greatly hindered if members of the public are to be charged for what should be freely accessible to them.\(^{94}\)

A deputation, including Brown, Robertson, Coward and head of CSA’s Printmaking Workshop Jorg Schmeisser—who had “inscribed his personal plea to the Prime Minister to reconsider the decision to impose the $2 fee on one of his large etchings of the Canberra garden-city landscape”\(^{95}\)—met first with the Minister for the Capital Territory, Mr Hodgman on September 22. On September 23, the

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\(^{93}\) *Campaign for Free Admission to the Australian National Gallery*, Campaign leaflet. CCAS Archives.


\(^{95}\) *Campaign for Free Admission to the Australian National Gallery*, press release, September 22, 1982. This artwork, the press release reported, was left with Mr Hodgman, the Minister for the Capital Territory to pass on to the Prime Minister.
deputation then met with Tom McVeigh, Minister for Home Affairs and the Environment, who “refused to take their representation to Cabinet”.96

Canberra commentators Ian Warden and Sasha Grishin joined the discursive fray in the *Canberra Times*. Grishin pointed out that as opposed to those international galleries privately bequeathed to nations and sustained thence-forward partly by entrance fees, the ANG was built from taxes paid by the people who could not now be reasonably expected to pay additionally for its upkeep. Grishin also declared that he was opposed to an entry charge on three grounds: philosophically, because “art is an integral part of life and not something for viewing on special occasions”; economically, where, citing the short-lived introduction of entry fees at the National Gallery in London, he revealed that “administering the fees was more expensive than the revenue they brought in”; and thirdly because “it seems a peculiar act of discrimination against the National Gallery” when art displays in other national institutions such as the NLA or AWM were free.97

Warden commented that, as the $2 collected was to be used to develop the collection, the public might be more amenable to the plan if it was known for sure that “one’s two dollars had paid for the left nipple of the fifth nude bather from the right in a Renoir fleshscape” and that, while acknowledging that there were those who were fee-exempt:

Mr McVeigh might also exempt another tiny, oppressed minority, the citizens of Canberra, on the grounds that they should be able to treat the Gallery as a local amenity to pop into on impulse at lunch.

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96 *Canberra Times*, “Gallery Fee Discussed”, September 24, 1982, 7.
time or of a weekend when they have no adultery or gardening lined up.  

The campaign rapidly gained a national following. On October 27, 1982, Geoffrey Brown, president of the Contemporary Art Society (Australia) (CAS) wrote, “for and on behalf of the Council, Administrative Staff and 350 members of the CAS”:

The Contemporary Art Society supports the Campaign for Free Admission and is in complete agreement with their stand that the Australian National Gallery belongs to the people of Australia, their taxes having been used to pay for the Gallery. . . . Together the art community, voices united, may help reverse the Government’s decision.

Letters of support arrived from, among others, local schoolteachers, the University of Queensland Department of Fine Arts, Nancy Underhill—then head of the Art Museums Association of Australia, who wrote, “I have sent telegrams to both the Prime Minister and Tom McVeigh deploring the imposition of charging at the ANG” —and from the Artworkers Union (NSW) who stated that they were

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100 Nancy Underhill, letter to Campaign for Free Admission, (BRG Post Office Box), undated, CCAS Archives, envelope, Campaign for Free Admission.
collectively “surprised and disturbed”.¹⁰¹ Blacktown City Council, a leader in Australian community arts practice, wrote:

The arts are by the people for the people, and it is the right of every Australian to have admission to these works, free of charge, to view our heritage.¹⁰²

BRG members were aware that their campaign had an international precedent. A user pays pricing approach in visual arts had been trialled previously in Britain with a similar response from museum professionals and the public. In early 1971, director of the Art Gallery of South Australia, John Bailey, wrote to the art critic of the Sunday Mail, Ivor Francis, enclosing a photostat of a December 1970 statement from the eight trustees of the Tate Gallery and the gallery’s Chairman, Robert Sainsbury. The statement had been delivered to British Prime Minister Edward Heath, MP Lord Eccles and the Chancellor of the Exchequer Anthony Barber, following their decision to impose admission charges to national museums and galleries, a decision the trustees viewed “with dismay”:

We believe that this decision is entirely contrary to the spirit which has guided these great institutions for generations. Once the principle of free entry has been over-ridden a unique and precious

¹⁰¹ Artworkers Union (NSW), letter to Campaign, (BRG Post Office Box), undated, CCAS Archives, envelope, Campaign for Free Admission.
¹⁰² Patricia Parker, Community Arts Officer, Blacktown City Council, letter to Campaign, (BRG Post Office Box), October 12, 1982, CCAS Archives, envelope, Campaign for Free Admission.
attribute of our national lives will have been destroyed for small
return.\textsuperscript{103}

“I am,” wrote Bailey to Francis, “naturally concerned about the principles
involved in the enclosed discussion.”\textsuperscript{104}

In spite of a concerted nationwide effort, the campaign did not succeed in
changing Cabinet’s decision. It would be 1997 before, with the exception of entry to
major exhibitions, the gallery’s third director, Brian Kennedy, introduced free
admission to the NGA.

The members of BRG were active across the community and were therefore
more aware than most of the impact that an entry fee would have on the wider
Australian population. Additionally, the imposition of charges, for that which should
have been freely available to all Australians for study, inspiration and relaxation,
was deeply antithetical to the spirit of open access to arts and culture that had been
envisaged by prime ministers Holt, Gordon and Whitlam in relation to the ANG.
Although many BRG members, by virtue of their status as students, or as poor,
unemployed, Canberra-based artists were exempt under the regulation, they knew
that those affected by the charges would be ordinary Canberrans.\textsuperscript{105} That BRG was
begun as an alternative to established spaces, and that members then fought for the

\textsuperscript{103} Statement opposing admission charges to national museums and galleries, Tate
Gallery Trustees and Chairman Robert Sainsbury to Prime Minister Edward Heath, MP Lord
\textsuperscript{104} John Bailey, letter to Ivor Francis, undated, CCAS archives, envelope, Campaign
for Free Admission. See also “Arts Workers’ Coalition: Statement of Demands”, in Charles
Harrison and Paul Wood eds., \textit{Art in Theory – 1900-2000: An Anthology of Changing Ideas}
(Malden MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2003), 926. “Admission to all museums should be free
at all times and they should be open evenings to accommodate working people.”
\textsuperscript{105} By June of 2011, six months after the opening of his private museum MONA in
Hobart, David Walsh realised that he would need to charge admission fees to assist with
covering costs. Importantly he exempted Tasmanian residents from that charge.
rights of Australians to be able to freely enter the newly-established space, successfully galvanising a national population, was a powerful marker of the growing relevance of the emerging contemporary art sector in the capital.

3.7 Chapter Conclusion

This chapter has examined the decade in which local artists and the arts community established contemporary arts practice from within pre-conceived political notions of what constituted arts and culture in and for the national capital space. The central concerns expressed by the community throughout the decade, the attempts to solve them, the rise of unique local non-government funding and communication solutions, and the growing strength and profile of the arts community have all been examined. In the next chapter I turn my attention to a close investigation of the far-reaching impacts that self-government brought to the sector in the 1990s.
4. Self-Government and the Arts

The changes wrought by self-government on Canberra’s developing arts community, beginning in mid-1989 when the ACT Legislative Assembly convened the first of the two Select Committees that are the focus of this chapter, were extraordinary. The decisions taken as a result of these enquiries continue to shape and define the city as a centre of vital contemporary local arts practice. The transfer from national control to emancipation over three years transformed Canberra’s culture and yielded a new spirit of connectedness; infrastructure that was enabled by the visionary decision to allocate the one-off $19 million casino premium to the arts also transformed the city’s landscape and enabled a decade of unparalleled growth, particularly in local visual arts.

This chapter briefly considers the ACT’s path to self-government, before making a close analysis of these major enquiries tasked with investigating and reporting on the capacity and desires of the arts and culture communities in the ACT: the Select Committee on Culture and Facilities (final report delivered June 1991); and the Standing Committee on Planning, Development and Infrastructure (Report No. 9 on the Use of the 19 Million Dollar Casino Premium, delivered December 1992). Their ambi'ts and recommendations reflect a greatly changed perception of the position of local arts and culture in Canberra and a powerful commitment to privileging its development.

The close readings that follow allow a comparison of two extraordinarily different decades. The methodologically flawed Pascoe Report of 1985 was intrinsically connected to the idea of local arts and culture in Canberra as a representation of national capital space; its recommendations proved entirely out of
step with the reality of local needs. By contrast, the final reports of the Select Committee on Cultural Activities and Facilities and the Standing Committee on Planning, Development and Infrastructure resulted from an intense period of community consultation. Their deeply local focus and recommendations acknowledged local arts and culture as an increasingly dominant feature of Canberra life.

The ACT Legislative Assembly’s commitment to the arts came at a time when demand for resources had outstripped current models of funding and other support. By 1989 the arts funding model in the ACT was broken. During the 1980s, escalating demand from the sector for scarce resources was met by responses from a local government whose powers of self-determination were limited. While increasingly willing, local government was simply unable to meet and effectively manage growing demand. As the decade came to an end, of most concern was the lack of any model that ensured sustainable future planning. Providing for generational growth was uppermost in the minds of Assembly members.

4.1 Steps to Self-Government

The first request for self-government—self-government being a “right [that] has long been recognised as an inherent part of British citizenship”¹—had been made in a pre-petition to Parliament in November 1927 by the Federal Capital Territory Representation Committee “praying for representation in the House of

Representatives and on the Federal Capital Commission.”\(^2\) Self-determination remained on the agenda, with debate varying in intensity as the fortunes of the Capital Territory seesawed through cataclysmic world affairs and changes in federal governments and Commonwealth administrative bodies. In 1978, with the national capital’s 218,000 citizens enjoying some of the lowest costs of living in Australia, 63.75 percent\(^3\) of the eligible population voted in a plebiscite for a continuation of the Commonwealth’s “benign dictatorship”.\(^4\)

In spite of this, the Commonwealth had determined to divest itself of the financial responsibility for local services and commenced the task of bringing together the various departments responsible for managing the ACT, in order to ascertain the actual costs of its maintenance. By the late 1980s, with the population approaching 280,000, preparations were complete. On December 6, 1988, the Governor General of Australia signed off on the relevant bills that began a three-year transfer from full federal control and funding to standalone local self-government.

The first elections for the ACT Legislative Assembly were held on March 4, 1989. ACT residents elected a minority Labor Government under Chief Minister Rosemary Follet, with the first meeting of the Assembly held on May 11. The NCDC was dismantled and planning responsibilities were divided between the NCDC’s replacement, the National Capital Planning Authority [NCPA to 1996; National Capital Authority (NCA) thereafter], and the ACT Legislative Assembly. The former retained control over planning and continued funding of those areas of

\(^2\) Ibid.
\(^3\) When calculated as a proportion of the eligible voting population, 63.75% equalled 69,893 persons voting against self-government and 30.54% or 33,480 voting in favour of self-government.
Canberra categorised in the Griffin Plan as national capital space; the ACT Legislative Assembly assumed planning and funding control of the remainder, including of local arts and cultural endeavours.

Self-government brought hope and a sense of broad cohesiveness to the Canberra arts community. From the earliest days the community—led by CSA’s head, David Williams, and the ACT Labor Government’s member, Bill Wood—were intent on refocussing the debate from its previously narrow focus on grant funding to the broad holistic development, including generational development, of arts and cultural planning, and the building of arts and community cultural infrastructure. Although Wood recalled that “the first years . . . were marked by an Assembly whose members were, in the early days, not in favour of self-government,” there were, from the beginning, strong indications of bipartisan support.

Committees played a central part in the next three years of intense research and planning. As noted in the opening to this chapter (see p. 123), among the many that were established by the Legislative Assembly from the end of 1989 onwards were the Select Committee on the Establishment of a Casino, the Select Committee on Culture and Facilities and the Standing Committee on Planning, Development and Infrastructure. The work of these committees specifically affected forward planning for arts and culture. Therefore, the following discussion examines the process and findings of these committees and their interrelated significance.

The decision to allocate funding revenue via the casino premium would radically alter the face of arts infrastructure in the city for the benefit of local

\footnote{Ibid., 4328.}
practitioners and consumers, and the pleasure of national and international visitors. As previously discussed, there was a modest precedent. Throughout the 1980s, taxes accrued from gambling in the ACT had allowed funding, via the CDF, of modest equipment and employment needs for arts and cultural projects, and community and sporting organisations. However, this new initiative was unparalleled in terms of the amount of funding it made available to the local arts sector. Successive ACT governments committed to allocating $19 million dollars, payable as a one-off premium from the proposed Canberra Casino’s successful bidder, to fund community cultural infrastructure projects. These projects conclusively altered Canberra’s landscape and raised expectations about the importance of culture in a modern city.

4.2 The Select Committee on the Establishment of a Casino

The inaugural ACT Legislative Assembly convened the Select Committee on the Establishment of a Casino in its first sitting month. This was a strong indication of the Government’s commitment to swift action and decision-making. It was the first of a number of select committees whose ambits were arts and culture and the casino premium. It commenced in May 1989 and reported to the Assembly in July 1989. The ACT’s first Government (Labor; May–December 1989) provided a submission to the committee in which it confirmed the Government’s commitment to using the one-off premium obtained from the commercial site for the “funding of facilities which could include a Theatre complex, Territorial Library and other
community and cultural facilities.” Subsequently, the Alliance government (December 1989–June 1991) affirmed, in May 1991, the use of the casino premium for community facilities. The second Labor Government—with Bill Wood as the Minister for Education and the Arts—reiterated the Government’s commitment in December 1991 and, again, on re-election in April, and a further time in October 1992, when Chief Minister Follett assured the Assembly that the casino premium would be “applied to community facilities in the ACT, specifically cultural and heritage facilities”.

The proposed casino was intended for the area known as Section 19, Civic, which housed the CTC. The Committee recommended that, along with the proposed casino, community facilities be enabled on the site, writing that; “an idealised community facility would include a lyric theatre (2,000 seats), play house, performance studio, library, regional art gallery, heritage centre, civic square upgrade, infrastructure and car parking.”

4.3 The Select Committee on Cultural Activities and Facilities

With these basic recommendations in place, the Government determined to enter into an extended period of research. The Select Committee on Cultural

\[\text{\^{\text{6}} Quoted in Select Committee on the Establishment of a Casino, (Canberra, ACT: Legislative Assembly for the ACT, July 1989), 3.}\]
\[\text{\^{\text{7}} Quoted in Standing Committee on Planning Development and Infrastructure, Inquity Into the Possible Use of the $19 Million Casino Premium, Report No. 9 (Canberra, ACT: Legislative Assembly for the ACT, December 1992), 6.}\]
\[\text{\^{\text{8}} Reply to Question put on notice, 21 October 1992, quoted in Ibid.}\]
\[\text{\^{\text{9}} Quoted in Select Committee on the Establishment of a Casino, 16.}\]
Activities and Facilities was convened on August 23, 1989, with Bill Wood, whom the arts community already “regarded as one of their own”, as chair.\textsuperscript{10}

Over 22 months of intense community consultation, the committee: received 58 submissions from groups and individuals; heard evidence from 66 witnesses over nine days of public hearings; inspected and met arts administrators and the directors of various state libraries, state art galleries, state museums and state theatre complexes in Brisbane, Melbourne and Hobart; investigated the regional theatre complex in Geelong, Adelaide Festival’s theatre complex, regional galleries in Orange and Wollongong, and municipal libraries and regional galleries in Bathurst and Goulburn. The Committee convened a public seminar on September 8, 1990, held “in the interests of widening the debate on the need for a State art gallery”,\textsuperscript{11} that brought government officials, major arts groups and private gallery owners together. By the end of this exhaustive process, Wood was able to claim that “there is not an Arts group or a related group in Canberra . . . that we did not approach.”\textsuperscript{12}

This unprecedented engagement with the community across every sector, organisation and many individuals was followed up with informed, intelligent analysis. Wood’s driving passion for the arts in the ACT, his ability to effect government decisions and his will to understand the sector’s present needs and to engage in visionary planning enabled insightful conclusions. Delivered to the Assembly in June 1991, the committee’s final report provided, as he recalled it, “the

\textsuperscript{10} Robert Macklin, “Cultural Scene Transformed Under Council”, \textit{Canberra Times}, November 21, 1991, 5. The committee’s other two members included Dr H. Kinloch and William (Bill) Stefaniak.

\textsuperscript{11} Select Committee on Cultural Activities and Facilities, \textit{Final Report} (Canberra, ACT: Legislative Assembly for the ACT, June 1991), 5.

basis for a lot of later activity.”\(^{13}\) More than this, it marked the beginning of long

term, locally managed, broad arts and cultural planning, the benefits of which

extended across subsequent decades.

The final report comprised 74 recommendations across ten areas. The first of

these related to overall arts funding, where the committee recommended “that

funding increase in real terms by 10% per annum”\(^ {14}\) over the period from 1992 to

1997. This proved an impossible recommendation to implement then or at any time

since.

Of particular importance were recommendations 2–35 that concerned the

establishment of a Territorial Library, Territorial Museum and Territorial Art Gallery

in a purpose-built facility in Section 19. The report proposed that this lead to the

repurposing of Civic Square as a cultural precinct comprising cultural and

commercial undertakings.

The literary arts were dealt with in recommendations 36–41.\(^ {15}\) The

performing arts were covered in recommendations 42–59, with a caveat stressing

that the need for “a new model of consultation . . . for the effective development of

the performing arts in the ACT.”\(^ {16}\) Recommendations 60 and 61 concerned

community art, with 62–68 encompassing education and youth arts, and 69–74

covering advocacy, bureaucracy, consultation and development. Throughout these

\(^{13}\) Australian Capital Territory. Parliamentary Debates. Legislative Assembly.

Hansard, October 22, 1992, 4328.

\(^{14}\) Select Committee on Cultural Activities and Facilities, *Final Report* (Canberra,

ACT: Legislative Assembly for the Australian Capital Territory, June 1991), xiii.

\(^{15}\) Specific recommendations involved a significant increase in overall funding for

literature, the establishment of the ACT Writers Centre in the Civic Square redevelopment,

the establishment of funding and support for writers in residence programs, the funding of a

community literature coordinator, and increased support for the Australian National Word

Festival.

\(^{16}\) Select Committee on Cultural Activities and Facilities, *Final Report*, 57.
sections there is consistent evidence of a deep engagement with the entire arts sector, with recommendations that reflect the desires of that community.

The report’s preface, authored by Wood, identified matters requiring urgent attention. The first of these, the immediate establishment of a cultural council “to improve administration and planning and to provide a more powerful voice for the arts”, was made after the committee considered other models, including retaining the ADB. The second recommended the consolidation of all arts-related government agencies within one ministry. Both stemmed from the committee’s belief that, having examined “a great range of evidence that makes it feel very positive” it nevertheless had:

some apprehension about the present administration of the arts in the ACT both in terms of funding and policy development. This apprehension in no way stems from the individuals involved with arts administration in Canberra. The committee’s reservations emerge from the observation that the needs of arts development in the region have outstripped the original models set up to service the arts.18

Despite both the recommendation from the Select Committee on the Establishment of a Casino and the submissions supporting the construction of a new 2000-seat lyric theatre, the Select Committee on Cultural Activities and Facilities determined that such expenditure was unwarranted, given the steady losses

18 Select Committee on Cultural Activities and Facilities, Final Report, 84.
accumulated over a number of years by the CTC. Instead, in its third urgent recommendation, the Committee advised that construction immediately begin on a community theatre in the Childers Street area. This 250-seat theatre, sited on the corner of Childers Street and University Avenue and renamed the Street Theatre, was completed in 1994. For over 20 years, the theatre has undergone several changes in management and style, but has remained a critical partner within Canberra’s performing arts.

The urgent recommendation to set up a Cultural Council was enacted five months after the Committee’s final report was delivered to the Assembly. Like OzCo, the 15-member peak body was composed entirely of arts peers who aimed to “promote the development and continued growth of a creative, diverse and dynamic cultural sector in the ACT”. \(^\text{19}\) The ADB was disbanded and replaced on November 20, 1991 with the ACT Cultural Council (1991–2013). \(^\text{20}\) David Williams, who had most recently headed the ADB, became the Council’s chair. The Cultural Council’s formation was driven by Williams and Wood, and it answered the need, first voiced by the arts community in the mid-1980s, for long-term planning that was managed by community members themselves. When announcing the Council, Wood overtly recognised local artists and performers, thanking them “for the essential spirit and vitality that they give to us all.” “They should,” he said, “take a bow.” \(^\text{21}\)

Williams and Wood were powerful collaborators in the transformation of Canberra’s arts culture as a function of the national capital space to a vibrant expression of local community. Williams, who had previously been director of the


\(^\text{20}\) The ADB had presided over the $1.7 million in ACT Government grants available from 1989.

\(^\text{21}\) Bill Wood, quoted in Macklin, “Cultural Scene Transformed”.
Australia Council’s Crafts Board (1978-1985), brought his considerable experience in infrastructure building to the table. Woods impact on arts and culture development from self-government until his retirement in 2004 cannot be overstated. In the second Follett Labor Ministry he held the first designated Arts and Heritage portfolio, as well as the portfolio of Planning. These concurrent portfolios enabled him to oversee the development of the Heritage Council and to identify and secure sites for arts facilities development. These included the ANCA artist studios in Mitchell in 1991 and ANCA artist studios and Gallery in Dickson in November 1992. In 1995, Woods was able to secure a permanent home for CCAS Gallery 3 in the newly redeveloped commercial offices at Manuka, on the block that had housed BRG.

The Cultural Council comprised two sets of committees: the Artform committees in visual arts, theatre, music, dance, literature, and—eventually—film, which considered all grant applications, and the Opportunities committee that considered entrepreneurial opportunities for the arts within the individual practices committees. The Council strived for a holistic approach to overall arts and cultural development, with chairs of all committees involved in negotiating the best grant applications in terms of the overall development of the ACT arts and cultural landscape. The arts community was made aware of committee members, and members assessing grant applications were invited to see the work of companies/artists. This assisted with continued analysis of the sector and ensured feedback to applicants. Among Council’s briefs was to seek multi-year funding for arts organisations through closer cooperation with OzCo. Analogous with

22 Canberra sculptor Jan Brown was a tireless advocate for the ANCA studios.
bureaucratisation, this conversely assisted in reducing the administration associated with yearly grant applications and allowed planning beyond a 12-month period, thus answering a need that had first been voiced in 1984.

4.4 Other Initiatives

Other important early initiatives from local government included a requirement to include local art in all new buildings that passed the Assembly in 1990, and the establishment of a $15,000 ACT Literary Fellowship (1991–1995) as advocated by Canberra author Sara Dowse. Non-government initiatives included the appointment of an Arts Editor by the Canberra Times, and the advent of the Canberra Times Artist of the Year award which was initiated by the Canberra Critics Circle. In announcing the award, Canberra Times managing director Ian Meikle recognised the “tremendous range and depth of artistic talent [that] contributes enormously to the quality of life in the national capital . . . a contribution which should be recognised and rewarded.”23 The Canberra Times’ own contribution to the Arts in the ACT was recognised in the final report from the Select Committee on Cultural Activities and Facilities:

The Canberra Times remains one of the most effective agents in the ACT for disseminating information about activities in the arts. Its regular and thorough coverage of the cultural life of the Territory is of enormous benefit to participants and audiences alike.

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could not function effectively without this outstanding level of support.\textsuperscript{24}

Canberra Arts Marketing (CAM) was another government-funded initiative that showed a commitment to modest developments that benefitted the broad arts community. The small organisation was established in 1993 with Elizabeth Brown at its head. As local arts and cultural activity increased rapidly over the next decade, CAM kept its members apprised of each other’s openings and events through an increasingly necessary arts calendar. From visual arts openings to orchestral presentations, CAM assisted, in its first decade, in cohering the wider sector into a powerful sense of local place.\textsuperscript{25}

In the same year the term cultural capital, used to refer to Canberra as a city of culture and first coined in print by David Williams, entered local language.\textsuperscript{26} This highly significant adoption indicated that Canberrans had begun to see themselves as the drivers and providers of a vibrant local arts milieu. That the same lobbying body which was seeking validation and resources to grow local arts for the benefit of the local and regional communities coined this term is indicative of a vigorous surge towards a cultural future.

\textsuperscript{24} Select Committee on Cultural Activities and Facilities, Final Report, 89, section 12.26. Well into the 2000s, Canberra Times would be considered as a great supporter of the arts. Changes in ownership and staff after this time brought a decrease in the coverage of local arts.

\textsuperscript{25} Brown left in the early 2000s and the organisation changed its focus. At the urging of the community, who felt that it was time for a new model, government funding was withdrawn in 2008 and the organisation folded.

\textsuperscript{26} David Williams in Robert Macklin “Cultural Capital of Australia?” Canberra Times, July 29, 1990, 17.
The second relevant committee, the Standing Committee on Planning, Development and Infrastructure was directed, in October 1992, to “investigate and report on recommendations to the Assembly of the possible use of the $19 million casino premium, having regard to both the June 1991 report of the Select Committee on Cultural Activities and Facilities, and the government’s stated objective to commit the funds to cultural facilities.” These objectives, the Government reminded the committee, “have a long background and cover successive ACT Administrations.” The Committee was directed to report to the Legislative Assembly by December 10, 1992. Public comment was sought, through local press advertisements, by November 11. The Committee heard 37 individuals and received 68 written submissions and “numerous telephone calls.” A public hearing on November 13 was attended by representatives of 20 arts organisations.

The impact of the report, delivered to the Legislative Assembly on December 10, 1992, was stunning. The cost of all requests, excluding un-costed submissions, totalled $177,502,867. The community, given the opportunity to take part in generational planning, had indicated through its many submissions its ability to think large. The Committee’s final recommendations reflected the breadth of community submissions over the two major enquiries. Their implementation over the

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27 This was an ACT-wide committee, established March 27, 1992 to “examine matters related to planning, land management, transport, economic development, commercial development, industrial and residential development, infrastructure and capital works, science and technology.” Committee Members were David Lamont, Trevor Kaine, Tony De Domenico, Annette Ellis and Helen Szuty.


29 Ibid., 3.

30 Ibid., 1.
next decade and beyond indicated the commitment of successive governments to supporting local arts and culture.

The recommendations were that:

- “$2.5 million dollars . . . be allocated to assist in the provision of an Aboriginal KeepingPlace/cultural centre . . . as proposed by the Ngunnawal aboriginal people and the Bogong Regional Council” (3.10, p. 28);
- “a trust arrangement along the lines discussed in this report be established to hold $2.75 million . . . pending the development of appropriate plans for regional facilities. These plans should result from extensive community consultation and negotiation, and take account of the diverse range of community and school-based needs that are demonstrated in the submissions to this inquiry” (3.22, p. 31);
- “the Government vary its land use policies in the Childers Street/Kingsley Street area to promote a mix of cultural and commercial activities” (3.33, p. 34);
- “$250,000 . . . be allocated to equip the new community theatre on the corner of University Avenue and Childers Street, City” (3.37, p. 35);
- “$5 million . . . be allocated to upgrading the Playhouse Theatre to a 600–650 seat theatre . . . and $7 million be devoted to providing a cultural and heritage facility in the city centre . . . either in the North Building of Civic Square or in the Childers Street/Kingsley Street area” (3.43, p. 38);
- “the Government facilitate the provision of space in the Kingston Foreshores area for visual and community performing artists, it being
recognised that such space is provided on an interim basis pending the finalisation of plans for the whole Foreshores area” (3.48, p. 39);

• “$1.5 million . . . be devoted to the NATEX [National Exhibition Centre] site to provide for essential maintenance and a basic refurbishment program” (3.26, p. 33).

As I have established, between the release of the report from the Select Committee on Cultural Activities and Facilities in June 1991 and the release of Report No. 9 of the Standing Committee on Planning Development and Infrastructure in December 1992, several recommendations of the former were enacted. These included the establishment of the ACT Cultural Council, the beginnings of construction on what would become the Street Theatre in Childers Street (that street identified in June 1991 by the Select Committee on Cultural Activities and Facilities as a second area for cultural development), and the re-siting of the casino, from its first proposed site in Civic Square, to its present location at the eastern city edge.

Decisions flowing from the recommendations of both enquiries resulted in rapid growth across the sector. By 1994, two ACT Cultural Council project rounds each year were attracting “up to 190 applications in an extremely competitive and vibrant arts scene.”31 The perennial shortfall of available grant monies in this climate of rapidly increasing activity saw the arts community in turmoil once again following the Council’s announcement of funding for the 1995 year with a total of $1.8 million distributed. This was only $100,000 dollars more than the 1.7 million

dollars distributed by the ADB in 1989. Council’s then chairman Richard Refshauge reported that money:

was extremely tight. In the past members were not fighting over particular projects. This time it would not be putting it too highly to say that they [members of council] were almost traumatised by the lack of available funds for good projects.32

In mid-1994, however, $108,000, “designed to provide flexibility to arts clients”,33 was expended in 16 second-round grants for the period August 1–December 31. That these were, in the main awarded to visual artists indicates a clear recognition of growth and response to the needs of this sector of the arts.

The realisation of successive local governments’ powerful visions for local arts and ambitious building programs manifested throughout the 1990s. In 1994, the Legislative Assembly moved to the South Building in Civic Square. Ethos, the Tom Bass sculpture erected in 1960 as a vision of a cultured national capital, then sat outside the front doors of the Assembly. In 1997, with the opening of CMAG approaching, a separate line in the ACT Government budget established the Cultural Facilities Corporation. This was given responsibility for the CTC, and for heritage cultural arts sites that included Lanyon Homestead, Calthorpe’s House, and CMAG (then under construction). In 1998, CMAG was opened on the ground floor of the North Building in Civic Square, directly facing the Legislative Assembly with the Craft Council and multicultural spaces housed above. The ACT Writer’s Centre, a

principle recommendation from the Literature section of the 1991 Select Committee on Cultural Activities and Facilities final report, was located in the Gorman House Arts Centre. The need for a Territory-focussed Library was largely overtaken by emerging technology that allowed online catalogues research between specialist Canberra collections held by the Heritage Library, the NLA, the NGA Research Library and the many university libraries across the city. When the Civic branch of Libraries ACT opened in Civic Square in 2006, it signalled the completion of the vision that had emerged in the first months of self-government for a cultural precinct that included a theatre complex, a Territory Museum and Gallery, Craft ACT and a library housed together within Civic Square.

The $19 million casino premium, which had bipartisan support within successive ACT governments for the provision of arts and cultural infrastructure, funded the Aboriginal Keeping Place in Yarramundi Reach on Canberra’s southern edge, Street Theatre, Hawker College Theatre, the Canberra Institute of Technology (CIT) music campus in Woden, and the completion of the Tuggeranong Arts Centre. This latter, the first of Canberra’s suburban community arts centres had been allocated funding of $4.183 million in 1987/88.34 Over the next four years, a number of enquiries and steering committees were engaged in attempting to move the project through to architectural drawings. The Centre finally opened in 1998.

The recommendations from both of these major inquiries exemplify a quantum change in the government’s perception of local arts and culture, indicating an increased level of respect for the wider arts community, as well as a clear understanding that the time had come to privilege local arts and culture. Over the

decade, a rapid growth in arts activity resulted from the combination of successive willing governments and peer-supported, sector-directed planning, coupled with the growth of arts infrastructure. As the decade progressed, the visual arts—which from the 1960s to the end of the 1980s had struggled under the powerful federal rhetoric of national excellence in flagship performing arts companies—came to be perceived as equally important to the performing arts in the ACT.

The reports that anchored their respective decades of the 1980s and the 1990s—the Pascoe Report (1985), the Final Report of the Select Committee on Culture and Facilities (1991), and its follow-on report from the Standing Committee on Planning, Development and Infrastructure (1992)—paint a remarkably different picture of Canberra. The Pascoe Report was compiled by a consultant whose most recent position as head of OzCo meant he appeared to be the best prospect for the job—that is, to ascertain the way forward for arts and culture in the national capital. But Pascoe came from outside, like others before and after him, and in privileging national capital space over the local, misread both the nature of place and the powerful desire of local practitioners to drive their own future. In contrast, the findings and recommendations in the final report of the Select Committee on Cultural Activities and Facilities were made following an unprecedented level of community consultation. Many direct quotes from community members are scattered throughout the report, illustrating the committee’s conclusions and indicating the depth of engagement undertaken by the committee and the seriousness with which the stated needs and indeed the cultural dreams of the community were taken. In them, civic pride was seen as stemming from local practice—in service to Canberra, but a Canberra whose identity was culturally separate from the functions of national
capital space, and where local arts practice was increasingly regarded as a dominant feature of Canberra life.

Additionally, many of the recommendations of the Standing Committee on Planning, Development and Infrastructure report, which clearly took into account the final report of the Select Committee on Cultural Activities and Facilities, continued to be activated over the next 25 years. Midway through the second decade of the twenty-first century, plans for the development of the Kingston Foreshore Arts Precinct are being finalised. This long-term fulfilment of the various recommendations stands as a testament to the original depth of arts community engagement over the first years of self-government, to the intelligent and far-sighted submissions by the broader arts community to these major Committees of Enquiry, and to the commitment of successive local governments to growing the sector.

4.6 Part One Conclusion

In conclusion, then, from 1978, a combination of the growing strength of CSA’s teachers and graduates, and Canberra’s identifiable tendency towards activism within its educated, local population, left governments in no doubt about the rising needs in the city’s burgeoning contemporary visual arts scene. Self-government from 1989 onwards allowed the ACT Government, given the certainty of a $19 million injection of funds to the sector from the casino premium, to engage in generational planning, management and growth by locals for locals. By 2000, the ACT had become a cultural force. This paradigmatic change, from a perception of arts and culture in Canberra as a reflection of the national capital space to a vibrant and resourced local arts community, is reflected in the next three chapters that map the evolution of BRG/CCAS over a 20-year period.
5. Case Study: Bitumen River Gallery—Evolution and Early Years

In this chapter, my focus becomes more specific. I examine a six-year period, beginning in 1978 before the genesis of BRG in April 1981 and concluding at the beginning of 1984 with the arrival of Anne Virgo as BRG’s second coordinator.

In the previous three chapters, we have seen how Canberra’s broad local arts milieu developed within and in opposition to powerful notions of national capital space. This chapter, and the next, contend that the process from unfunded collective to fully funded contemporary art space was marked by a particular set of circumstances unique to Canberra. This chapter’s different sections illuminate these various circumstances and examine their impacts on the growth of contemporary art practice in the city, as evidenced through BRG’s journey from 1981 to 1987.

Section 5.1 examines the impact of Canberra’s unique “subcultural homogeneity” on the beginnings of a Canberra-based contemporary art practice.¹ This phrase, coined by BRG member Tony Ayres in 1985, refers to the substantial number of mostly young and unwaged arts students, musicians, performers and social activists who participated in and cross-fertilised each other’s activities in Canberra during the late 1970s and early 1980s. They were “subcultural” in that they broadly participated in a wide range of self-initiated activities that took place outside Canberra’s established arts and cultural milieu. The section examines the intrinsic connections between Jobless Action, the members of the Canberra screenprint

collective Megalo (see section 5.1.1) and the opening of BRG in April 1981 (see section 5.1.2).

I evaluate early set-up, personnel, government assistance and prevailing community attitudes in order to arrive at the conclusion that members of the BRG collective were intent on disrupting social, political, cultural and arts practice paradigms. As has been demonstrated, Canberra’s cultural and political pre-eminence as National Capital and its small population served to magnify local and national social and political disjunctions and injustices. This chapter outlines how work from both Megalo and BRG members knowingly brought focus to these inequalities across the broad spectrum of social issues including women’s, Indigenous and gay rights, domestic violence, housing, employment and war. BRG’s local collective ethos allowed for a new curatorial approach where members collectively decided on the thrust of upcoming exhibitions, and on the relatively low prices for new media works such as posters, photocopies and mixed media works in exhibitions. This became a critical point of difference with the approach of the October 1982 opening of the ANG, Australia’s flagship gallery for the presentation of Australian and international works of art to the nation and the world. Amidst this growing push to re-iterate Canberra’s profile as the face of national arts and culture, BRG members remained intent on growing and strengthening the local arts community.

The section also presents a close reading of the first two exhibitions held at BRG, the group exhibition *Bill Posters Appreciated* (see section 5.1.3) and Trevor Nickolls’s solo exhibition *Dreamtime Machinetime* (see section 5.1.4). Both were collectively curated by BRG members led by Alison Alder and Paul Ford. *Bill Posters Appreciated* brought together local, national and international printmakers
whose prints and posters elucidated the broad spectrum of political and social concerns that dominated the period. *Dreamtime Machinetime* heralded the contemporary, Urban (now known as city-based) Aboriginal art movement which would gain traction nationally, and then internationally, in the mid-1980s.

Section 5.2 reveals the symbiotic relationship between CSA, Megalo and BRG. It does so through a close examination of the influence of CSA Printmaking Workshop’s inaugural tutor Mandy Martin on those students involved in the geneses of Megalo and BRG (see section 5.2.1). To this end, it analyses the volatile and causally-linked political and artistic milieu that flourished in Adelaide between 1972 and 1977 and Martin’s direct artistic interventions in pertinent political events. It does so because this period in South Australia was responsible for the early development of both Martin’s own politics and her art practice. Her lived experiences then enlivened the student body in Canberra with whom she worked, awakening them to the practical applications of politics in art. Martin’s influence was combined with the political experiences arising from the carving out of a local space from within the more insistent national capital space and the politics inherent in being members of a homogenous subculture. These factors provided the political base throughout this early period for Canberra’s young contemporary artists, which they expressed through the early exhibitions at BRG.

Within the context of women’s politics and local art, section 5.3 considers the significance of key individuals’ journeys to Canberra, in particular artists Cherylynn Holmes (see section 5.3.1) and Vivienne Binns (see section 5.3.2). Early BRG member, Cherylynn Holmes, politically awakened by the proselytising of second wave feminism’s consciousness-raising meetings, first visited Canberra in 1976 to attend the Down to Earth ConFest and then moved permanently to Canberra.
in 1979. Vivienne Binns, Australia’s leading feminist artist, was a regular visitor to the city following her first exhibition at Canberra’s Abraxas gallery in 1975. She took up a residency position in the Painting Workshop at CSA in 1993 and moved permanently to the capital in 1994. Martin’s journey, as examined in section 5.2.1, and those of Holmes and Binns, provide contrasting examples of women whose ages, milieux and art practices differed, but who were each intimately involved in the developing contemporary art scene in Canberra.

Finally, Section 5.4 closely examines the circumstances surrounding a decision made by the BRG collective in 1983 to reject a poster, titled Slut, for inclusion for sale in the BRG poster collection. Slut, created in 1983 by Melbourne artist and Jillposters’ collective member Catriona Holyoake, demonstrates the rapidly changing construction of feminism, from second wave to third wave, that was sweeping southern capitals in the early 1980s as a result of international influences. The analysis strives to illuminate a particular Canberran paradox: members of the BRG collective were highly politicised yet simultaneously somewhat removed from the rapidly changing politics of feminism practiced in other cities in Australia.

5.1 “Don’t Do It If You Don’t Need Art”: Canberra’s Subcultural Homogeneity and the Birth of Collective Spaces

Art is a Scheherazade job that goes night after night after night. The same anew. The main thing is . . . don’t get involved with any of this if you can think of one other thing that, in your heart, you believe is a better thing to do with your life. If you can think of another life; a lawyer, nun, brain surgeon, jet pilot, do that thing and don’t get
involved. Don’t do it, not just because the profession is over
determined but because, if you go to it as a second choice, it is going
to show in your work. Your work will be second rate and you will
clutter up the place with overly managed bad art. Don’t do it
because you want “to express yourself”. Don’t do it because you
want a career. Don’t do it because you feel art needs you. Don’t do
it if you don’t need art.²

This excerpt from Noel Sheridan’s essay ‘Yes Tasmania’, in Chameleon: A
Decade (1983-1993) speaks of the compulsion that, from the beginning of the 1970s,
drove small groups of artists and like-minded individuals to begin setting up
alternative spaces. These spaces were for artists who, excluded by various art
institutions because their youth and use of media such as prints, posters, photocopies
and new media precluded serious collecting, became compelled to make and show
work that was socially and politically relevant, on their own terms and of their own
choosing. By 1980, this compulsive ethos had reached Australia’s youngest city and
national capital, Canberra.³

Canberra’s alternative art space, BRG, was not the first of Australia’s
alternative art spaces, nor was it modelled on those spaces that preceded it: Praxis in
Perth, ACP in Sydney, EAF in Adelaide or IMA in Brisbane. Canberra as national
capital differed significantly from other Australian cities and, as a result, critical

³ Noel Sheridan (1936–2006) was the inaugural paid secretary of the EAF. By the
1980s, titles such as “secretary” and “coordinator”, which had previously been applied to
those who led Australia’s alternative art spaces, had moved to the administrative term
“director”. This change in title, although not in job description, coincided with the change
from alternative art spaces to contemporary art spaces, and was a harbinger of the creeping
institutionalisation of art in Australia during the 1990s.
differences can be identified between the formation and early years of other art spaces and BRG.

BRG had its genesis in a small, fluid group of around eight to ten people, comprising printmakers, students from the CSA Printmaking Workshop, social activists, and beneficiaries of the late 1970s employment stimulus programs operating in Australia. That such a disparate group was responsible for the birth of alternative contemporary art practice can be traced to the first of these critical differences, which Tony Ayres identified as “Canberra’s subcultural homogeneity”. The second critical difference was that the formation of BRG followed on swiftly from the beginnings of Megalo in 1980. In other words, the genesis of BRG was intrinsically connected to the formation of Canberra’s first printmaking collective. Its alignment with Megalo ensured that, from the first exhibition opening on April 4, 1981, the gallery’s focus, while predicated on the local, would never be parochial.

Canberra, with a population of around 220,000 people by 1980, had begun to experience a cultural divide. On one side was a significant body of public servants who managed the day-to-day affairs of the Federal Government, an international conclave of ambassadors and staff from a number of embassies, military personnel attached to the Royal Military College of Duntroon, and academic personnel attached to ANU, along with professional advisors and private business owners constituting a large service sector. It could be argued that the occupants of this side of the divide consumed imported culture. Broadly, the CTC hosted interstate dance, opera and theatre companies and established artist societies held regular exhibitions at venues such as the Canberra Theatre Gallery, the ACG and a number of

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commercial galleries around the city. Overwhelmingly, exhibitors for these events were drawn from visiting artists working in traditional areas—cultural exchange artists organised through the embassies or established artists recognised by the academy.

On the other side, although not completely in opposition, the city was experiencing growing unemployment and a steadily expanding community of students, including increasing numbers graduating from CSA. From within these groups came the impetus and energy that created what Ayres has described as Canberra’s “cultural fringe.” Smaller cultural groups active in 1980 that drew much of their audience and many of their members from these latter groups included theatre groups such as Fools Gallery Theatre Co., CYT and Jigsaw Theatre, dance companies and community arts groups such as Bluegum.

Ayres, an early BRG member, wrote that 1980 was:

a prosperous time for the cultural fringe in Canberra. Given Canberra’s size and subcultural homogeneity, it is not surprising that all of these organisations were linked by common threads—an interchange of personnel whose consensus of opinion substituted for stated ideology. One could fairly describe most of these ventures as

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5 Indeed, many diplomatic representatives and some academics proved very sympathetic to “fringe” art initiatives, indicating that the social divide was not entirely clear-cut.


7 Jigsaw’s then artistic director Joe Woodward has written, “We tended to operate on a ‘Collective’ basis with all cast, crew and director involved in decision making and artistic responsibility. It had a strong sense of ‘theatre for the community’ and challenging privilege and establishment values. It tried to be a door to more cooperative and social values affirming people’s culture and lives.” In “Jigsaw Theatre Company History” Accessed October 11, 2012, http://www.jigsawtheatre.com.au/history
politically radical, in so far as their content tended towards leftist analyses of society.\textsuperscript{8}

A critical role in the unfolding story of contemporary art practice in Canberra was played by Julian Webb who coordinated the work of Jobless Action, the employment creation arm of the then-new CYSS. From a base in Ainslie, Jobless Action provided moral and physical support for unemployed people, putting together income schemes and giving “some focus to political activism”.\textsuperscript{9}

Also central to the story were the political and arts practice choices made by a small number of CSA students. CSA opened its doors in its current location on the ANU campus in 1969. In 1980, a $3 million refurbishment program was completed. From 1978 onwards, the School had a strong printmaking focus under master printmaker Jorg Schmeisser and critically, from the inaugural Print Workshop tutor, Mandy Martin. By 1980, Alison Alder was in her third year of a fine arts degree, majoring in printmaking. Part of an increasingly leftist, politicised youth arts scene, Alder was disenchanted with the technique-oriented, master printmaker/apprentice paradigm championed by Schmeisser and she longed for a centralised collective that devolved control into the hands of the makers. At that time, no such alternative existed. “The Art School,” wrote Alder, “was the pivot of art activity which was closed to artists outside of that system.”\textsuperscript{10} She and her peers took matters into their own hands. They self-identified as having “high energy and high levels of political

\textsuperscript{8} Tony Ayres, “Space”. \textit{Art Network}, 11.
\textsuperscript{9} Alison Alder, speech at opening of Megalo Access Arts new premises at the former Hackett Primary School, 1992, cited in “Printing History”.
\textsuperscript{10} Alison Alder, “Serving the needs of artists.”
and social commitment” and in 1980 set about changing the face of art practice in Canberra.\textsuperscript{11}

Megalo was a natural outcome of a poster making culture that put itself in the service of minority social groups.\textsuperscript{12} The poster’s multiple production and wide dissemination was enabled in the 1960s through technological changes such as phototypesetting. Beginning as an underground political force in the 1960s connected with the 1968 Paris riots, poster making became legitimised through small poster collectives throughout Europe and America concerned predominantly with anti-Vietnam War protests, feminism and the women’s movement, and the anti-nuclear movement. In the 1970s in Australia, a growing political activism and awareness of these social issues, coupled with the desire of artists coming out of art schools to develop an alternative creative environment, led to the formation of a loose association of print workshops. These workshops were:

fundamentally committed to ensuring access to, and control of,
information by those people whose interests and concerns are under-

\textsuperscript{11} Alison Alder, interview with the author, April 14, 2010.
\textsuperscript{12} The history of poster making as art—beginning with the work of the French poster designers Cheret and Toulouse-Lautrec from the latter part of the 1800s; progressing to its use as a political propaganda tool through the twentieth century in both World Wars I and II and in countries including Spain, Russia and China; and produced as art objects in countries such as Japan—is a vast and much-documented history. It is outside of the scope of this thesis.

represented, or not represented at all, in the dominant media forms of radio, television and newspapers.\textsuperscript{13}

Women’s rights was the central issue for CWL, who set up a printmaking workshop in the garage of their home office at 12 Bremer Street in inner south Canberra in 1972. During 1972 and 1973, CWL members were printing posters entirely concerned with women’s issues. Founding member Biff Ward remembered that member Eileen Haley “knew a lot about” screenprinting and that CWL would have “these big screenprinting working bees . . . working really hard, printing, printing, printing. We’d print posters for meetings and public meetings and maybe demonstrations.”\textsuperscript{14}

\section*{5.1.1 The Genesis of Megalo}

By 1980, printmakers in Canberra were operating as a loose underground, “screenprinting in garages around the place, mainly producing posters to advertise events and perhaps less often to express an ideological opinion”.\textsuperscript{15} In May of that year, desire and momentum crystallised and a decision was made to set up a printmaking workshop. Jobless Action placed a tiny, unattributed advertisement in the \textit{Canberra Times} requesting that people interested in a silk screening collective

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\textsuperscript{13} Lee-Anne Hall, “Who is Bill Posters? An Examination of Six Australian Socially Concerned Alternative Print Media Organisations”, special issue, Caper 27 1988, 3.
\textsuperscript{14} Biff Ward, interview with Sara Dowse, September 26, 1998, NLA oral history typescript, 30, quoted in Julia Ryan, email to the author, June 20, 2016.
\textsuperscript{15} Alison Alder, speech, “Opening of Megalo Access Arts.”
\end{flushright}
enterprise telephone a business hours number. The resulting well-attended inaugural meeting included “many strangers”.

Among those “strangers” was Colin Little—who had established the Earthworks Poster Company at the Tin Sheds, University of Sydney in 1971—and David Morrow, who had produced work at Lucifoil in Sydney. These two brought collective experience to a group that also included Gaida Serilus, Paul Ford, Roland Manderson, Di Johnson and Webb’s co-worker Annie Cavanagh. The meeting was an indication of Canberra’s linked “subcultural homogeneity”. Serilus, a “hippie firebrand poster maker”, was Webb’s partner and Paul Ford was Alder’s partner. These social interconnections were critical to the formation of both Megalo and, a year later, BRG.

When Megalo received its first funding through the DCT Arts Development Fund in 1981 it signalled the beginning of a growing willingness from the Commonwealth to support emerging contemporary artists, albeit, at this time, as members of the unemployed. Muse magazine applauded the decision:

The DCT is to be congratulated on its recent funding of Jobless Action’s silk screening workshop at Ainslie Village. The workshop has received $5000 for equipment costs and is hoping to eventually

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17 Alison Alder, speech, “Opening of Megalo Access Arts.”
18 Little, until his death on October 4, 1982, played an important role in the genesis and development of Megalo and BRG.
20 Alison Alder, interview with the author, April 14, 2010.
21 ACT was funded through the Commonwealth Government’s DCT until the Territory gained full self-government status in 1992. See chapters 2, 3 and 4 for further information on various arts funding bodies in the ACT.
employ a coordinator. Spokesperson Colin Little originally from the “Tin Shed Collective” in Sydney told *Muse* that “a major aim of the workshop was to improve the quality of poster graphics and street art in Canberra”. He saw the Village venture as a viable business capable of producing commercial posters as well as local social and non-profit prints. The collective hopes to involve the wider community by means of summer schools.22

5.1.2 The Genesis of BRG

As the output of political posters from Megalo screen printers continued to increase, it became rapidly apparent that some sort of combined shop/exhibition space was needed. At the far edge of the St Christopher’s Catholic School grounds, on the corner of Furneaux and Bougainville Streets, Manuka, was a derelict building that had consecutively operated as a milk shed, a shelter shed and finally a bus stop. In response to a resident’s suggestion23 to local Liberal member for Canberra, John Haslem,24 that the building be used by the unemployed in some useful way, Robert Ellicott—Minister for Home Affairs and the Environment, and Minister for the Capital Territory (1977–1980)—handed the derelict structure over to Jobless Action’s Julian Webb.

22 “Museshorts”, *Muse* 5, 37. This grant was the first awarded to a Canberra-based artist collective. While it was symptomatic of the increasing willingness of government funding bodies throughout Australia to support emerging artists, at this time in Canberra the focus was very much on support mechanisms for artists as members of the growing sector of unemployed rather than as working artists.

23 Unfortunately, the name of the resident is lost in time.

24 John Haslem (b. February 1, 1939) was the Liberal member for Canberra from December 13, 1975 to October 8, 1980.
Alder, Ford, Webb and Serilus, together with CSA students Julia Church and Mark Denton, and printmakers Colin Little and David Morrow, had solidified their connections throughout the previous year with the establishment of Megalo. The shelter shed was an answer to the group’s compelling need for an outlet for screenprints produced through Megalo. Jobless Action was closely aligned with the CYSS, and usage for the site was envisaged as a shopfront for Megalo posters and products from CYSS clients, with Jobless Action providing administrative assistance. The focus quickly turned to exhibition space, and a collective—comprising Megalo members, CSA students and Jobless Action members—was formed to transform the derelict building into a gallery. The DCT expedited an electricity pole to service the building and contributed $10,000 for urgent repairs. These included fitting a ceiling, mounting windows and doors, and replacing parts of the flooring.25

As with Megalo a year before, Jobless Action provided the official front for BRG. The focus was firmly on the unemployed. The public were advised that the gallery was run by a “collective of unemployed people through Jobless Action, with the help of a number of committed employed people”, and that it would “sell art and some craft produced by unemployed people and other low income earners”.26

It was a prosaic beginning for a modest vision. The name “Bitumen River Gallery” encapsulates a particular spirit of the time: a do-it-yourself ethos, a grassroots approach to contemporary practice in the Canberra community, a sly take on social art within a city manufactured for twentieth century urban and suburban

living. The view from the proposed new gallery took in the vast bitumen car park that serviced the St Christopher’s church and school. In retrospect, the name constitutes a parody. Bitumen, the symbol of the urban space, remade via a youthful collective into a gallery whose existence was charged with the compulsive spirit of renewal that was transforming international contemporary art.

5.1.3 Bill Posters Appreciated

BRG opened on April 4, 1981 with 60 posters in an exhibition titled *Bill Posters Appreciated*. Posters came from: Jura Bookshop, EARTHworks, Lucifoil, Black Earth, Toby Zoates, Cockroach, Rouge Collective, Wimmins Warehouse, Matilda, Movement Media, and Pre-Natal Press; Resistance and Shopfront Theatre Sydney; Breadline (Melbourne); Redback Graphix (Wollongong); Without Authority (Lismore); Red Pepper (San Francisco); and Sisterwrite (London). The exhibition’s opening image, designed by David Morrow and printed by Morrow at Megalo, featured a wide-eyed, dark haired toddler, with the words “Well, I’ve never heard of you either” scrolling across the bottom of the image (see Fig. 2 below).
Fig. 2. David Morrow, *Well I’ve Never Heard of You Either*. Screen print, postcard, BRG opening invitation for April 4, 1981. CCAS image archive

The national and international prints on exhibition provided a window to contemporary social concerns, with titles including *Share the Shitwork* (see Fig. 3 below), *Don’t Bomb the Pacific, El Salvador, Stop Police Harassment, Fight Evictions*, and *For Aurukun and Mornington Island*. 
Fig. 3. Alison Alder, *Share the Shitwork: Even a Man Can Do It*. 1981, brown paper bag, screen print, 25cm x 20cm. In *Bill Posters Appreciated*, BRG opening exhibition. CCAS image archive

*Share the Shitwork*, designed by Alder and printed by her at Megalo, comprises two four-coloured panels that reference early twentieth-century newspaper illustrations. The work features a lanky, hatted chap, with a pipe in his mouth and a dog at his feet. In the first panel, he is using a scrubbing board and tub and, in the second, a stick and wire clothesline. Subtitled *Even a Man Can Do It*, the
images deliver, with crafty humour, a clear message: domestic equality in the late 1970s remained as elusive as it had been in the 1930s.

The opening exhibition was also an opportunity to make politicised statements in the press. These included an opinion piece by Webb in *Hard Times*, an occasional publication briefly produced by “an independent autonomous collective” including Webb and “various fringe dwellers.” Webb’s review of the opening reflected the contemporary community backlash to the widening gap between the wealthy and the unemployed in Canberra. It incorporated a short thesis on the “nature and value of work in terms other than the $” and urged readers to support the gallery:

> If the unemployed people running the place are to achieve their aim of satisfying employment, that is also paid, then your patronage is essential. If following exhibitions are of the calibre of this one then they will not be let down.\(^{27}\)

*Muse* covered the opening with a statement from the exhibition’s organisers, that in its impassioned political rhetoric encapsulated a youthful, contemporary utopia:

> Co-operation is an essential part of this exhibition. The building was renovated through a group effort, the posters were made under a group system. The age of individual alienation is withering . . . we must oppose the terrorism of big business and its concomitant

\(^{27}\) Ibid.
manipulative exploitation mentality; demand more humane and enduring social relationships; and develop community control of the streets and the country we/you share with all members of the world.\textsuperscript{28}

The choice of \textit{Bill Posters Appreciated} as an opening exhibition was important and prescient. It meant that, from its inception, BRG was contextualised within a national and international rubric. It heralded an intention to remain relevant within the sphere of national and international social concerns and to realise those concerns through contemporary art practice. Posters for sale in the exhibition were modestly priced at around $3 to $4 and embraced a wide spectrum of contemporary concerns. They were overtly political, from poster number 1, titled \textit{Dead Men Don’t Rape}, through to poster number 60, titled \textit{Nuclear Free Pacific}.\textsuperscript{29}

From that first exhibition onwards, the gallery embraced and then transcended the local. The appellation “parochial” could not then, or in the years to 1987, be applied to BRG, either by the public or by its members. Over the next six years, BRG members and early principal coordinators—Alder together with Ford, and Virgo together with Erica Green—would continue to impress the gallery’s local relevance on artists, funding bodies and the public. Importantly, they also began to align its presence with the national agenda of emerging contemporary art spaces. They did this by: attending seminal national arts conferences, beginning with the ANZART conference in 1983; instituting a series of travelling exhibitions between


Canberra, Melbourne, Perth and Hobart; leading the push for the establishment of a local chapter of the Arts Workers Union and for the national Campaign for Free Admission to the newly-opened ANG; and bringing in national speakers on contemporary art, such as Terry Smith, to enliven local debate and arts practice.

In many ways, despite its strong opening exhibition, BRG’s continuance seemed unlikely. Media commentator Marcus Breen commented in April 1982 on the general feeling that followed *Bill Posters Appreciated*. He wrote:

> When Humphrey McQueen\(^{30}\) opened the Bitumen River Gallery in 1981 with the flourish of a glue brush and the flutter of a poster, few people expected to see the gallery thriving one year later.\(^{31}\)

To begin with, the gallery was unfunded, relying on the young, inexperienced collective members to drive its future direction and undertake day-to-day management. It was a space run, according to one local wit, “for all lost causes of humanity”.\(^{32}\) In essence, it lurched through that first year, appearing to make it up as it went along, while managing to maintain a powerful, socially political focus. As Ayres would write from the perspective of 1985:

> The gallery came into being with each successive exhibition; the gallery became a “political” one because the small circle of people involved, art school graduates and under-graduates, were at that

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\(^{30}\) Humphrey McQueen was the teacher-in-charge of the History and Appreciation of Art/Architecture, a one to two hour course for Art Diploma 1 at CSA from 1978 to 1980.


\(^{32}\) *Canberra and District Historical Society Newsletter* (June/July 1982): 11.
time making overtly political imagery, not through a conscious collective decision to seek out that work.\textsuperscript{33}

Recalling the climate that marked the collective’s ability to move forward, Church married the collective’s high energy levels to the do it yourself ethos:

We thought we had a licence to do whatever we wanted really and we kind of did. [We had] all the raw materials and that’s partly what was such a charge-up about it—we could come up with the ideas, we could print the posters ourselves, we could take all the photos ourselves . . . and we could also build the workshops and build the galleries . . . It was a very particular time in Australian history where people [working in the arts] did that all over the country and had done it for the generation before us too.\textsuperscript{34}

The ANZART conference in 1983 was critical in establishing collaborative links between BRG and other artist-run spaces. In May 1983 Alder attended ANZART in Hobart. Part of this conference included a breakaway three-day seminar, the Open Sandwich Conference, that brought together representatives from all of Australia’s existing contemporary art spaces for the first time. They came to share with, learn from and support each other.\textsuperscript{35} The paper given by Alder at the


\textsuperscript{34} Julia Church, interview with the author, September 30, 2012.

\textsuperscript{35} Pamela Zeplin, “Crossing Over: Raising the Ghosts of Tasman-Pacific Art Exchange: ANZART-in-Hobart, 1983”, in “‘Asian’ media Arts Practice in/and Aotearoa,
conference provides a perspective on the volatile period immediately following the opening of BRG. She wrote:

At this time there was no real conception of how the gallery was going to operate, to the point of not knowing what the next exhibition was going to be, and a number of problems began to surface.\textsuperscript{36}

Among these problems was the question of how to select future exhibitors. BRG was an open access gallery whose only exhibition policy was that the works shown would be non-racist and non-sexist. The group had neither the experience nor the desire to make value judgements on potential exhibitors. Ford explained:

One woman said that she wanted to show—she was unemployed—so a number of us went along to look at her work and (sort of) pretend that we could decide whether she would show her work. So we all saw her work and thought, wow, what a responsibility, to say whether we like it or not and whether that person’s work should be shown.\textsuperscript{37}

\textsuperscript{36} Alison Alder, “Bitumen River” (paper presented at the Open Sandwich Conference, ANZART, Hobart, May 19–June 12, 1983).

\textsuperscript{37} Marcus Breen, “Bitumen River Gallery-One Year After”, \textit{Muse}, April 2–May 13, 2005, New Zealand Electronic Text Collection.
5.1.4 *Dreamtime Machinetime*

Given this absence of ideas and skills around how to manage the gallery after the first exhibition, it is extraordinary that the second exhibition at BRG, *Trevor Nickolls: From Dreamtime to Machinetime* was, albeit for very different reasons, as remarkable as the first. This exhibition opened at BRG a full three years before *Koorie Art '84* introduced the work of contemporary city-based Aboriginal artists, previously known as “Urban” artists, to Sydney. In its first exhibition BRG had centred itself within the national and international contemporary art discourse and, with its second exhibition, it anticipated a discourse that has become one of the principal interests of art history since 1980: the movement of Indigenous art from ethnographica to fine art.

Nickolls, with dual Aboriginal/Irish heritage, graduated from the South Australian School of Art (SA SOA) (Dip. Fine Art painting) in 1970.\[38\] The trajectory of his work, which as a student was wholly concerned with western European subject matter and styles, gradually turned towards the dichotomy of traditional Aboriginal life versus alienated urban living. By the late 1970s, he had met central Australian Warlpiri/Anmatyerre painter and senior lawman, Dinny Nolan Tjampitjinpa, and begun to incorporate dots and traditional Aboriginal mark-making in his works, developing his Dreamtime/Machinetime thesis.\[39\] Nickolls arrived in

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\[38\] From the 1990s, Trevor Nickolls (b. Port Adelaide, 1949) has been known as “the father of urban Aboriginal art”.

\[39\] Dinny Nolan Tjampitjinpa came from Yuendumu and moved to Papunya in 1972. He was one of the senior lawmen of the Warlpiri/Anmatyerre tribe who, with the support of teacher Geoffrey Bardon, began painting traditional designs on canvas, giving birth to the contemporary, grassroots (as opposed to the Urban Aboriginal art movement that would rise in the 1980s) Aboriginal art movement. Bardon characterised him as “a wonderfully reliable man . . . a gentleman. He was a determined painter for Papunya Tula Artists Pty Ltd and was
Canberra to take up his award as the 1981 H. C. Coombs Creative Arts Fellow at ANU.  

Important collaborative links between Australia’s national university and young radical CSA students were encouraged by the physical proximity of CSA and ANU. Ford, still a student at CSA, met Nickolls on campus and together with Little—who had met Nickolls during Little’s time as Arts Advisor for Tiwi Designs from 1976 to 1980—suggested that Nickolls hold an exhibition at the about-to-be-opened BRG. Serilus and Alder printed exhibition posters and the invitation. Afterwards, Nickolls gave Alder a drawing. She remembers his work as “luminous. It sang out from those red brick walls.”

Nickolls exhibited 26 recent paintings. Comments made in the BRG visitors’ book reflect an audience not yet literate in the language of contemporary Indigenous art, with responses ranging from “Quite impressive (reminds me of Aboriginal work)” to “Exciting, wonderful detail. Shows terrible dilemma of black culture—your women are so fierce!” ANU head of Art History and Canberra Times reviewer Sasha Grishin applied his considerable scholarship in writing the first review of Nickolls’s art practice by an art historian, noting that Nickolls was “consciously creating his own personal expressive language freely using . . . a blend of forms drawn from traditionally Aboriginal arts and modern western conceptions . . . a fine ambassador for the company during his visits to Melbourne and Sydney.” Geoffrey Bardon and James Bardon, Papunya: a Place Made After the Story: The Beginnings of the Western Desert Painting Movement (Melbourne: The Miegunyah Press, 2004), 87.

Nickolls was determined to access family history and resources at the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs (AIATSIS) but, unable to prove his indigeneity at that time, had been denied access to the archives.

Alison Alder, interview with the author, April 14, 2010.

Comments attributed respectively to Andrew Bray and Caroline Blesing. CCAS archives, BRG Visitor’s Book—1981 to 1983.
of painting”.

While ultimately recognising Nickolls’ work as “coherent and potent”, Grishin felt that “in a number of his paintings, the imagery becomes too much an illustration of political ideas to work satisfactorily as a visual unity.”

It was precisely the “illustration of political ideas” that heralded the soon to explode phenomenon of contemporary Urban Aboriginal art. Grishin was not alone in failing to recognise Nickolls’s exhibition as the beginning of what would become an internationally recognised art movement. Three years later, reviewers would misunderstand as “simulated and derived” and dismiss as “a passing fad” the work in the seminal Sydney exhibition *Koori Art ’84*. Yet, only six years after *Koori Art ’84*, Nickolls and Rover Thomas were the first Aboriginal artists to represent Australia at the Venice Biennale. Nickolls was a heraldic messenger and his position as the second exhibitor at BRG presaged the gallery’s position as a harbinger of contemporary trends.

BRG quickly developed a following among Canberra’s wider arts community. Alder recalls established artists such as Rosalie Gasgoigne dropping in to the new space as well as ANG director James Mollison, whose description of

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48 Nickolls’s exhibition title shares a wonderful synergy with the name “Bitumen River”.
BRG as “that little punk gallery” swiftly found its way into print— in Grishin’s *Canberra Times* review of Nickolls’s *From Dreamtime to Machinetime*, he wrote, “[Nickolls’s works] are showing at the newly opened Bitumen River Gallery, a small punk gallery located at the Manuka car park.”

It is possible that Mollison’s original meaning for the appellation became lost in translation. Mollison was a warmly supportive, frequent visitor to BRG. In comparison to the ANG, Bitumen River must have seemed like some “punk” kid, flexing its puny muscles and cocking its nose at the establishment. In any case, the moniker stuck through the first year, although it seems probable that the original meaning, of what was most likely a throwaway line meant to highlight youth versus The Establishment, became confused with a contemporary social movement. By 1983, Ayres took exception to the descriptive phrase, writing that BRG:

> is not a “punk” gallery. It has none of the violent anarchy which typifies a punk visual style. None of the people who run it stick pins in themselves or make their hair stand up on end like used toothbrushes.

Mollison continued to visit often. On May 15, 1982, artist Geoff Shera, who was sitting the gallery, wrote in the visitors’ book:

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49 Alison Alder, interview with the author, April 14, 2010.
50 Sasha Grishin, “Aborigines in Role of Blood Sacrifice”, *Canberra Times*.
51 There was a vibrant punk scene in Canberra in the early 1980s.
52 Tony Ayres, “Space”, *Art Network*. 
visitors included students, diplomats, Welsh tourists and Canberran workers. The Director of the National Gallery came along to the Gallery. He remarked that the Gallery was “a very lively one”. Mr Mollison said it was a “crazy exhibition” with the pot-pourri of glass, leather shoe bespoking mixed media work & drawings. I asked him when the National Gallery was being opened and he said October 13 (or was 8th) [sic] this year. He asked me if I knew the “Young Italians”, “who in particular” I asked. “the young Italian painters”, “painting in Italy?” I asked. He said “Yes, like Clemente” I said “No, what do they paint like, what’s their stuff like?” He laughed and said “like this!” 53

This anecdote illustrates the perceived gulf that existed at that time in the minds of collective members between national and local cultural spheres; between art in the institutions and art as practiced by the members of BRG. On one hand, Mollison showed keen interest in the progress of this new wave of young artists; they were an accurate reflection of the thrust of broader contemporary art practice. Additionally, although the youth of these emerging artists and the emergence of poster making and photocopy as mediums for artistic expression precluded serious collecting by other Australian art institutions, Butler recognised the importance of the prints and posters being produced by both local and national collectives. With the support of Mollison and with funds supplied by then chairman of the Gallery Council Gordon Darling, he immediately began acquiring posters and screenprints

53 May 15, 1982, BRG Visitors’ Book—1981 to 1983. Shera’s entry in the visitors’ book appears here as it was originally written, with grammatical inconsistencies included.
made by collective members for the national collection. Despite this quiet support, the about-to-be-opened ANG, with its prominent position in the national capital representing the apogee of the institutional model, epitomised a paradigm that these artists felt they were excluded from and that they fundamentally rejected. Their focus was in turning this paradigm on its head.

5.2 CSA and BRG: The Beginnings of a Symbiotic Relationship

CSA and BRG—and BRG’s successor CCAS—have been engaged in a symbiotic and often complex relationship since 1980. This section examines the relationship between seminal staff and students at CSA from the latter years of the 1970s to the early 1980s in order to reveal CSA’s influence on BRG founding members. It contends that CSA, and in particular the Printmaking Workshop under senior lecturer Schmeisser and inaugural tutor Martin, provided a unique environment that directly contributed to the genesis of BRG. It was in this workshop that a small group of politically inclined students were stimulated, particularly by Martin who proved to be a politically and artistically literate tutor. While it acknowledges that other factors (as previously examined) were important, it illustrates that the environment at CSA was a critical factor in the growth of nascent contemporary arts exhibitions in Canberra, as evidenced through BRG’s activities.

The focus on printmaking and the rapid rise of an underground print movement in Canberra, while following national and international trends in art practice, was influenced and encouraged by several appointments made at CSA.
These included Udo Sellbach (1927–2006), the school’s inaugural director, in April 1977, and Schmeisser (1942-2012) and Martin in 1978.54

German-born Sellbach took up his appointment in a period that Agostino has termed “the financial halcyon days” of tertiary education in Australia.55 Federal Government support, which in the pre-self-government years liberally funded education in the Territory, enabled the implementation of Sellbach’s Bauhaus-inspired vision. This involved setting up discreet workshops within CSA, one of which was printmaking, as well as the removal of previously-accepted barriers between art and craft.56 Importantly for the future of the Printmaking Workshop at CSA, Sellbach was a master printmaker trained in the European tradition whose commitment to furthering printmaking in Australia had been obvious for decades. In 1960, Sellbach and his printmaker wife Karin had “played a leading role in setting up the printmaking department at the SA SOA.”57 In 1966, Sellbach, Ursula Hoff and Grahame King established the Print Council of Australia in Melbourne.58 In the

55 Ibid., 33.
56 The Bauhaus vision accepted other disciplines, such as craft, architecture and design, as art. Its architectural influence is seen in Canberra in several privately owned houses and in the 1962-built public housing of the Northbourne Housing Group—designed by Ancher, Mortlock and Murray for the NCDC in 1959—and the Bega and Allawah flats in Braddon designed by Richard Ure in 1954. These buildings, which occupy prime land destined for redevelopment as part of a proposed light rail corridor, are “Canberra’s and probably Australia’s first and only true example of the rationale of the Bauhaus principles used for public housing”. Martin Miles, “Canberra House: Mid-Century Modernist Architecture”, accessed March 23, 2015, http://www.canberrahouse.com/2006/11/08/northbourne-housing-group-1959/
57 Agostino, 26.
58 “The Print Council of Australia (PCA) was established in 1966 to encourage the production and appreciation of hand-printed graphics. The intention of the PCA was to stimulate printmaking activities, to encourage understanding and appreciation of the original print and to define the various types of printmaking (wood-cut, etching, engraving, lithograph or serigraph).” MS 49, Papers of the Print Council of Australia, Australian Prints and Printmaking Collection, NGA Research Library, accessed April 21, 2012, http://nga.gov.au/Research/pdf/MS49_FindingAid.pdf.
20 years before his arrival in Canberra, he had lectured in printmaking in Adelaide, Melbourne, Brisbane, and Hobart (where he was head of the Tasmanian School of Art). Agostino reveals that the Hobart appointment was rife with “political infighting” and thus Sellbach, like many artists who migrated to Canberra from other Australian capitals, hoped that his appointment to CSA would provide “a fresh start.”

Shortly after his arrival in Canberra he invited Schmeisser, who had trained in both western and eastern printmaking traditions in Germany and Kyoto, to set up a new Printmaking Workshop at CSA. At the same time, he approached Adelaide’s Robert Boynes to take up a position as head of the Painting Workshop. Boynes’ partner Martin, then a printmaker with an emerging national profile, had just begun teaching at Salisbury TAFE. Agreeing to come to Canberra if she could secure a tertiary position, she applied for and was accepted as the tutor in the new Printmaking Workshop at CSA. Schmeisser, Boynes and Martin took up their positions together at the beginning of the 1978 academic year.

5.2.1 Mandy Martin: Background and Impacts

Martin’s influence on the late 1970s and early 1980s intakes of those students who founded and progressed Megalo and BRG, and on the development of contemporary political art in Canberra—especially prints and posters—was

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50 Agostino, ANU School of Art, 27.
60 By 1981 and again in 1983, Martin’s work would be included in Australian Perspecta; by 1983 she would have her first of many solo shows at Roslyn Oxley 9 Gallery. Martin’s biography from 1977 to 1983 shows growing interest in her work nationally and internationally. See http://www.mandy-martin.com.
61 In Agostino, ANU School of Art, 29, the starting year of Martin and Schmeisser is incorrectly given as 1979.
profound. In order to understand the critical importance of her contribution to the development of the CSA students she tutored, this section makes a close reading of Martin’s own early political and artistic development, which was framed by South Australia’s volatile political environment. This close reading is pertinent because of the strength of her contribution to local arts development; she was only 26 when she arrived at CSA, but she brought with her a sophisticated understanding of the nexus of art and politics gained through her personal experiences in Adelaide. To further explain the totality of her influence, this section considers the rise of the Progressive Art Movement (PAM) and women at the SA SOA, and Martin’s involvement with the various left-wing political parties engaged in battles in the South Australian car factories. Her political focus and her screenprinting skills which she used on the ground in dangerous real life situations directly influenced the group of students who went on to establish Megalo and BRG, and therefore this close reading of her influencing milieu is critical to building an understanding of the motivations of these founding students whom she mentored.

At the beginning of 1972, Martin had won one of five scholarships to the prestigious SA SOA. Three factors fundamentally set the early trajectory of Martin’s career. These factors in turn awakened her political conscience, gave her permission to make art outside of the academic paradigm, and furnished her with the skills to do so. The first, in the second semester of her first year, was the arrival from the UK of Clifford Frith as lecturer in Foundation Studies. Frith’s novel approach to teaching—“Why teach anything, why not do crochet classes?”—legitimised the making of art outside entrenched academic boundaries. Martin recalled: “I headed to the Adelaide Hills and built a geodesic dome which was an ‘investigation of an interior
space’... I never painted again at art school.” The second, in 1973, was her decision to take Brian Medlin’s course *Politics and Art* at Flinders University, which she found intellectually and politically stimulating as it explored the international intersections of art and politics. The third factor was her decision, in 1973, to seek out Adelaide painter, printmaker and lecturer Robert Boynes, who taught her to photo-screenprint. This skill, which she passed on to her long-term collaborator Annie Newmarch, gave the two women an entrée into the highly politicised world of South Australian car manufacturing.

South Australia—which under reforming Labor Premier Donald “Don” Dunstan styled itself the “State of the Arts”—was arguably the most politically volatile of the Australian states and territories in the 1970s. Its industry was dominated by American car manufacturers Chrysler and General Motors Holden, which were the state’s major employers and whose factory floors had, since the 1960s, become sites of escalating worker/management conflict. The complex industrial relations scenario was compounded by the number and diversity of small, left-wing political groups that were pitted against the companies, the State Government, the industry’s major union the Vehicle Builders Union (VBU) and, often, against themselves. Among the factions who had a presence on the shop and factory floors were groups including the Communist Party of Australia Marxist Leninist (CPAML). The CPAML played a pivotal role, firstly in Martin’s political

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63 Other groups included: the Communist Party of Australia (CPA); the Socialist Party of Australia; the Worker Student Alliance for Australian Independence (WSA); the Socialist Workers Party (SWP); the Socialist Labour League (SLL); the International
awakening and then in her disenchantment with the nexus of art and politics as evidenced in South Australia.

Martin became an early and active member of PAM. Centred around Flinders University, PAM was formed by a group of artists, performers, musicians, filmmakers and writers in 1974. This tendency towards cross-artform fertilisation was echoed in the Clifton Hill Community Centre in Melbourne and in Canberra’s own fluid, homogenised subculture of artists, musicians and performers from the late 1970s. PAM comprised a like-minded group who had:

- turned their backs on conventional art modes and favoured mass-media forms of communication like video, photography and screenprinting rather than painting which we saw as an elitist and anachronistic activity.\(^{64}\)

PAM quickly became a front organisation for the Worker Student Alliance for Australian Independence (WSA) and for the highly secretive CPAML.

Martin’s emerging political focus, along with the photo-screenprinting skills that she had learnt from Boynes and passed on to Newmarch, found their logical outlet in the Adelaide factories and workplaces of the American car manufacturers. The strategies employed by the CPAML on the factory floor followed the model of the Maoist two-stage revolution in working with the capitalists to expel the foreign Socialists (IS); and the Rank and File group (RAF), which were often accused of being a front for the WSA. List sourced from Garry Hill, *Anatomy of An Industrial Struggle: Chrysler Factory at Tonsley Park in Adelaide 1976-1978*, accessed April 18, 2012, http://www.takver.com/history/chrysler.htm.\(^{64}\)

imperialists—in this case, the American car manufacturer—and supporting the working-class struggle. The CPAML made effective use of cultural and arts workers, including Martin and Newmarch, to make rapid incursions onto the factory and shop floors with union-backed sloganeering that took the form of the immediately producible and disseminatable screenprinted poster. In 1989 Martin recalled that:

Cultural workers had moved into the car factories and onto the rank and file of organisations in the car factories, and artists like Annie and I were right in behind, setting up exhibitions and demonstrations in the factories and workplaces. We screen-printed posters and stickers on the spot and images like When workers unite, bosses tremble and other plagiarised symbols from May 1968 in Paris, which enraged management as [posters and stickers] appeared minutes later on machinery and doors around the factories.65

Politics, both through the CPAML and via a growing interest in feminism, dominated this stage of Martin’s life. She was printing political posters by day (at one stage she was banned from using SA SOA Printing Workshop inks and from using the workshop itself during school hours) and attending political meetings at night. As vice-president of the Student Representative Council (SRC), Martin “donated the entire funds of the SRC, a whole $240, to the PLO”66 and “turned the office into a crèche for students with babies”.67 Importantly, together with a group of

65 Ibid.
66 Palestine Liberation Organisation.
67 Mandy Martin, “The South Australian School of Art at Stanley Street North Adelaide 1972–5.”
art school women students, she founded what was arguably the first women’s art
group in an Australian art school. This energetic involvement with feminist politics,
which Martin had viewed as contiguous to her leftist political endeavours, was in
fact highly unwelcome within the CPAML cadre. Under the Maoist two-stage
revolution concept, the women’s revolution (along with gay rights) came in well
behind the worker’s revolution. Martin recalled: “Even doing posters for things like
the women’s shelter was frowned on because the feminist, women’s movement was
considered a waste of energy”. 68

This perceived incompatibility of her twin political interests was thrown into
sharp focus by events that followed a visit by American feminist Lucy Lippard and
Australian art critic Terry Smith. Lippard, visiting Adelaide as part of a lecture tour
and to source images for the first issue of the American Feminist publication
Heresies, stayed with Martin and Newmarch. In town at the same time was Terry
Smith, who had spent 1972–1975 in New York, where he had studied at The New
York Institute of Fine Arts and Columbia University and joined the conceptual
artists’ group Art and Language. The two were considered, by the CPAML, to be
“lackeys of American Imperialism”. 69 Lippard was a powerful advocate for feminist
artists, and both she and Smith were working at the cutting edge of contemporary
American arts criticism. Martin was “pulled in for a whole day of disciplining by the
cadre of the CPAML for fraternising with the enemy.”70

This experience led Martin to realise that membership of PAM, and by
default the CPAML, brought with it a curtailed freedom of artistic thought and

68 Mandy Martin, interview with the author, April 4, 2012.
69 This phrase referred to anyone who sympathised with American concerns or
worked within American cultural spheres.
70 Mandy Martin, interview, April 4, 2012.
political will that was as restrictive as the academic art school paradigm. Allied to this sense of a loss of creative and political autonomy were her concerns over increasing violence at Chrysler’s Tonsley Park factory in the lead-up to the riots and mass sackings of June/July 1977. Martin viewed the internecine factional wars as “callous and interfering in working class peoples’ lives. People [were] being beaten up by the police, going to jail, losing their jobs when they had families to support”.71

In the Australian car industry’s history of significant unrest, the period of Martin’s involvement as an active member of PAM is arguably the most bitter. Its intensity meant that Martin experienced an extreme introduction to the politics inherent in the worker/unions/owners/political factions nexus of trade unionism, and to art as a means of political activism at the coalface. The divisions and self-serving nature of much of the struggle, and the particularly bloody events leading up to and surrounding the July 1977 vote for increased workers’ rights, signalled the end for Martin: “I didn’t want to hit people over the head any more, and I wanted to be able to critique both capitalism and socialism.”72

In other words, Martin required freedom to respond to the world as an artist, anticipating and reflecting change as her interests dictated, free of any imposed ideology. The time was ripe for the move to Canberra:

By the time I left Adelaide I was pretty pissed off. I was looking for something that wasn’t partisan, that was actually about fostering artistic practice and emerging artists, because I knew, as a fairly

71 Ibid.
72 Mandy Martin, “Political posters in Adelaide.”
young artist myself, how difficult it was to bang your head against establishment walls. It still is, but it was particularly hard then.73

Martin and Boynes arrived in a Canberra that was “a breath of fresh air”, a sentiment that echoed Sellbach’s feelings about his move to Canberra representing “a fresh start”.74 Martin’s national reputation was on the rise and she was actively seeking a bipartisan and open forum within which to operate.75 In 2012, she recalled that the move to Canberra signified:

a clean slate because although people like Humphrey McQueen76 for example had preconceptions about who Robert and I might be, in fact it was tremendously liberating to get over here and be able to paint without being criticised about not making political art. I’d come from a pretty tough ideological environment where every colour and every word and so on was analysed. If it wasn’t approved by the rank and file of Chrysler and GMH [General Motors Holden]

73 Mandy Martin, interview, April 4, 2012. Although this intense period of art-making from within a political collective and for the collective cause was over, Martin has continued to paint many series of works that reflect on the plight of the worker and the degradation of the environment by corporations.

74 Quotes respectively: Mandy Martin, Ibid.; and as previously quoted in Agostino, *ANU School of Art*.

75 See footnote 59 in this chapter. Additionally, Sasha Grishin reviewed Martin’s drawings in the CSA Staff exhibition of May 1979 as “increasingly more powerful and intense”. See Sasha Grishin, “Diverse Exhibition United by Standard of Excellence,” *Canberra Times*, May 15, 1979: 15.

76 McQueen, who had been senior lecturer in General Studies at CSA, resigned on February 1, 1979 to take up a two-year Australia Council Literature Board Fellowship. He would return to Canberra in time to open BRG in April 1981.
then you weren’t allowed to do it. So yes it was really liberating coming to Canberra where you could reinvent the wheel a little bit.77

Martin’s Adelaide experiences would have a profound effect on the students who came under her tutelage in the Printmaking Workshop. Her recent experience using photo-screenprinting in a live political context was emphasised when, tasked with setting up the Workshop, she first pasted the walls, floor to ceiling, with political posters. Additionally, her knowledge of and connection to the feminist and women’s art movements and her relative youth provided a real alternative within the Workshop to Schmeisser’s more traditional and more technically rigorous approach, given his background, to printmaking and teaching.

Her appointment constituted the first full-time appointment of a female at the art school for six years.78 She was at least a decade younger than any of her male cohort, which meant she was quite close in age to most of her students. Included in the first undergraduate intake of 1978 were Alder, Ford, Ayres, David Morrow, Mark Denton, Cassie Mollen, Nick Cosgrove and Di Wells. Church and Kath Walters arrived in 1979, Walters into the Print Workshop and Church into Photo Media.79 These students were a radicalised, hippie-leaning, feminist, activist group in their early 20s, and they were hungry and open to all that Martin had to give. Students began in Printmaking after a first semester of Foundation Studies (later known as Core Studies). This large group within the first and second intakes of

77 Mandy Martin, interview, April 4, 2012.
78 Since Gillian Mann in 1972 (who, in addition to other contributions to the arts in Canberra, developed the Printmaking curriculum for CSA) and Pat Harry, also in 1972, in painting.
79 Church remembers Walters as “really the key person... [she] taught me screenprinting and she later became my partner in crime in Melbourne.” Julia Church, interview, September 30, 2012.
Printmaking students, with an alternative ethos, were looking to art as a socially useful vehicle. Martin was ideally suited to inspire and support their particular social agenda. With such vastly different backgrounds and trajectories of learning and teaching, it was inevitable that Schmeisser as head of the Workshop and Martin as tutor found themselves at odds early on, particularly with the concept of the value of the alternative within the student body and with the academic values placed on various students’ work. As Martin noted: “Jorg couldn’t get it. He didn’t understand my anti-establishmentness or that within rebellion and difference you could find immense creativity”. Martin recognised the importance of the work being produced by students such as Denton, Mollen, Alder, Church, Ford and Ayres, and was determined to support and nurture their talents. “I argued about the assessment of nearly every one of those students who was special to me;” (Ibid.) it was “a battle the whole time I was in printmaking . . . assessment was difficult; it needed a sympathetic outside examiner to understand the feminist, gay, Asian, student body.” (Ibid.) In the end, Schmeisser and Martin “came to a truce” (Ibid.) and, with the support of students, essentially divided up the classes; the radicalised group of hippie firebrands came under the exclusive mentorship of Martin.

This was not a formal arrangement and it would be incorrect to suggest that any section of the Workshop was closed in any way to any student. Equally there are many students at that time, including Canberra printmakers Julie Bradley, Dianne

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80 Martin’s late night experiences in the print room of the SA SOA were mirrored by the early 1980s cohort in Canberra. Printmakers whose work responded more to contemporary social concerns than to art orthodoxy were generally less inclined to play by the rules. Julia Church recalled, “I think the best times I had at the art school were when I used to break in at night and screenprint . . . doing experiments . . . printing on plastic and that was really lovely.” Julia Church, interview, September 30, 2012.

81 Mandy Martin, interview, April 4, 2012.
Fogwell and Ben Taylor whose long careers benefitted enormously from Schmeisser’s rigorous training. Nor does it imply that training was any less rigorous for those radicalised students who came under Martin’s tutelage. But it is arguably true that the energetic and understanding support extended by Martin impacted positively on the group of students who went on to form Megalo and BRG.  

This support was not limited to in-school experiences. Martin provided additional opportunities for her students to make art outside art school that encouraged the rise of the underground printmaking culture whose apogee was the establishment of Megalo by Alder and her fellow printmakers in 1980. Martin had shipped her Adelaide print studio to her new home in Queanbeyan and it became a focal point for that first group of students. She recalls that:

In the second part of that first year when I went into printmaking [that group of students] all sort of became [friends]. They’d come out and do a bit of printing there because I had a full studio I’d brought over from Adelaide, wax and one arm bandit and dark room [which] I’d set up in Queanbeyan in the double garage.

Later in that year, a pregnant Martin and Boynes moved their household from Queanbeyan to Canberra. Martin recalls the moving of her own print workshop to Gorman House:

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82 By April 1981, Alder and her core group had set up BRG. Martin saw the gallery as “an important way of developing the emerging artists—I did participate in a few shows there but it wasn’t fundamental to my survival. I mean there was nothing here when we first came. Abraxas Gallery had just folded and the National Gallery wasn’t open. There was just so little happening so it was great to have somewhere that became a focus.” Mandy Martin, interview, April 4, 2012.

83 Ibid.
Alison and Paul and Mark and Julia and so on helped me move and [in 1982] we set up ACME Ink at Gorman House.\footnote{For which Roger Butler did the plumbing!} We rented those 4 little rooms there—one was the layout room, one was the office, one was the printing room and the other was the dark room. I’d pay the rent and in exchange for helping print my work they’d use the facilities. I didn’t do a lot of printing at that stage—a couple of editions a year—and they’d print that work for me. So it was at that stage that we did things like True Bird Grit.\footnote{Mandy Martin, interview, April 4, 2012.} True Bird Grit was printed in 1982 at ACME Ink by Alder and Church, and it pulled together a diverse group of women working in multiple cross-artforms throughout Canberra. Martin remembers it as “quite a funny document, really, and it was in response to looking at Canberra and thinking, ‘Well, where are the women artists?’”\footnote{Ibid.} Having already experienced the social and artistically nurturing value of a women’s art group in Adelaide, Martin had looked for evidence of a women’s art movement when she first arrived in Canberra and had established that there wasn’t one:

. . . but there were a couple of women who were interested. There was Barbara Campbell the American feminist artist, who’d been friends with people like Nancy Spero and Lucy Lippard and she’d
come straight from that [milieu] to Canberra. Also Karilyn Brown\(^{87}\) came to Canberra around that time.\(^{88}\)

Martin’s contribution to the development of contemporary art in the region extended beyond the teaching experiences enjoyed by consecutive years of students during the period from 1978 until 2002, when, although she remained at CSA, she left the Workshop.\(^{89}\) Her own socio-political conscience and knowledge and her involvement with current political thought were powerful motivating factors in the development of the political stance of that first group of students who went on to form Megalo and BRG. Her strong leadership likewise enabled enduring friendships between students, linked as they were by common ideas and burgeoning political awareness. Later, many of those who returned to, or arrived in Canberra to teach at CSA, such as Toni Robertson and Nigel Lendon, although they were appointed through the usual formal processes, applied for their roles because Martin extended invitations to them.

As explained in section 5.1.2 of this chapter, the BRG collective, through the making and exhibition of posters, was committed to local, national and international artistic political expression. Many of the issues expressed in their work were indivisibly yoked to feminism. BRG artists were developing their local practice within the national capital at the heart of federal politics. They were mentored by older women artists with lived experiences of using art as a political tool, and they

\(^{87}\) Brown would go on to act as temporary coordinator of BRG towards the end of 1982. She was instrumental in mobilising the nationwide Campaign for Free Admission to the NGA, as examined in 3.6 The Campaign for Free Admission, pp. 114–122.

\(^{88}\) Mandy Martin, interview, April 4, 2012.

\(^{89}\) When, in 2002, she left the Print Workshop (although not CSA) due to rising health and safety concerns over the effects of printing chemicals, the School converted the Workshop to water-based inks.
were beneficiaries of CWL’s second wave feminist activisms which had achieved many advances for local women since 1970. It is fair to conclude that by 1983, these young artists were exceptionally politically aware. How, then, to explain the rejection of a third wave feminist poster titled *Slut*, made by Melbourne artist Catriona Holyoake in 1983, and offered in that year to the BRG collective for sale in their poster rack? This fascinating and subtle conundrum, where highly politically aware artists appeared somewhat removed from the expressions of third wave feminism that were apparent particularly in Melbourne and other major centres indicates that emerging changes in feminist theories and representations took hold differently in Canberra.

Anchored by a close reading of the circumstances in Canberra and in Melbourne surrounding the rejection of *Slut*, the next section considers these emerging differences between second and third wave feminist representations of women. In order to do so it analyses the impact of the politics of the women’s movement in Canberra. To further explain why these emerging artists were so preoccupied with feminist concerns, I examine in depth the contrasting journeys to Canberra of Australia’s foremost feminist artist Vivienne Binns and early BRG member Cherylynn Holmes. Their journeys and impacts, different again to that of Martin’s, contextualise the various factors within the women’s movement that marked this period of contemporary art development in Canberra.

5.3 Feminist Politics and Art: Intersections

The young male and female students and activists who founded BRG could not help but be radically politicised. As I have explained, a diverse range of interconnected people who were engaged in various cultural and social justice
organisations and collectives practised social activism. Activists were highly visible within a relatively small Canberran population that had grown from around 140,000 in 1970 to around 235,000 by 1983. Additionally, they were agitating at the heart of political and judicial decision making in Australia, which drew feminist activists from around the country at various times and increased both the sense of urgency and the perceived effectiveness of political actions. BRG founders and early supporters, largely born around 1960, were beneficiaries of the gains won by second wave feminists who had been active internationally, including in the USA from the late 1960s and in Australia since 1970. The ACT chapter of the Women’s Liberation Movement, CWL, was formed in June 1970. Founding member Biff Ward remembered that in March/April 1970 she asked Sydney feminist Lyndall Ryan if she would come to Canberra if Biff got a group of women together:

She said ‘Yes’ and she and Coonie Sandford – an Australian woman who had been living in the US and later went back there – came here and spoke to us on a Saturday afternoon. The women there that day

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90 For example: On March 8, 1972, International Women’s Day was revived. In 1973 women from around Australia set up a Tent Embassy outside Parliament house for three months in the lead up to and during the McKenzie-Lamb Private Members Anti-abortion Bill. In 1973, Biff Ward, Eileen Haley, Daphne Gollan and Susan Magery from CWL organised the Mt Beauty National Feminist Theory Conference (the “Theory” very much tongue in cheek), at Mt Beauty in Victoria. International Women’s Year in 1975 brought two conferences to Canberra: the Women and Politics National Conference, organised by Elizabeth Reid (who had been appointed as Whitlam’s Women’s Advisor in 1973), was held at ANU and the Anarchist Feminist Conference (again, organised by CWL). Some of the women who were instrumental in CWL and Women’s Electoral Lobby (ACT) were Julia Ryan, Biff Ward, Susan Magery, Beryl Henderson, Elizabeth Reid, Gail Radford, Sara Dowse, Drusilla Modjeska, Eileen Haley, Daphne Gollan and Carol Ambrus.
agreed to meet on Wednesday night and met every week for six years.\textsuperscript{91}

Between 1970 and 1980, Australian women gained significant ground in the battle for equality on many fronts, with escalating gains made between 1972 and 1975 as a result of the swift implementation of useful legislation and funding by the Whitlam Government. In Canberra, submissions that had far-reaching consequences were made to the Government through the highly effective Women’s Electoral Lobby (WEL) ACT (established 1972). In the same year the Aboriginal Tent Embassy was founded and became a nationally recognised space for Indigenous political lobbying. WEL ACT and CWL supported Pat Eaton, the first Indigenous candidate, to stand (unsuccessfully) for Federal Parliament in 1972, as an independent candidate on women’s and children’s issues. In Canberra, women’s services that received some level of government funding as a result of local lobbying included the Canberra Women’s Refuge in 1975, followed in 1976 by the Rape Crisis Centre.\textsuperscript{92} BRG opened in April 1981, in the same month in which women commemorating the rape of women in war first marched in Canberra’s Anzac Day Parade and were arrested for doing so. Arguably, Canberra, from 1972, could be seen as operating at the cutting edge of political feminism in Australia.\textsuperscript{93}

\textsuperscript{91} Biff Ward, email with the author, July 11, 2016.
\textsuperscript{92} Elsie House, Sydney’s Women’s Refuge, opened in Sydney in 1974. The Canberra Women’s Refuge was opened on International Women’s Day, March 8, 1975.
\textsuperscript{93} “In From Lady Denman to Katy Gallagher it is stated: “Over its history as the national capital Canberra has witnessed a distinctive phenomenon: the capacity of activist women—many of them also public servants—to work within governmental structures to achieve broad-ranging improvements to the lives of women and families in Canberra and across Australia.” Henningham, Nikki. “From Lady Denman to Katy Gallagher: A Century of Women’s Contributions to Canberra.” Published February 21, 2013. Accessed August 15,
5.3.1 Cherylynn Holmes and the Utopian Ideal

The utopian ideal found political expression through the work of Jim Cairns, Labor Member for Yarra (1955–1969) and Lalor (1969–1977) and briefly Deputy Prime Minister in the Whitlam Government. He drove a relentless course for change, firstly as a spearhead of the anti-Vietnam protest movement and then as a leader of the countercultural movement. As the former, after several years of anti-war agitation, Cairns led an anti-Vietnam War street march in Melbourne in 1970 that attracted 100,000 peaceful protesters. Although he had lost his position as Deputy Prime Minister by early 1975, he continued to champion a countercultural philosophy for the rest of his life. In December 1976, prior to his resignation from politics, Cairns and his colleague Junie Morosi organised the first Down to Earth ConFest at the Cotter River Recreation Reserve, just south of Canberra. It attracted 10,000 to 15,000 people. Cherylynn Holmes, a vigorous early BRG collective member and regular exhibitor who was then living in Kurrajong Heights in the Blue Mountains, came to Canberra for the first time in 1976 to attend the festival and recalls that “everyone was very excited about it”.

Canberra provided a haven and a home for Holmes, who came to CSA in 1979 aged 34. Her personal journey is quite different to those in the student cohort who were in their early twenties, and it stands in contrast to Martin’s politicised, unionised background. Holmes exemplifies the generation of women for whom the


94 ConFest was a manifestation of the Down to Earth Movement which Morosi and Cairns founded after Cairns lost his ministerial position in the Whitlam Government and before his resignation from parliament. The movement folded in 1979.

95 Cherylynn Holmes, interview with the author, August 30, 2012.
women’s liberation movement provided support and for whom art provided solace and inspiration. Because the story of her journey to CSA encapsulates the experience of a particular and large group of women of similar ages and from similar backgrounds, I quote her at length:

I of course read *The Female Eunuch*. I was in a rather exploitative marriage in my twenties and left that in my thirties and went to live up in Northern NSW. I knew I was capable of a lot more than what I’d been indoctrinated as and I knew the pathway was through art. I had feminist friends in Sydney. [There was] a loose collection of women. We’d have dinner parties or go to restaurants. I read the *Sydney Morning Herald* advertisement for the art school and applied and got the train down to Canberra for the interview. On the way back out of town, I realised that one of my dearest friends from that first encounter [the Down to Earth ConFest in 1976] was working at the NGA and he said “You’re not getting on that train. Stay in Canberra overnight and I’ll fly you back tomorrow.” He took me to dinner at Santa Lucia and we dined with Rosalie Gascoigne and her daughter. And then we went to a Vasareli exhibition in the Albert Hall. He was flying off next morning to collect some work from somewhere and a car picked us up in the morning and took us to the airport and we took separate planes. It was a magical journey to Canberra. [When I arrived to begin at CSA] I stayed with my sister
for a week and somehow got into a group house briefly and then got
a government house in O’Connor.  

A key facility that encouraged this sympathetic environment occurred with
the development of Ainslie Village. Ainslie Village opened as a military barracks
during the World War II, provided accommodation for Canberra’s migrant worker
population after 1945, and later acted as an interim accommodation solution for
migrants. From 1976 to 1980 the hostel, managed by private contractors and the
DCT, provided short-term housing for migrants and those on low incomes. By 1980,
years of neglect meant that buildings were in disrepair and the Village had gained a
reputation for pervasive violence; those most in need were reluctant to accept
emergency accommodation there. Jobless Action, whose initial support had enabled
the creation of both Megalo and BRG, submitted to the DCT, a joint proposal with
the Salvation Army, St Vincent de Paul and Village residents. The proposal was
accepted and shortly thereafter, control of the Village passed to a newly incorporated
body composed of residents and community organisations, including Jobless Action.
Jobless Action members comprised community workers, activists and artists, and an
early decision was taken to set up Megalo in the Village.

When Megalo set up its rudimentary workshop at Ainslie Village, the anti-
aesthetic ethos—which Hal Foster has defined as “a will to grasp the present nexus
of culture and politics and to affirm a practice resistant both to academic modernism

96 Ibid. Holmes revealed that Dennis Trigg, in the true spirit of the countercultural
movement, named O’Connor as the Peoples Republic of O’Connor by which name it is still
fondly known by manyCanberrans.
and political reaction”—began to flower collectively outside of CSA. 97 For a brief moment in the history of the Village, the influence of European and Australian countercultural utopias manifested in a collective aesthetic. It was realised through the planting of common food gardens and particularly through the presence of a functioning creative workshop whose output was intrinsically tied to the concerns, both recreational and socio-political, of the Canberran subculture to which Megalo members belonged.

The cohort responsible for the birth of Megalo/BRG were themselves in an interstitial generational divide; the anti-Vietnam war protests, which had attracted hundreds of thousands of protesters nationally and galvanised the previous generation, were replaced with a creeping disempowerment of a significant proportion of the Australian population. This was particularly obvious within the homogenised subcultural population in Canberra of which these young artist/activists were a part.

Coupled with their desire to make art that was recognised outside of the closed gallery system was this renewed ethos that borrowed from the 1968 European student uprisings and was influenced by the countercultural movement, the women’s liberation movement, and locally rising levels of poverty and unemployment. This ethos stimulated their desire to make art that was “useful, [art] that people needed. It was anti-individualist in that sense, anti-aesthetic in many ways and about empowering people.” 98 In spite of the many serious concerns that were foregrounded through prints and posters, community action for these activist artists/printmakers

98 Interview with Julia Church, interview, September 30, 2012.
was often actively based in light-hearted social engagement, and for Church and others, Megalo and BRG both provided “another place to play”:

we had so much energy. . . . [S]ocially there was a lot of brainstorming. We were fortunate to be alive at a time when we really felt like we could do anything that we turned our hands to.

And that, I suppose, was a little bit like what was happening in ’68.

It was an exciting time.\textsuperscript{99}

By the early 1980s, Australians were feeling the effects of the Fraser Government’s razor gangs on women’s health and social services and consequently on families and the unemployed; changed policies were biting deeply into previous gains. In 1981, the Single Women’s Shelter Collective was established to push for single women’s crisis accommodation and, after several years of intense negotiation and following high profile community actions including squatting, the Government provided some funding to establish the Toora Single Women’s Shelter in 1983, followed by the Incest Centre in 1984.\textsuperscript{100} The decrease in government support through the Fraser years led to an increase in radical expressions of the need for that support for women’s services; in Canberra and elsewhere in Australia, poster makers

\textsuperscript{99} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{100} Resources useful in compiling this survey were Elena Roseman, “Talking Like a Toora Woman”, and “From Lady Denman to Katy Gallagher: a century of woman’s contribution to Canberra.” Conversations with Lee Collins, who was an active member of 2XX Community Radio and a member of the young “punk” generation of lesbian feminists active in Canberra from the early 1980s, were revealing and useful.
played a pivotal role in getting these messages of need out into the public domain (see Fig. 4, Fig. 5 and Fig. 6 below).101

Fig. 4. BRG 5th Birthday Show, March 26–April 13, 1986. Unattributed poster evidencing issues around women’s equality, installation photograph. CCAS image archive

101 Many of the posters in BRG’s first exhibition carried messages of need for women’s services. Additionally, in Canberra during 1972 and 1973, members of CWL were printing posters entirely concerned with women’s issues. Ward, quoted in Ryan, email to the author, June 20, 2016.
Fig. 5. BRG 5th Birthday Show, March 26–April 13, 1986. Unattributed posters evidencing issues around women’s equality and tenants’ advice, installation photograph. CCAS image archive
Fig. 6. *BRG 5th Birthday Show*, March 26–April 13, 1986. Unattributed posters evidencing the last 5 years of social concerns including Rape Crisis Centre, Artists Against Uranium, and Vote Social Democracy; installation photograph. CCAS image archive
Contributing to the charged political environment that came with living and working in the national capital, were older feminist women students and lecturers who arrived at CSA from other cities and who continued to impact positively on students in the Printmaking and Photomedia Workshops. These included Anne Morris, who, like Binns, was an early arts worker in community arts. Morris arrived at CSA in 1982 and positively influenced a number of printmakers, including Church and Holmes. Holmes recalls travelling to Sydney with Morris to attend meetings for The Women’s Art Register (the first of which Mandy Martin also attended), and the 1982 Women and Arts Festival: “We thought, ‘Hey, there’s nothing like this in Canberra’, so we came back and organised an exhibition”.\(^\text{102}\) The ACG, at that time in the Wales Centre on London Circuit, hosted this exhibition of work by 28 local women artists, titled *The First Super Doreen Show*, which Holmes curated. Church, who had created the cartoon character *Super Doreen* in early 1981 (see Fig. 7 below), remembers Morris as:

> an inspiring figure. She had already been working in community arts before us and making a living out of it. She was incredibly well-organised but also an extraordinarily open and generous person with her knowledge and ideas, and very encouraging of everybody.\(^\text{103}\)

\(^{102}\) Cherylynn Holmes, interview, August 30, 2012.  
\(^{103}\) Julia Church, interview, September 30, 2012.
Fig. 7. Julia Church, *Super Doreen*. 1982, poster, 102cm x 76cm; private collection, photograph by Brenton McGeachie

Martin, whose influence on the BRG founding group has been previously examined, was joined in the Workshop by Toni Robertson (b. 1953) from 1982 to
1985. Robertson, along with Colin Little, was one of the founding members of the Earthworks Poster Collective at the University of Sydney’s Arts Workshop, The Tin Sheds, and also a founder of the Sydney-based Women’s Art Movement. Robertson’s presence in Canberra ensured that contemporary politics continued to be a focus at CSA and also encouraged more frequent visits from her colleague Vivienne Binns.

5.3.2 Vivienne Binns

Binns’ story is different again to those of Martin and Holmes. Her influence in the early 1980s on the burgeoning arts community in Canberra was subtle, but she was already disposed to view Canberra as a future home, eventually relocating from the Blue Mountains to take up a position at CSA as lecturer in Foundation Studies, Painting, Sculpture and Theory in 1994. She had in fact “been up and down to Canberra”\textsuperscript{104} since her 1975 and 1976 exhibitions at Fantasia and Abraxas Galleries respectively:

Even with the women’s art movement, back in the seventies when we formed groups in Sydney, we visited other states, searching out women artists. We’d made contact [in Canberra with] people like Rosalie Gascoigne and so on and I’d had fleeting visits with the place through the community arts, enough that I knew there was theatre and arts and the poster [movement]. There have always been

\textsuperscript{104} Vivienne Binns, interview with the author, February 26, 2012.
lively activities and projects going on. . . . I always knew there was a community [of women artists].

Canberra’s strong community arts focus, recognised by Binns in the 1970s, was a clear reason for her growing interest in the city. By the time she settled permanently in Canberra, her own experiences in this area assisted in maintaining the political focus of CSA students throughout the 1990s and 2000s.

Binns’ “explosive” debut exhibition at Watters Gallery in Sydney, in 1967, is now generally seen as anticipating the rise of 1970s feminist art in Australia. By the early 1970s, her fascination with craft and feminism was coalescing into what would become more than a decade of fertile engagement with community arts in both urban and rural women’s communities, beginning with the travelling community arts project *Artsmobile* in 1972. Her best-known project from the period is *Mothers’ Memories Others’ Memories (MMOM)* (1979-1981), which focused on creative expression in the lives of women in the Blacktown area of Sydney. The benefits experienced by a wide range of women as a result of their involvement in *MMOM*—and *Full Flight* (1981-1983), which was enacted in central and far west of NSW—was recognised with Binns being awarded an Order of Australia medal in 1983 for services to Art and Craft. She is acknowledged as a founding member of

105 Ibid.
106 Deborah Clark’s use of the word “explosive” reflects the response of contemporary critics for whom the sexual imagery of the works, particularly coming from a young female artist, was entirely unexpected. Clark writes that “this show marked a key moment in the nascent Women’s Art Movement.” in Deborah Clark, “The Painting of Vivienne Binns”, in Vivienne Binns, edited by Craig Judd. (Hobart: Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery, 2006), 8 Exhibition catalogue.
107 Of *Full Flight*, Binns wrote, “As an Artist in Community in a large predominantly rural area of 60,000 square miles and a population of 200,000, I travel from town to town in a caravan which has living quarters and a small work space. I stay for 2–4
the Women’s Art Movement in Sydney, a pioneer of community arts practice, and an enduring and effective advocate for women artists. Illustrating the latter is the following extract from Binns’ 1977 letter to the Craft Council of NSW:

The argument for excellence in arts is hard to dispute and because of this it is itself excellent as a subterfuge to disguise other motives. It is used for instance to disguise embedded sexual discrimination in job selection at some art colleges. It can be used to disguise a situation which by means of special selection criteria fosters and nurtures the needs of a few in the name of “high standards”. It can be the death knell of creativity in the widest sense and blind people to a narrow view of what art is. Our view is already heavily blinkered.108

Binns agreed with Martin’s earlier assessment of Canberra as “a breath of fresh air”. In 1993, at the tail end of a Keating Fellowship, Binns travelled again to Canberra to take up a residency in the Painting Workshop at CSA and later explained:

I just found the CSA such a fabulous place by comparison to the politics and unpleasantness of the other major cities like Sydney and

Melbourne where I might look for work [that] I sort of pestered them to give me a job. I knew there were people who were really happy to have me coming there.\textsuperscript{109}

Canberra, therefore, was seen to be free of the pervasive art world politics — as identified by Martin, Binns and Sellbach—that characterised life in the southern Australian capitals from which these important practitioners came.\textsuperscript{110}

\section*{5.4 Slut}

In the middle of 1983, Alder, on behalf of the BRG collective, took receipt of a consignment of works on paper from the Jillposters collective in Melbourne. Among them was \textit{Slut}. Tellingly, it would prove to be the only poster ever rejected by the collective.\textsuperscript{111} \textit{Slut}, now in the print collection at the NGA, differs markedly

\begin{footnotesize}\begin{enumerate}
\item Vivienne Binns, interview, February 26, 2012.
\item Contemporarily, Canberra is still noted for its warm, inclusive and supportive arts community particularly through the local organisations CCAS, CMAG, M16, Megalo, Photo-Access and ANCA.
\item First wave feminism arose during the nineteenth century continuing into the early twentieth century. Its primary concerns—evidenced through the suffrage movements in the USA, the UK, Australia and New Zealand—centred around political equality for women, including the right to vote, the right to stand as candidates in elections, and rights around marriage and children. From 1949, a Marxist critique of capitalism as a root cause of women’s inequality entered the discourse and remained a driving factor throughout second wave feminism. Second wave feminism arose in the US from the early 1960s. It built on the political gains of first wave feminism in that it sought to identify and remove cultural inequalities which the feminist movement recognised as barriers to full political equality. It was intrinsically linked with the women’s liberation movement and it used cross-national consciousness-raising meetings to proselytise the their aims. These disavowed all forms of patriarchy, including the uneven representation of women artists in museums and art galleries and including issues around equality of career choice, remuneration and working conditions and physical and sexual safety for women and children. Third wave feminism arose during the early 1990s in the USA and co-exists to the present day with second wave feminism. It is seen as a somewhat reactive movement to second wave feminism’s insistence on equalising sexual difference between men and women and it seeks to reclaim and celebrate women’s differing sexuality. It includes a diversity of theories and a fluid approach
\end{enumerate}\end{footnotesize}
from other posters in the collection from the period of 1983/84 in two key respects.\footnote{The \textit{Slut} poster was purchased by Roger Butler, who consistently bought posters from BRG, Jillposters and other Australian printmaking collectives, including, from 1973, “almost a complete collection” of the Earthworks Poster Collective. Roger Butler, quoted in “Posters for Posterity”, \textit{Canberra Times}, September 4, 1986: 1s.} Firstly, it is printed on fine art paper in only two colours, blue and red. Secondly, and most significantly, the central figure, a woman, has long red hair and wears a red dress and red stiletto shoes. A thought bubble reads “I won’t see you in Paradise”. At the bottom right of the poster, a small clock shows five minutes to midnight; the text on the left of the clock face reads “nuclear time”. Entering from the centre left, beginning outside the poster frame, is a quick rendering of a cruise missile, pointing at the figure and bearing the word “slut”. Finally, the figure is fully outlined with a cut line in black from the knees up and the written exhortation to “cut here” (see Fig. 8 below).
Fig. 8. Catriona Holyoake, *I Won’t See You in Paradise (Slut)*. 1983, screen print, 100cm x 80cm. Collection of the National Gallery of Australia. Photograph by Brenton McGeachie. CCAS image archive
Canberra’s principal position as a fulcrum of political decision making and social activism and as a nexus for the national expression of aspects of the women’s liberation movement, among other social movements of the 1970s and 1980s, has been established. The strong feminist leanings of CSA student and graduate printmakers, Martin’s role and the influences of community arts practitioners such as Binns and Morris, have been made clear. Given these facts, the 1983 rejection of Slut indicates that other factors were at play in Canberra’s emerging contemporary arts scene, including a continued emphasis on second wave feminism that may have been subtly encouraged by Martin’s Maoist political background and could also have been a result of Canberra’s relative isolation as a regional centre where early visual examples of third wave feminism were not as accessible to collective members.

Alder’s final day as coordinator of BRG was August 11, 1983. Her second-last letter, written on that day, was to the Jillposters collective:

Received your posters the other day and feel I must write to tell you that I don’t feel the gallery can have the “slut” poster in its racks. I realise that this poster has many intentions and that whoever did it hopefully meant to put across a message of “super powers = penis [leads to] oppression of women.” However, visually that message is not clear and the poster puts across an extremely negative image. My main argument is that the woman is portrayed as a totally passive helpless victim. Personally I find this very offensive. Women must be made aware of the negative aspects of our society but at the same time as commenting on this oppression women must give other women positive models to act upon. I find that this is not
the case in this instance. Please let me know what you think, and I
look forward to hearing from you. Yours sincerely, Alison Alder for
Bitumen River.¹¹³

A few months later on November 24, 1983, in his capacity as temporary
coordinator, Colin Russell wrote to Jillposters. Russell—who was carrying out a
BRG stocktake of posters, postcards and books—acknowledged receipt of 3x5 lots
of posters, and sought clarification as to whether the BRG commission should be
added on to the poster price of $3.75 or deducted from it.¹¹⁴ The letter also indicated
the inclusion of copies of Slut that Alder had decided, with the support of Russell,
could not be carried by BRG in their poster racks due to its “ambiguity and its
negative projection”:

Also enclosed are posters that had been sent to us about three or four
months ago. At that time Alison, who was the co-ordinator, sent a
letter expressing her misgivings towards that poster and if it would
be suitable for the gallery to have placed it in our racks, mainly for
reasons of ambiguity and its negative projection. She had written
with the intention of finding out how you felt and personally as a
postermaker myself, I supported her on this point. Since we received
no reply and a stocktake was under way, the collective, at a general
meeting, decided that the “slut” poster not be exhibited, and be
returned to the Jillposters collective. I hope that you don’t view this

¹¹³ Alison Alder, letter to Jillposters, August 11, 1983.
¹¹⁴ The reply from Jillposters indicates that galleries in Melbourne added 25% to
take the retail price to $5.00. BRG had been adding 20% on for a price of $4.50.
as a harsh action or that any prejudices against the intended meaning of the work are being enforced.\textsuperscript{115}

A very informal note came back from Carole Wilson, a founding member of Jillposters:

Colin darling you are oh so formal, yes we are horrendously offended by the fact that you didn’t display the “slut” poster and we are planning to execute a subversive, terrorist action on Bitumen River Gallery and especially you.\textsuperscript{116}

The letter, succinctly displaying the ad hoc nature of the small Australian print collective, continued:

Thankyou for being so terribly tactful & polite – I’m usually the only one who reads Jillposters mail anyway. . . . Jillposters couldn’t possibly get itself together enough to write a reply to Alison’s letter. Very strange collective we have lots of money & no one prints posters; we are given a free workshop & we give it back; etc, etc.\textsuperscript{117}

Russell appended a note to the Jill Posters letter before filing; “Ha Ha—personal friend not to be taken as a need for military armament! Colin”.

\textsuperscript{115} Colin Russell, letter to Jillposters, November 24, 1983. Original emphasis.\textsuperscript{116} Carole, [now known to be Carole Wilson], letter to Colin Russell, Tuesday, (undated). CCAS archives, correspondence envelope, 1983.\textsuperscript{117} Ibid.
As already noted (see p. 163), the BRG collective had determined at the outset that the only requirement for work to be accepted for exhibition was that it be non-sexist and non-racist. *Slut* was clearly non-racist and therefore Alder’s reasons for rejecting the poster centred on constructions of female sexuality. Her objections to the poster—that is, that it put across “an extremely negative image”; that the woman “was portrayed as a totally passive victim”; that she, Alder, personally found it “very offensive”; and that “women [in this case, postermakers] must give other women positive models to act upon”, which she felt this poster did not do—all speak to the image of woman as constructed by issues of equality in second wave feminism.

This construction eschewed references to femininity; beauty, inextricably linked to objectification, was to be avoided. The 1984 *Post-Atomic Card*, produced for the Campaign for International Co-operation and Disarmament, illustrates this type of representation of women in anti-nuclear posters. Printed in 4 colours, including a radioactive green/yellow, its two female workers are dressed in overalls and boots and wielding shovels, with a banner that reads “Bury it Mac” (see Fig. 9 below).¹¹⁸

Fig. 9. Post-Atomic Card!: Working Art! Black and white scan of colour postcard, designed and printed by the Fallout Committee for the Post-Atomic Postcard Show, 1984

The blatant femininity of the Slut poster’s protagonist—her long red hair, red dress and red stiletto shoes—was in stark opposition to these representations. Red was a colour still associated with female sexual promiscuity, with the term “scarlet woman” in use, and a general sense of moral laxity inherent in the potent combination of colour and stilettos. If Holyoake’s woman had been wearing boots and overalls, the poster may have passed. But Alder was herself a second wave feminist and the collective, programmed by virtue of political and social choices to walk the feminist talk, were unable to accept this particular construction of the feminine as anything other than a weak or “passive” sexual stereotype.

The collective may also have been influenced by what Laura Meyer has identified as the “heavy fire” that key feminist art strategies came under in the 1980s. The Feminist Art Movement began with the Fresno Feminist Art Program at Fresno State College (now University) in California’s San Joaquin Valley in 1970 under
visiting artist Judy Chicago. Meyer has identified two of its main “pedagogical artmaking strategies” as “the quest for new kinds of female body imagery, or so-called cunt art” and the use of “female media”, which—under the rubric of “women’s work”—included performance art, photography, filmmaking, needlework, and the use of costume and make-up. Meyer posits that, by the 1980s, these formerly key strategies were seen to be negatively “reinforce[ing] an essentialist [or in other words a collection of fixed traits] view of women”. 119 Despite the fact that words such as “slut” and “cunt” had gained widespread currency through the female art movement and the women’s liberation movement of the 1970s, they nonetheless retained a seedy pejorative quality; the collective would have been hard-pressed not to identify the use of “slut” in this instance as essentialising.

It was not until the early 1990s and the rise of “lipstick feminism” that feminism and femininity were seen to cohabit, evidenced publicly through the use of makeup and the wearing of dresses and high heels. Additionally, the use of female-centric language such as “slut” and “cunt” was widely reclaimed by women in the 1990s as potent symbols of personal power. In Australia, the cyberfeminist120 collective VNS Matrix (1991–1997), who are credited with launching the cyberfeminist movement — which is charged with examining the multiple


In “Cyberfeminism(s): Origins, Definitions and Overview”, Vesna Dragojlov gives a comprehensive examination of cyberfeminism’s history and argues that, broadly speaking, cyberfeminism’s main goal “has been to analyze issues of gender, new technologies and, especially, the internet” (25) that “sit at the crossroads of art, theory and activism” (23) (University of Advancing Technology, accessed June 24, 2012, http://www.uat.edu/webmedia/pdf/Cyberfem_14066.pdf.
intersections between women and computer technologies—made this reclamation of language visible, referring to themselves in their 1991 manifesto as “the modern cunt” pitted against the referent of “big daddy mainframe” in the continuing war against patriarchy.\textsuperscript{121} Despite the coming changes, language, as it applied to gender and sexuality in the early 1980s, was essentially neutralising: Alder’s reading of the poster, as “super powers = penis [leads to] oppression of women”, is a response that is indivisibly tied to the constructions of second wave feminism.

Arguably the BRG collective’s response says more about the nature of the engagement with feminism in Canberra and the heightened politicisation inherent in the national capital, than it does about the wider national and international feminist movement. In other words, Alder’s and the collective’s response may have been more politically charged, by virtue of being located at the centre of Australia’s political decision making, than the artist Holyoake intended. This fact would therefore reflect a particular artistic disconnect between the Melbourne-based artist and the Canberra collective and thus between the politically heightened but, at the same time, relatively more insular art world of Canberra and that of the more established scene in Melbourne. Additionally, during the early 1980s, the BRG collective largely comprised present and past students from CSA who could not have

\textsuperscript{121} VNS Matrix’s manifesto reads as follows:

\textbf{CYBERFEMINIST MANIFESTO FOR THE 21ST CENTURY}

We are the modern cunt / positive anti reason / unbounded unleashed
unforgiving / we see art with our cunt we make art with our cunt / we believe in jouissance
madness holiness and poetry / we are the virus of the new world disorder / rupturing the
symbolic from within / saboteurs of big daddy mainframe / the clitoris is a direct line to the
matrix / VNS MATRIX / terminators of the moral codes / mercenaries of slime / go down on
the altar of abjection / probing the visceral temple we speak in tongues / infiltrating
disrupting disseminating / corrupting the discourse / we are the future cunt.

Manifesto first declared by VNS Matrix 1991, Adelaide & Sydney, Australia.
been anything other than influenced by the emphasis on emancipation inherent in Martin’s Marxist/Maoist Adelaide background. It can therefore be argued that a driving force in the context of how Slut was viewed was that the collective was so attuned to the politics of second wave feminism that they were less concerned with the changing constructions of feminism emerging in southern capitals. Melbourne artists on the other hand were arguably more exposed, through the rapidly increasing movement of artists and ideas in and out of the country, to European and North American trends, which included the theories and practices of third wave feminism.122

The postermaker, Holyoake, was a member of the Jillposters collective that for a time included former BRG members Church, Walters, and Deej Fabyc, all of whom had moved to Melbourne in 1983. Like Martin and Binns, Church regarded Canberra as a centre where political orthodoxy held less sway. Her own assessment is as an activist printmaker who had been heavily involved in CSA’s scene from 1979 to 1982, as a member of the loose network of underground printers in Canberra, as a founding member of Megalo and BRG, and then as a founding member, along with Kath Walters, in several print workshops in Melbourne from 1983 onwards.123 She later recalled that:

122 This may seem unlikely today when images and movements are instantaneously transferred across world boundaries. In the early 1980s without email and internet, movements grew more slowly.
123 Julia Church and Kath Walters arrived in Melbourne from Canberra at the beginning of 1983. Church immediately set up Bloody Good Graphix at University of Melbourne where the duo printed and taught printmaking skills to community members. Church recalled that “Bloody Good Graphix became one of the base camps for Jillposters. Contemporaneously we applied for a grant to set up Another Planet and for a Victorian Department of the Arts Community Arts Grant and got both. So [with the latter] we worked with the Hospital Employees Federation creating banners for them and going out as roaming artists in residence creating visual [material] with their membership. That was a really interesting period of time. Then we employed people to set up Another Planet and some of
I think in Canberra there was more flexibility, there was less political orthodoxy. In Melbourne and Sydney I think there was a lot more orthodoxy and you could get into some really terrible stoushes. I’m just thinking about Jillposters for example which had all sorts of political problems because people held very strong political positions; they were polar opposites sometimes or imagined that they were. I think Canberra was quite liberating in that way.\textsuperscript{124}

Many Jillposters members were lesbian separatists, although Holyoake “was heterosexual, liked men, liked having sex with men.”\textsuperscript{125} Holyoake was the same age as her Megalo/BRG contemporaries but was both subject to and took advantage of a more diverse social and artistic milieu. While others “tended to work in their groups” Holyoake “mix[ed] about with a lot of different groups,” including Melbourne’s Clifton Hill art community and other groups making films and music. Friends and “artist feminists” returning to Melbourne from visits to the UK and New York were inspired by emerging pop-cultural feminist icons in fashion—such as Vivienne Westwood—and music, such as Madonna. “Red lipstick was ‘in’—sluttish-ness was out there, female sexuality was definitely being pushed into the mix in the early

\textsuperscript{124} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{125} Holyoake, email to the author, December 24, 2011. All quotes in this paragraph

Jillposters members included Holyoake, Wilson, Church, Walters, Fabyc, Lesley Baxter, Ally Black, Linda Brassel, Zana Dare, Maggie Fooke, Julie Higginbotham, Barbara Miles, Kate Reeves, Linda Rhodes, Julie Shiels, Lin Tobias, Julia Tobin.
Also emerging in Europe at the time was New Romanticism and Holyoake recalled wanting to “dress up in 50s-60s retro feminine”.

Holyoake embraced these many and diverse influences and crafted a poster that proved unacceptable to the BRG collective and difficult to accept, even—as will be discussed—for her more internationally influenced Melbourne contemporaries. Despite the fact that Holyoake characterises early 1980s Melbourne as “a post feminist/post punk era” where she and other women peers “reacted to and questioned the exclusivity” of hard-core feminist ideas—including the benefit of following masculine forms of dress—it is clear that the central female figure in Slut presents a construction of “woman” that was unusually feminine within the context of imagery favoured by a second wave feminist collective such as Jillposters.127

Jillposters collective members were primarily printing posters to be pasted up in the street, occasionally working in two colours, which allowed the poster makers to maximise limited printing time and funds and suited the postmodern use of photographic images. Artist and founding Jillposters member Carole Wilson secured access to the print room at University of Melbourne, where Slut was printed out of hours.128 It was here also that the Jillposters’ printmakers made small editions on quality paper for their portfolios. Holyoake writes that “A lot of the work I did at this time was based on a simple illustrative style—juxtaposing images to create a story or project an idea.”129

126 Ibid.
127 Holyoake, December 24, 2011
128 I am grateful to Carole Wilson, formerly from Jillposters, who remembered Catriona Holyoake as the Slut poster maker and set me on the path to finding her and also to being able to attribute the poster for the NGA. Holyoake has taught digital media at RMIT for 15 years and is currently the Senior Digital Strategist for Red Cross Blood Service in Melbourne.
129 Email correspondence with Holyoake, December 24, 2011.
Holyoake’s central female figure was a photographic image of a woman striding across a street, taken from *Vogue* magazine. The image appealed to her as it was:

a positive active image for a fashion magazine, which usually shows women as the object. [The model] was one of my favourites and I really liked the dress; it was very simple and elegant. I was a bit of a chameleon—overalls one day and skirts and heels the next [. . .] you had to blend in when required.\(^{130}\)

*Slut*, with its appropriation of this photographic image and its gathering of messages and images from the immediate contemporary milieu can be seen as a deployment of Julia Kristeva’s “fragmentation of the imaginary” which Kristeva identified as a marker of postmodernist art strategies.\(^{131}\) Holyoake was therefore exquisitely of her time, elaborating in *Slut* the “real mix of feminist and postmodern theory” to which she was exposed.\(^{132}\)

Alder’s initial reading of the poster’s message—that is, that “super powers = penis [leads to] oppression of women”—was at odds with the artist’s intentions. As Holyoake remembered it:

I was trying to subvert the penis by making it look like a toy rocket (silly boy missile) in relation to the woman in red who is striding out

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\(^{130}\) Ibid.


\(^{132}\) Email correspondence with Holyoake, December 24, 2011.
confidently—separate and oblivious of the rocket. … it’s half rocket half penis. I was trying to make fun of it (Germaine Greer style). It’s just a penis!—Boys and their toys, men and their rockets. The cut out is to add to the idea that this is a game and yes we can change the play.  

And indeed, if the cut line were to be employed and the figure pulled forward out of the poster frame, then the rocket/penis, intended for the model’s midriff, would simply pass by into open space.

In the 30 years since the poster was made, the word “Paradise”, when combined with the sexualised image of woman, calls up fallout from nuclear activity in the Pacific Islands or Islamic extremist definitions of Paradise. In fact, Holyoake’s use of “Paradise” in the thought bubble was designed to be ambiguous: constructed as a series of comments on perceptions of female sexuality and the threat of nuclear holocaust. The artist’s intended readings included firstly, “I’ve sinned, I’m a slut (in the conservative male sense of the word), I won’t get to heaven [as in the Judeo-Christian construction of paradise] and I don’t care I’m having a great time.” And secondly, “Paradise; I won’t see you there because we will be dead and the world/nature/ beauty will be destroyed.”

Even in her hometown of Melbourne, a city subject to the ebb and flow of artists and ideas moving rapidly between Australia, America and Europe, Holyoake’s own collective struggled with the blatant femininity of the poster’s protagonist. Reflecting in 2011 on the reception of the poster from other Jillposters

133 Ibid.
134 Ibid.
members, Holyoake—describing herself as “deliberately trying to take a more Warholian/post-modernist tack”—wrote:

I think the reading of the poster was that it was offensive to women as in sexist. Carole Wilson was at least prepared to listen and out of friendship agreed we should still post it up in the street. . . . I did remember being disappointed that the poster didn’t fit with what was PC [politically correct]. Failure more on my part I thought to not meet the criteria. But I have to say I do remember thinking that a lot of the PC art was really dull and that some PC people were already being a bit colloquial. So the Vogue magazine image was, I thought, going to have more impact; [in that the woman at the centre of the poster was] a civilian rather than a feminist. [I thought] no-one is going to care about a feminist in boots and overalls, people hated them.135

The rejection of Slut in Canberra, in an environment that was noted more for flexibility than for political orthodoxy, illustrates the critical importance of artists’ access to diverse influences and opinions. While the proposed public display of the poster created disquiet among some members of Jillposters, Melbourne afforded greater access to rapidly changing international constructions of, in this case, feminism and allowed for an acceptance, albeit somewhat grudging, of Slut’s message. Canberra’s contemporary artists, particularly as evidenced through BRG,
were distinctly less impacted by the flood of disparate internationalist ideas that were making their way through southern capitals.

The decision to reject *Slut* occurred in what is now categorised as a postmodernist, post-feminist era. Arguably this brief period in the early 1980s could be understood *not* as post-feminist but as an interstitial moment; between second and third wave feminism and, importantly, as the 1980s unfolded, between the death of the artist-run space and the birth of bureaucratised art centres, in Canberra, nationally and internationally. This change from collective practice to funded contemporary art space is examined in the next chapter, which analyses the process and impacts of the amalgamation of BRG with ACG to form CCAS.
6. **Transition: BRG to CCAS**

To further examine the specifics of Canberra’s rapidly changing visual arts milieu, this chapter investigates and analyses the steps towards and impacts of the amalgamation of BRG with the ACG that created CCAS in July 1987. The chapter is anchored by a close reading of Anne Virgo’s seminal role in the amalgamation. Virgo, who was BRG’s second coordinator during 1984 and 1985 and then became ACG director in 1986, was appointed as inaugural director of CCAS in 1987. Her ten years in Canberra coincided with the transformation of local contemporary art practice from a youthful collective operating at the margins—as reflected at BRG—into an expression of contemporary art operating in a national mainstream context—as demonstrated through CCAS.

To clarify the significance of the changes in contemporary arts in exhibition at this time, the chapter also analyses the notion and reality of collective practice at BRG and the consequences of the loss of the collective model as it transitioned to a more highly bureaucratised contemporary art space. This, along with analysis of the exhibitions that preceded and followed amalgamation, reveals the philosophical schism that characterised the wider national development of contemporary art: whether arts practitioners were better served by spaces run by artists for artists or whether contemporary art should take its place within the network of funded art galleries and museums.
6.1 Anne Virgo

Virgo arrived in Canberra at the beginning of 1984 as one of two part-time coordinators at BRG, became director of ACG in 1986 and assumed the role of inaugural director of CCAS in 1987. She remained in that position until 1993 when she left for Melbourne to become director of the Australian Print Workshop (APW).

She had completed a fine arts degree at SA SOA, majoring in printmaking and photography. For a year or so after graduation, she shared studio space in Adelaide, making prints and photographs and working part-time to pay the rent. Along with many of her early 1980s cohort from the SA SOA—and like Martin in the decade before her—she left art school with an expanded social and political consciousness:

I had focussed specifically on what at that time was called community arts practice. When I went through art school and did a fine art degree my mentors at the time were very much the socialist drivers, part of the socialist party agitators in Adelaide, and so I grew up in a very political environment.¹

Passing through Canberra in December 1983, knowing only one other person in the city, the 22-year-old Virgo read the Canberra Times advertisement for a shared coordinator’s position at BRG. She submitted an application and returned to Adelaide. Within weeks she was back in Canberra for an interview in the gallery, with an interview panel that comprised Sasha Grishin, and artists Kay Ransome,

¹ Anne Virgo, interview with the author, September 17, 2013.
Tony Ayres and Stephanie Radok. “We were sitting around on chairs, someone was sitting on a metal garbage tin—it was pretty rudimentary.”² Virgo was offered the job and started at the beginning of 1984 in a job share position with BRG stalwart Mark Denton:

Mark was a local Canberra person and I was the person completely left of centre [be]cause I’d come from outside of Canberra. I hadn’t made a conscious decision to move to Canberra—it was just one of those things that happened. I didn’t know anyone in the art world [in Canberra]. [I was] totally disconnected.³

Despite her self-identified outsider status, she was well-suited for the shared coordinator’s position in the young collective. At SA SOA, Virgo had had it “drummed into [her] psyche” that “to be an individual artist was almost self-indulgent, that it wasn’t about the individual it was about working collectively, working in a different way.”⁴ Arriving in Canberra, she moved into a group share house in Yarralumla. The salary for the two and a half day a week position was $7,500, at that time “not much more” than the dole:

[T]o supplement our income from the Gallery we both took on other jobs; Mark worked on the merry-go-round in Civic and I cleaned the offices of an architect. Both Mark and I intended to continue with our practice as the role of coordinator was a shared position, but it

² Ibid.
³ Ibid.
⁴ Ibid.
wasn’t long before we realised that this was almost impossible. It seemed that we were both working full-time on a part-time wage— not unusual for an arts-related job.  

When Denton left BRG to work with Church and Walters at their Red Letter imprint in Melbourne in the middle of 1984, Virgo took on the coordinator’s role full-time. She was drawn to arts administration and, with Denton’s departure, decided to pack away her “paints and palettes” and pursue a career supporting artists. “I realised”, she wrote in 1986, “that arts administration was my first love and that my practice was secondary. For the next year and a half Bitumen River was my life.” Virgo’s introduction to the 1984 BRG Scrapbook serves to underline the fledgling collective’s ability to survive, despite tenuous circumstances, to the point where it could attract the beginnings of a useful funding base. Its survival to this point is testament to the continuing support of the local community. She named the year as “a ‘turning point’” for the gallery:

After two years [sic] of surviving on volunteer labour, on an inadequate budget, often witnessing “burn-out” by key members due to the enormous task of running an organisation with no or very little financial reward for their work, BRG was able to employ a full-time co-ordinator. This position enabled such basic

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5 BRG 5th Birthday show, CCAS archives, envelope, 5th Birthday Show.  
6 Ibid.  
7 Ibid.  
8 The period was in fact two years and ten months.
administrative functions as a book-keeping system, a filing system
and a more efficient program of activities to operate.\(^9\)

It enabled much more than these basic improvements. It is evident that from her arrival in Canberra, Virgo was interested in the wider arts community, both in Canberra and nationally. Throughout Australia, collectives and artist-run spaces that were opened and staffed by young artists, as well as funded contemporary art spaces, were proliferating. By 1984, only the NT and the ACT were without a federally funded contemporary art space. The contemporary arts sector was on the cusp of enormous change and Virgo, who proved to be both ambitious and a strategic thinker, had arrived in Canberra at a pivotal moment in the development of contemporary art in the city.

Virgo’s two years with BRG were characterised by a tremendous energy and curiosity. She travelled widely and frequently with the aim of progressing national relationships and building capacity in contemporary arts practice in the ACT. In 1984, she attended four state conferences: Artists’ Week at the Adelaide Festival of the Arts from March 9 to 19, the Regional Development and Touring Exhibition conference in Melbourne on April 27, The Art of Survival conference in Melbourne on April 29 and, on June 2, the Contemporary Art Spaces Association conference in Sydney.\(^10\) There she met with “representatives from each state to discuss common issues and develop a stronger network.”\(^11\) Continuing the gallery’s relationship with

\(^10\) The Contemporary Art Spaces Association was the first iteration of the peak organisation Contemporary Art Organisations Australia (CAOs).
\(^11\) BRG scrapbook, 1984, CCAS archives.
CSA, Virgo gave a lecture midway through 1984 at the art school as part of the Art Forum public lectures program.\(^\text{12}\)

Her first working contact with ACG at Gorman House, then directed by Ben Grady, also occurred in that year when a year of planning resulted in the BRG collective coordinating, with ACG, the local tour of the travelling political poster exhibition *Truth Rules OK?* This exhibition emanated from the EAF in Adelaide, and toured to the Woden and Belconnen shopping centres.\(^\text{13}\) At BRG, n arts fashion parade heralded the exhibition *This Year’s Model*, a china painting workshop presaged *A New Spirit in China Painting*, and women’s films were shown at the opening of the *Women’s Archives Exhibition*. In addition, BRG hosted lectures by Terry Smith (on Frida Kahlo), Gary Sangster from Sydney’s Artspace, Robert MacDonald and Jelee Pryor from Sydney’s Art Unit, and Juan Davila (whom Ayres had met and invited to Canberra).

Modelling a collective ethos, Virgo, Saxton, Ayres and Denton all wrote on behalf of the gallery through the first half of 1984. By March, approximately 100 people and organisations were on BRG’s mailing list.\(^\text{14}\) Potential exhibitors were given the aims and objectives of BRG, the current gallery roster, a membership form and an exhibition agreement. In an ad hoc manner, CSA often loaned frames for works in exhibitions, and members of the collective were prepared to frame and hang works for visiting artists, or to sit the gallery for the shows’ duration or to

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\(^\text{12}\) This initial contact progressed to a four-year teaching stint in Professional Practice at CSA from 1988 to 1991. CSA amalgamated with the Canberra School of Music to form the Canberra Institute of the Arts in 1988. Art Forum was initiated by Sellbach in 1983 as the Living Arts Program.

\(^\text{13}\) *Truth Rules OK?* was co-curated by Ken Bolton and Christine Goodwin and opened at the EAF in Adelaide in September 1983.

\(^\text{14}\) Anne Virgo letter to Marcus [unattributed, but most likely Marcus Breen], March 7, 1984. CCAS archives, envelope, “correspondence, 1984/2.”
provide visiting artists with a bed. Artists were requested to print invitations and posters if possible and posters continued to be sold from the BRG poster racks during and after exhibition. Members collectively mailed exhibition invitations out and posterered details of up-coming events widely around the city.

By mid-1984, a core group of BRG members who had guided the gallery through its considerable early difficulties had left Canberra for capitals interstate. Denton joined Church and Walters at Redletter Press in Melbourne. Ayres was studying film in Melbourne at Swinburne and writing for *Art Network*, and Brown, who, after stepping in as BRG coordinator for three months after Alder’s departure for Melbourne in early 1983, was working with the VAB of OzCo in Sydney. After a year in Melbourne, Alder was on the move to Redback Graphix [which had been founded by Michael Callaghan and Gregor Cullen in Brisbane in 1979 (one year before Megalo), before moving to Wollongong in 1980 and then to Sydney in 1985]. Collective members were buoyed by the support of their peers who had left Canberra for positions interstate and who continued to support the gallery in various ways, including being present at openings. These former colleagues would continue to support the gallery through the next few years, visiting when in town, exchanging contacts, showing in exhibitions at BRG and, importantly, facilitating national touring shows between artist-run spaces.

Reflecting the growing profile of contemporary art in Canberra and the increased national visibility of BRG and its activities, the gallery’s 1985 CDF grant, which was announced in November 1984, was increased to $27,000 and BRG also received its first grant, of $8,750, from the VAB of OzCo. Arguably Karilyn Brown, working at OzCo, was well positioned to stress the importance of BRG to the federal funding body.
The continued difficulties of operating effectively in a collective environment were reflected at the end of Virgo’s first year. The November BRG meeting unanimously agreed that Virgo should continue in the coordinator’s position if she wished to. Virgo was willing to continue, but the proviso under which she agreed to was that members make themselves more available for consultation and that they provide more support to her.\footnote{BRG meeting minutes, November 13, 1984, CCAS archives. Envelope, “Meeting Minutes, 1984.”}

One of the defining characteristics of the BRG journey during the period from 1981 to 1985 was the number of “crisis meetings” called. That the collective was forced into these periodic reactive meetings was a result of its essentially ad hoc beginning and the ongoing problems caused by inadequate funding and staffing, pitted against the strong desire for the gallery to succeed. Having run BRG almost singlehandedly through to the beginning of 1983, Alder’s “burn-out” precipitated an emergency meeting of members in late 1982 to assess future directions.\footnote{Alison Alder, letter to Geoff Shera in Brisbane, undated, CCAS archives. Envelope, “Correspondence, 1984.”} On that occasion, the meeting led to a decision to institute a formal collective membership base in an effort to streamline procedures and to spread the administrative load across members. In August 1983, BRG’s Future Directions Forum, which included Grishin among its attendees, had determined that the collective should commence proceedings to become either an Incorporated Association or a Registered Business, and on September 6, 1984—in an act that conferred a public legitimacy on the collective—BRG was incorporated as an association in the ACT.\footnote{Another compelling reason for this decision was so that the telephone number could be listed as “Bitumen River Gallery”, rather than “A. Alder”.}
This was a fundamentally important step that in its formality signalled maturity and a desire among members to secure the collective’s future. The 1983 conference elicited a letter from artist, teacher and BRG member Neil Roberts, (1954–2002) who, unable to attend, wrote that “the survival of the gallery or something similar” was “vital” to the development of the visual arts in Canberra. Roberts accepted that “a collective-run gallery is a desirable ideal” but believed that innovations such as “performances, installations and various one night wonders . . . could be more difficult to undertake given the trials and tribulations of a truly collective model.” Roberts was an active collective member from 1982 with strong ties to CSA, particularly in the Glass Workshop which, with Klaus Moje, he was instrumental in setting up in 1983. Roberts was highly aware of the inherent difficulties that maintaining a long-term collective consensus presented, given the members’ relative youth, poverty and lack of experience. He personally believed that in the interests of:

maximising . . . influence both here and interstate . . . especially at this point of time in Canberra, the appointment of a decisive and forward-looking director with the power to respond quickly to opportunity and change would be an exciting step in the right direction.18

These Future Directions forums and meetings resulted in actions that enabled the gallery to stay open in the lead-up to Virgo’s appointment. Virgo

18 All quotes in this block quotation and the paragraph preceding it are from a letter to Alison Alder from Neil Roberts, August 3, 1983. CCAS archives.
recalled that during her own two-year period from the beginning of 1984 to early 1986:

there were many times along the way—“crisis meetings” they were called—where you’d pull the group together and “There’s no energy, what are we doing, who’s involved, who’s doing this, what’s going to happen”—so many moments where it just could have fallen over.19

During Virgo’s first year at BRG, on May 2, 1984, around 30 people attended the gallery to reflect on the present and discuss future directions. By mid-1985, in the wake of the Pascoe Report,20 a BRG Search Conference, again titled “Future Directions”, was held at TAU21 and attended by 17 members. That this is half the number of members who attended the Future Directions Forum a year before indicates that the collective membership continued to be somewhat unstable, a consequence of the still peripatetic nature of the lives of those visual artists within the city. The perception and the reality of the available opportunities for visual artists to progress their career while remaining in Canberra was low. In response to a question posed about changes in Canberra and what opportunities and constraints such changes might represent for BRG, members’ responses included that, while acknowledging “an increased interest in galleries and art in general”, Canberra:

19 Anne Virgo, interview, September 17, 2013.
20 See section 3.3 The Pascoe Report, pp. 87–101 for an examination of the wider effects of the report on the ACT arts community.
Offer[ed] limited opportunities as a place for artists to live and work, especially after the publication of the Pascoe Report; rather Canberra was perceived as a stepping-stone en route to Sydney or Melbourne.22

The Pascoe Report cast a long shadow on BRG members. They were so newly emerging into a more receptive milieu but Pascoe’s recommendations extended little encouragement for future Federal Government-assisted growth. Although self-government was more than three years away, concern was also voiced about the economic effects of self-government on the local visual arts sector and the proposed concomitant Federal Government cutbacks to the CEPs, which continued to provide start-up funds for community cultural projects.

Possible futures that privileged growth in both space and programming were envisioned when members were asked to consider what BRG would “ideally” look like in five years. A key concern was with a larger space, “twice its present size,” with “more space and more staff”, based in the old GPO or in a “large warehouse or building that the collective had ‘seized’”.23 This larger space would allow the “staging [of] dual shows (thematic and experimental) at the same time” with performance art, sculpture, large installations and “risky and innovative” art.24 A focus on artists and the community also prevailed, indicating the deep connections between artists and community that informed the collective’s decisions, with responses such as “working artists should dominate gallery directions”, that BRG be

23 Ibid.
24 Ibid.
“a base/umbrella for other activities and a resource centre for artists”, that it “remain accessible to community exhibitions eg. mural artists”, and that it “connects with community events.”

While most responses envisioned a larger space within Canberra that continued to focus on emerging artists and the community, a few suggestions concerned BRG’s place in the wider visual arts community—that BRG be “part of an integrated network with all the visual arts groups in Canberra and interstate”, or in a more defined way, that it be “part of the contemporary art network undergoing radical growth.” The response that BRG could be “either emerging artist based, community based or part of a major contemporary art network but not both [sic]” is evidence of a broad understanding, from this particular respondent, of current national trends in funding.

Virgo was arguably the first person able to progress the idea of a fully funded contemporary art space in Canberra. While it is unlikely that she arrived in the city with that in mind, it is feasible that by the end of 1984, supported by the many national professional encounters she engaged in, the imminent possibility of creating such a space had taken hold. The list of 17 members who attended 1985’s Future Directions included six current CSA students, nine working artists, a community artist/administrator who was also a member of the ADB and Virgo. Five were new members and six had been members for a year. Only four, including Cherylynn Holmes, had exhibited and become members within the first year. Virgo was the least Canberra-centric of the attendees and arguably the most aware, given

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25 Ibid.
26 Ibid. nb original emphasis on all.
27 Or rather, “all three”.
28 Ibid.
her exposure through national travel, of the rapid changes occurring in the visual arts sector. It is likely that responses pointing towards BRG’s inclusion in a national contemporary art network came from Virgo and therefore it could be assumed that, by this meeting in mid-1985, her intention to further such an agenda was firming. A number of factors, however, were yet to align.

The question of appropriate space would have been uppermost in Virgo’s mind. BRG was clearly too small to accommodate any possible contemporary art space and the city, planned and constructed largely to purpose, did not provide access to suitable “spare” real estate—unlike the warehouses of Melbourne or Sydney or the bond stores of Adelaide and Hobart—that could be re-envisioned and re-purposed as centres for art. Additionally, BRG was deeply imbued with the ethos of a collectively run space. The small group who continued to lend day-to-day assistance in the running of BRG were somewhat peripatetic and unstable, but BRG was attracting slow annual increases in funding, its membership was growing and the gallery’s presence had demonstrated increasing need in the sector through its five years of continuous operation.

By the end of 1985, Virgo was having trouble seeing a future for herself at BRG. When Ben Grady resigned from his position as director of ACG—leaving the community sector in the wake of the Pascoe Report to open his eponymously titled commercial gallery in Canberra’s southern suburb of Kingston—Virgo applied for and was given the job.29 She resigned from BRG on February 14, 1986 and eX

29 Grady was one of a number of arts workers in the ACT who resigned at the end of 1985, following widespread dissatisfaction with the ADB’s handling of arts funding in the ACT.
de Medici and Greg Sugden stepped temporarily into the coordinator’s position.

Virgo recalled the reasons for her resignation:

I guess I’d done what I needed to do, it wasn’t progressing anywhere, it was a bit cyclic, you know it was a limited life there and in a sense it was time for Bitumen River to die. And the energy and the enthusiasm had gone. . . . [I]t was time to move on.  

In March 1986, she was appointed director of ACG in Gorman House. The position attracted more gravitas and greater visibility than the BRG coordinator’s role. Coupled with the excellent gallery facilities that she now controlled, it placed her in a stronger position to begin progressing plans for a local contemporary art space. It was not within ACG’s purview to show emerging artists and thus Virgo planned to continue the emphasis “on local professional artists: people who have perhaps exhibited before or have been painting for a number of years.” She stated that she was “keen to provide gallery space for major exhibitions from contemporary art spaces and regional and State galleries.” This would indicate that she imagined the ACG as a de facto regional gallery. Canberra would add this to its growing collection of cultural institutions with the opening of CMAG in February 1998.

Erica Green, who had worked under Virgo at BRG and been appointed BRG’s coordinator on April 1, 1986, described 1986 as “a year that embraced divisiveness, dialogue, rationalisation and review . . . culminating in many new and

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30 Anne Virgo, Interview, September 17, 2013.
32 Ibid.
exciting initiatives.” The gallery hosted nine solo exhibitions from local artists, the majority of whom were now early career artists as opposed to current or recently graduated students from CSA, as was the case earlier. Three interstate exhibitions—including the touring exhibition *Truth Rules II*, the second iteration of this concept from the EAF—and three theme shows—including an exhibition of printed works using multiple techniques, a members’ Christmas show of edible art and BRG’s *The 5th Birthday Show*—completed the calendar. It was clear that the local visual arts sector was strengthening as applications from potential exhibitors continued to increase throughout the year, and Green and collective members worked to build the profile of BRG and to emphasise both growing achievements and growing need within the visual arts sector.

### 6.2 Amalgamation: From Collective to Contemporary Art Space

It is likely that by the time of BRG’s fifth birthday celebrations Virgo had begun behind-the-scenes strategising for a BRG/ACG merger into a single contemporary art space, as the vote that legitimised the merger was less than a year away. The agreement of many parties was needed to progress any such merger. These included: BRG members, the ADB, the Arts Council (ACT) Board and its CEO, OzCo’s VAB, the wider ACT arts community and Canberra’s art consuming public. Virgo had a friendship with and strong support from Ross Wolfe, who was

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34 The nine artists were eX de Medici (*Work Saints*), Michael Cartwright (*Recent Works*), Stephanie Radok (*The Garden of Earthly Delights*), Wendy Ann Rose (*Up the Garden Path*), CSA graduate student Julianna Balla (*Layers Within*), Jackie Gorrying (*These Things of Mine*), Sylvia Convey (*A Coloured Life*), Gaynor Cardew (*The Great Graffiti Show*), and Monica Luff (*Luminus*).
director of the VAB from 1983 to 1988 and who, among other “policy initiatives of consequence” was concerned that each capital city would have a funded contemporary art space.\(^{35}\) She could also arguably be certain of support from Green, who had been her co-worker at BRG and remained her friend and confidante after Virgo’s move to the ACG and Green’s own upward step to the coordinator’s position at BRG.

Unhappy with the proposed move were the Arts Council (ACT)—which had only recently acquired its excellently appointed new exhibition space at Gorman House, “a space to work with that would turn many gallery directors’ eyes green”\(^{36}\)—and those members of BRG who believed that Canberra needed an artist-run space that catered for newly emerged artists and for works that would not find a home in either the commercial or funded spaces. This above all was intrinsic to the opening of BRG and had remained so for the period.

Virgo’s note, in materials pertaining to the fifth birthday celebrations, gives no clue of any future plans. She writes:

Most of my memories of Bitumen River are people, not only the visitors to the gallery but those that were involved and dedicated to the concept of an artist run space. The energies of these members built Bitumen River into a viable and valuable visual arts space, a space unique to Canberra and perhaps to Australia because we are now celebrating our fifth birthday proving that the ideals of an

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\(^{35}\) Ross Wolfe’s policy initiatives included agreements for a permanent Australian Pavilion at the Venice Biennale and establishment of the National Exhibitions Touring Support Program [now known as National Exhibitions Touring Support (NETS) Australia].

\(^{36}\) “Director drafts policy: Gallery emphasis on ACT artists”, *Canberra Times*, March 20, 1986, 5.
artists-run space can be sustained. Although I have now left
Bitumen River in my capacity as Co-ordinator, I still feel very
attached to that small building in the car park that was often
mistaken for a toilet block and hope that in a few years [sic] time we
will be celebrating our tenth birthday.37

The first public outing of the proposed idea occurred on October 21, 1986.
All were invited to a public meeting at BRG titled A Contemporary Art Space for
Canberra?, preceded by a meeting on October 9 of The Contemporary Art Space
Working Group—responsible for lobbying, advertising and organising the public
meeting—that included Gaynor Cardew, Sylvia Convey, Paul Costigan, Elizabeth

Arguably neither BRG members, who made up the bulk of the Working
Group, nor the ADB, were fully aware that a contemporary art space for Canberra
would mean an end to BRG. The ADB intended to fund both BRG and the ACG
going forward and, on December 4, 1986, the Board announced that, from a total
ACT pool of $1,105,063 in Operational Grants for 1987, BRG would receive
$33,000, an increase of $5,000 on the previous year. ACG was awarded $45,000.38

Just six months after the first public meeting that floated the idea of a
Canberra contemporary art space, the members of BRG voted, in April 1987, to hand
their constitution over to Virgo and the ACG, and the new organisation, CCAS, was
incorporated with Virgo as its director. On the surface, the transition to a

37 BRG 5th Birthday show, CCAS archives. Envelope, 5th Birthday Show.
38 Megalo was awarded $29,000, Photo Access $21,340 and Studio One $25,000.
Gorman House Community Arts Centre was awarded $22,640. In all, 26 ACT arts
organisations were awarded a total of $1,105,063. The largest grant by far, $200,000 was to
the newly formed Fortune Theatre.
contemporary art space appeared to be both welcome and logical, reflecting what English artist, curator and writer Richard Grayson—who first came to EAF in Adelaide in 1982—has called the “victory of contemporary art”.

There was opposition from those who believed that Canberra’s arts community needed an artist-run space. These individuals believed that the local arts community needed a messy, open, emerging arts incubator—that is, the community needed BRG. Vocal opposition came from de Medici, Huw Davies and Neil Roberts among others. Davies photographed the crowd as the vote was taken. There had been a hard and successful drive for membership instituted some weeks before the vote and many of those voting in favour were new recruits. Among the naysayers, folded arms eloquently but ineffectually signified opposition to the merger.

The opening of CCAS marked the beginning of a fully funded and bureaucratised contemporary art exhibition practice, bringing the ACT into line with each of the Australian states and their respective contemporary art spaces. On July 4, 1987, CCAS held an opening party prior to the official opening on July 10 by Daniel Thomas, director of the Art Gallery of South Australia. Virgo informed the public through the Canberra Times that CCAS’s aim was to “facilitate and encourage a program of activities that address the concerns and issues associated with innovative and experimental contemporary visual arts practice.” It planned to do so by supporting emerging and established artists, responding to the needs of its arts community, initiating activities and providing a forum for special events.

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40 The NT would have to wait until 1989 before its own contemporary art space, 24HR Art, would open.
lectures and discussions.\textsuperscript{42} The funding that had previously been extended to BRG and ACG became seed funding for the new organisation and ADB announced that from the total pool of $1 million for the ACT for the year 1988, the operational grant extended to CCAS would be $83,000, an increase of $5,000 on the previous year’s combined BRG and ACG grants.

The opening also marked the end to an ACT-based, independent, artist-run space with all of its attendant possibilities and frustrations. Six years after it opened its doors in April 1981, BRG—subsumed and renamed—entered the mainstream.

Australian writer/curator Julie Ewington\textsuperscript{43}, reflecting on the merger in \textit{Art Monthly}, wrote at the end of 1987 that it provided “one of the few admirable examples of ‘rationalization’ here or anywhere else. The Canberra art community and its audiences have come out the richer.”

This is despite regrets I share about the immolation of the old Bitumen River and its Collective. . . . [T]he exhibition program has always been wonderful and wacky, a combination of work from local artists and small touring shows, a haven for group shows by recent graduates and students from the Canberra School of Art, and a focus for art community energies. Quite simply Bitumen River sheltered some of the liveliest art in Canberra, and just about the

\textsuperscript{42} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{43} Ewington was head of the Art Theory Workshop at CSA from 1986 to 1989 when she resigned to become curator of SofA Gallery. She moved to a position at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Sydney in 1994, later becoming head of Australian Art at Queensland Art Gallery.
only scurrilous art, thereby standing as a beacon of resistance in this sanitized city.\textsuperscript{44}

Geographically, Lake Burley Griffin separated the two spaces, known as CCAS Galleries 1 and 2 at Gorman House and CCAS Gallery 3. The smaller Gallery 3, previously BRG, which had provided a focus as the “beacon of resistance” over six years, was situated in the heart of Canberra’s most expensive retail and residential area, Manuka. Among Canberra’s 1987 population of 270,000, the area attracted embassies and Canberra’s established wealthy residents. Across the lake in Braddon, Gorman House Arts Centre, which looked onto the conglomerate of high-rise government flats, was situated in the heart of what had long been Canberra’s poor, inner-north, artist-dwelling hub of Braddon/Ainslie, just down the road from the early 1980s counter culture experiment at Ainslie Village. BRG/CCAS Gallery 3 may well have been situated in the more socially exclusive suburb of Manuka but its program largely remained dedicated to artists and works that provided that critical “beacon of resistance”, particularly in this first year after amalgamation. In contrast, CCAS at Gorman House, in the middle of a demographic that sat generally lower on Canberra’s socioeconomic scale, presented a program that was often more highbrow or intellectualised than that at Gallery 3.

The crossover exhibitions at BRG and CCAS—that is, the last to be held at BRG and the first at CCAS—were \textit{Salon Coda: The Making of History} (June 10–July 5, BRG) and \textit{Site Specific City} (July 10–August 2, CCAS). Ewington described the former as “typical of the Bitumen River’s Style” given its “less-cash-more-dash

\textsuperscript{44} Julie Ewington, “Canberra Commentary”, \textit{Art Monthly}, November, 1987, 16.
verve"45. *Salon Coda* comprised 99 works from over 50 artists hung in the nineteenth century Salon manner. The exhibition’s title was timely: *Salon*, from the method that “provided an unparalleled opportunity for seeing what was being done by nearly every artist of consequence and seeing it at the same time and place”46, and *Coda*, to mark the end of an extraordinary period in Canberra’s contemporary art history. The exhibition’s tagline referenced the preceding six years of works from BRG artists, as the artists in exhibition were drawn from the ranks of previous exhibitors and included student artists, emerging artists, early and mid-career artists. Arguably, outside of CSA and discounting community art exhibitions, *Salon Coda* (see Fig. 10 below) constituted the largest number of local contemporary artists yet hung in the city. “Unhappily, perhaps,” wrote Ewington, “modern exhibition strategies ensure this is a rare opportunity.”47

45 Ibid.
On the other side of the lake at Gorman House, Site Specific City exhibited the works of five BRG stalwarts: de Medici, Ayres, Neil Roberts, Stephanie Radok, and Arthur Wicks (see Fig. 11 below), represented with works on paper, installations, constructions and video. de Medici and Ayres, both emerging artists at this point, had previously specifically activated the gallery with works that provided a “beacon of resistance” to Canberra audiences. Here, de Medici and Roberts contributed an installation that snaked across the outside wall of the gallery. Wicks, an early BRG exhibitor, was an established artist who had worked in Berlin, New York and Paris, with works held in the NGA and many regional galleries.
Fig. 11. Arthur Wicks, *Mobile Observatory*. Wooden machine (working), main blades 4m, total length 2.0m x 1.3m. Installed in gallery in *Site Specific City*, CCAS group exhibition, July 10–August 2, 1987. CCAS image archive

During the rest of 1987, Virgo and Green began to build a combined profile as CCAS from the former BRG and the former ACG. *Site Specific City* and *Salon Coda* were followed by the national travelling exhibition *Domestic Contradictions: Perceptions of the Domestic Sphere* and the local *At Home with Megalo Maniacs*. The former was a national look at contemporary feminism curated by Julie Ewington and funded by OzCo’s VAB and the Power Gallery of Contemporary Art. It comprised nine artists from four states—including Ann Newmarch, who had been Martin’s Adelaide compatriot—with works spanning from 1974 to 1987. It opened at the Power Gallery of Contemporary Art before travelling to Canberra, Shepparton and Adelaide. Works in the exhibition vigorously interrogated contemporary pressures on women’s domestic life and the uncomfortable and growing
intersections with public life. Importantly, it showed an early commitment to accepting national touring exhibitions.

At the newly named CCAS Gallery 3—which would continue to be referred to as “BRG” by Canberra’s art community for some time to come, and would continue to stubbornly resist efforts to sanitise its exhibition program—six artists who had worked together for the previous year at Megalo held a joint exhibition titled *At Home with Megalo Maniacs*. Printmakers Paul Costigan (Megalo director and visual arts representative on the advisory body the ACT Cultural Industries Council) and Gaynor Cardew, together with Annie Trevillian and Angelic Oltolgyin working in textiles and Lynn Dickens and Annie Franklin in photomedia, presented a different take on the domestic. Reviewing both *Domestic Contradictions* and *Megalo Maniacs*, Sonia Barron was able to find common ground, conflating their disparate domestic views with a Lippard quote:

> What seems to be most important in this whole matter is that we focus our eyes and our feelings upon the flashes of insight which our feminine sensitivity affords us.

The exhibition that followed *Domestic Contradictions* constituted the only public display of a selection of works from the Parliament House collection prior to their in situ installation. *Art in Architecture: Selections from the new Parliament House Collection*, was a very Canberran affair that ran from until September 27.

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Given that CCAS was relatively small and very much less physically secure than any of the national institutions, it constituted a coup. On her election as director of the ACG, Virgo had publicly declared her desire to host exhibitions from other state galleries. This desire remained unfulfilled during 1986 and the first half of 1987, but it seems likely that she had previously secured this exhibition for ACG and rolled it over to CCAS. The Hon. Stewart West, Minister for Administrative Services, opened the exhibition on September 3. Artists included Fred Williams, Sidney Nolan, Arthur Boyd, Robert Klippel, Mandy Martin, Imants Tillers, Gareth Sansom, Vicki Varvaressos and Grant Mudford. The Parliament House Construction Authority in association with the Rotary Club of Canberra presented the exhibition. It provided one of the few examples of exhibitions at BRG/CCAS throughout the period covered in this thesis where male artists outnumbered female artists, although it could hardly be considered as representative of local or national contemporary practice.

CCAS continued to enlarge its horizons, to cement its links with CSA, and to privilege women artists with its next two exhibitions. When the gallery showed *Jannene Eaton: Recent Paintings* from 1 to 25 October, Grishin wrote that in:

> presenting the first Canberra exhibition of Janenne Eaton’s work,
> the Canberra Contemporary Art Space has staged its first significant solo exhibition in its three months of operation.  

Eaton had taught de Medici drawing at CSA, won the 1987 *Canberra Times* National Art Award, and was represented at that time by Grady. According to

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Grishin, Eaton “presented the work of a mature, questioning artist . . . of remarkable pictorial powers and considerable spiritual insight.” Following on from Eaton’s exhibition was *The Crossing*, from two Sydney women artists: Adrienne Gaha, who was artist in residence in the Painting Workshop at CSA, and Narelle Jubelin, the co-founder/co-coordinator of First Draft, an artist run gallery in Chippendale, Sydney, with whom BRG had previously exchanged exhibitions.

The decision to show BRG senior artists in the first CCAS show was inspired, and from these examples of the first exhibitions under the CCAS banner in Galleries 1 and 2 at Gorman House, it is clear that Virgo successfully transitioned the Gorman House location from ACG to CCAS. Illustrating that Gallery 3 in this early period continued to function in much the same way as BRG had previously done, the *Canberra Times* “Exhibitions List” for October 29, 1987 informed readers that “in Gallery 3 (formerly Bitumen River Gallery) . . . is a group exhibition by members of the BRG collective, titled *Nowhere Utopia.*” Nowhere Utopia, a photocopy exhibition investigating Canberra’s peculiarities, is further examined in chapter 7 as an example of touring shows from the 1980s. The title–while reflecting on Canberra’s history as a largely unsuccessful utopian social experiment – acts, inchoately, as a paean to loss, a true reflection of the displacement felt by the BRG collective at the “immolation” of their collective’s home.

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51 Ibid.
52 *Canberra Times*, October 29, 1987, 14.
6.3 Notions of the Collective: Defining BRG

In bringing this chapter to its conclusion, it is important to reflect on the notion of the collective as evidenced at BRG. This thesis, in referring throughout to BRG as a collective, contends that it is most usefully defined, considered and remembered as such. Virgo, in interview in 2012, objected to the definition, saying:

When I started there the organisation was already funded. To me it was always an artist run initiative that did receive a government grant. People didn’t pay to have an exhibition—it was all supported and it had a committee, like a committee of management or an honorary board of management or something so it wasn’t really a collective in the true sense of collective.\(^{53}\)

Virgo’s retrospective objection, which disallows the use of the term “collective” once funding has been received, has little to do with the notion of the collective as evidenced at BRG. BRG’s principal raison d’être was to provide exhibition space for those locked out of other spaces, whose work evinced the “lost causes of humanity”.\(^{54}\) In setting up BRG, and Megalo before it, as collectives, members were following the historical precedents of oppressed peoples who have always formed groups of various kinds to gain combined strength for their struggles. Artists who have wished to voice views that ran counter to established positions or to

\(^{53}\) Anne Virgo, interview, September 17, 2013.
\(^{54}\) Canberra and District Historical Society Newsletter, June/July 1982, 11.
regain visibility within their society have formed collectives to conduct their mission with the relative support and protection of the group.

Although by the beginning of 1984 the collective had attracted local funding, the $21,000 grant was just enough to support a small coordinator’s salary and minimal running costs. This therefore meant that the day-to-day running of the space continued to fall into the realm of collective responsibility. Thus, CCAS operated from 1984 as a minimally funded collective, with jobs continuing to be allocated across a broad member base in spite of the small but growing amounts of funding extended to it after its first two years of operation.

Members were publicly referred to and self-identified as being the BRG collective even after BRG had been subsumed into CCAS. Virgo had herself freely deployed the term during 1984/1985 while working with the collective and then directly after amalgamation in the press release that announced Nowhere Utopia as “a group exhibition by members of the BRG collective”\(^\text{55}\).

The BRG community’s self-identification as a collective is referred to in numerous general meeting notes over the period. In minutes from the general meeting of 19 members on October 20, 1982, point one states: “That even though a co-ordinator is to be appointed, the collective is still valid for all major decision making, and through working in all the various sub-committees.”\(^\text{56}\) A year later, minutes from the general meeting of Sunday August 7, 1983 under “Any other business” state that a “Process of ‘intuitive consensus’ be upheld”.\(^\text{57}\) Among the


\(^{56}\) BRG meeting minutes, October 20, 1982, CCAS archives, envelope, meeting minutes, 1982.

\(^{57}\) BRG meeting minutes, August 7, 1983, CCAS archives, envelope, meeting minutes, 1983.
possible futures envisaged during the 1984 Future Directions Forum were that “an active collective would be reflected in BRG.”

The management committee of BRG after returning to Canberra from Brisbane in early 1984, remembers that BRG was “called a collective” even though by September that year it was an incorporated association: “The membership was functioning as a collective where everything’s shared. You just did it as a group because it had to be done.”

Printmaker and BRG member Deej Fabyc, commenting during BRG’s fifth birthday on the collective ethos, wrote: “I believe in working against the dominant ideology whenever I can. . . . I was involved in BRG because . . . artist run galleries are important.”

Finally—as previously noted—Julie Ewington, in reviewing the crossover exhibitions after amalgamation, lamented the “immolation” of the “BRG collective.”

The contention that BRG was not a collective disavows both the collective ethos that drove its founding and BRG’s continued focus on work that manifested the concerns of marginalised groups. Artist and art critic Mark Alice Durant has written that a community-based art collective “gives voice to the voiceless”.

BRG showed the work of minorities who would otherwise have remained invisible within Canberra’s available exhibition spaces, including Indigenous artists, intellectually and physically disabled children, and other socially and economically marginalised groups. That ethos remained alive throughout 1984 and 1985 during Virgo’s role as

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59 eX de medici, interview with the author, April 9, 2012.
60 BRG 5th Birthday show, CCAS archives, envelope, 5th Birthday Show.
coordinator, and up to and for a brief time after the merger. Indeed, pockets of resistance continued to surface right through to 1994.

Ultimately, it is BRG’s locus as a continued point of resistance throughout the period from foundation to after amalgamation, together with an unbroken line of collective decision-making and job sharing processes, that defines BRG as a collective. In an interview, Virgo warned generally against romanticising the gallery’s memory, but it is impossible to overstate the importance of BRG in the development of contemporary art in Canberra.\textsuperscript{63} Its mission was to show the most contemporary of art, made by those at the forefront of, and agitating for, social and economic change. Many of those who first exhibited with BRG would go on to become senior figures in the Canberra and national art communities. Throughout the period from the late 1970s up to the early 2000s, their work bore witness to the movement of contemporary alternative art from the margins to the mainstream.

6.4 Chapter Conclusion

The preceding two chapters have examined the trajectory of BRG from an unfunded, artist-run collective to CCAS, a fully funded, bureaucratised contemporary arts space. They contended that the BRG/CCAS evolution was marked by unique factors arising from Canberra’s position as national capital. These factors, temporally framed between the beginning of 1978 and the end of 1987, included Canberra’s subcultural homogeneity, CSA Printmaking Workshop’s radical emphases, and the influences of feminism and federal politics. I also dealt with the

\textsuperscript{63} Virgo, interview, September 17, 2013.
circumstances leading up to and following on from the amalgamation of BRG and ACG that resulted in the formation of CCAS.

In the next and final chapter, I examine CCAS in the period from 1994 to 2001 and the contribution of its two directors, Trevor Smith and Jane Barney, who led the organisation through the 1990s. Over this seven-year period, contemporary arts practice at CCAS transitioned, through national and international touring programs, from a preoccupation with local expressions of art in exhibition to a contemporary art space whose exhibitions program evidenced the maturity and confidence of Canberra’s visual arts community.
7. Transformation: Transcending the Local

This chapter examines key personnel, exhibitions and artists in order to contextualise CCAS nationally and internationally from 1994 to 2001. It begins by analysing the background of Canadian born and trained Trevor Smith and the significance of his appointment as director in 1994. Paradigmatic changes occurred around curatorial practice and the identity of contemporary art spaces during the 1990s and Smith began to manifest these in exhibition at CCAS within his first three months. Conceptually inclined and deeply theoretical, he was hired to shake up the existing culture. In order to examine Smith’s impact on contemporary art practice in Canberra, I closely examine the critical reception to his curated group exhibition Romantisystem (see section 7.2.1) and to Dale Frank’s contentious and memorable exhibition Satellite of Love (see section 7.2.2), which Smith co-curated with Christopher Chapman over the 1994/95 summer. In examining the motivations behind his appointment and the local reception of these exhibitions, this section places the CCAS program as contemporaneously relevant both nationally and internationally. Also investigated here is the increasing national penetration of CCAS through the slow growth of exhibition reviews in national art magazines and the impact of the loss of long-serving staff members at the end of 1994.

The second section analyses the background and appointment of Canberra artist and curator Jane Barney from the beginning of 1995 to 2001 (see section 7.3). Together with Smith and then as director after Smith departed in 1996, Barney brought an intense focus back to local exhibitions while expanding horizons for local artists by developing national and international tours for their exhibitions. Within this context of expansion, I also examine and compare BRG and CCAS travelling
exhibitions, and the activities of artists who came from minority groups or who worked in mediums considered as outside mainstream practice, including in poster making, Urban Indigenous and Indigenous art, photocopying, tattooing and gay culture (see section 7.4). Close attention is given to Barney’s curated exhibition *Beautiful Home* (from local artists Bronwen Sandland and Paull McKee), national and international touring exhibitions *60 Heads* (eX de Medici) and *Black Books* (Indigenous Canberra artists), and the international artist exchange and exhibitions *Canberra/Brasilia* (see section 7.5). Particular consideration is given to de Medici’s professional trajectory, which exemplifies the movement of Canberra’s contemporary arts practice from a preoccupation with asserting the local within the national capital space to a mature practice, whose confidence in national and international markets transcended the local.

7.1 Changes in the Definition of Curators and Contemporary Art Spaces

Smith’s appointment as director and his curatorial decisions during his first year reflected international paradigmatic changes around the definition and role of the curator. These changes had begun to manifest from the 1970s, in exhibitions curated by Swiss curator Harald Szeeman from 1969 and Australian curator Daniel Thomas from 1972. By the late 1980s as “curators began more and more to be creatively and conceptually involved in the making of exhibitions” and professional roles changed accordingly, professionalisation of curatorial practice arose in new academic courses.¹ J. J. Charlesworth has written that “the term ‘curator’ has been

¹“The formalized study of curating first properly emerged at the École du Magasin in Grenoble, France, in 1987 with a 10-month course dedicated to curatorship. This was
around for as long as there were bodies of objects and bodies of knowledge to preserve and perpetuate.” By the mid-1990s however, curators had transitioned from their supportive role in developing collections and exhibitions to acting as, and importantly being perceived as, cultural protagonists in their creative exhibition-making.

Among others who have written on these decades of transition is American arts writer Nicola Trezzi who has identified the curatorial shift as a move to “the practice of curating as an art in its own right, with its own structure and language.”


This questioning of the role of the curator was evidenced in America in 1990, at a workshop at Blue Star Contemporary Art Museum (established 1986) in San Antonio, Texas. Convened by artist and founding director Jeffrey Moore, the workshop’s intention was to answer questions around the notion of the curator within the contemporary art space and the curator’s relationship to artists and exhibitions. Proposed questions were reflective of a growing liminality around the role and included: “What is a curator? What does he or she do? What is the role of the curator in the art community? Why does someone have the right to call himself or herself a curator? Why is this or that curator’s taste better than mine? Is it who you know? In other words, does a buddy system between curators and favorite artists exist? Do curators have a responsibility to exhibit artists from their own communities? How do the duties, goals, etc. of a museum curator differ from those of a director/curator at an alternative space? How do the local arts community, the size of the exhibition space, etc. influence curatorial decisions?” As this chapter progresses, we will see how the spirit of these questions manifested at CCAS.

Trezzi writes of the “passage from a historical, ‘temporal’ perception . . . to a ‘spatial’ understanding of art.” In other words, a move away from curating as being solely aligned to the academic discipline of art history towards an approach dominated by artists and other multidisciplinary practitioners. This change was apparent internationally, as the 1990s progressed, through the rapid growth of biennales of contemporary art whose governing bodies extended their curatorial invitations to artists and where artists began curating satellite exhibitions during biennales. In Australia, by 2002, Richard Grayson would be invited to curate Sydney’s Biennale, (*The World May be*) *Fantastic.* As well, in the mid-2000s, OzCo instituted a funded program that invited international curators to tour Australian art spaces, in order to assist in both expanding the local understanding of the role of the curator and to positively impact international perceptions of Australian artists. At CCAS, this change was manifested through the appointment of Jane Barney as curator in 1995, whose own curatorial trajectory emanated from her arts practice.

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5 Ibid.
7 Grayson was one of a rising handful of artist/curators at the forefront of the rapidly changing construct of the artist/curator in contemporary art in the 1990s. (*The World May be* *Fantastic*) included “quirky and unpredictable” artists from 21 countries. Grayson stated that his artistic intention was to “look at ‘approaches that are fantastic, partial, various, suggestive, ambitious, subjective, wobbly and eccentric to normal orbits.’” Michael Duncan, “Report from Sydney: Self-Created Worlds”, *Art in America* 90, no. 10 (2002): 60–65.
Along with these paradigmatic changes in curatorial process, Smith’s appointment occurred during the decade in which contemporary art spaces in Australia were seeking to establish identities that distinguished themselves from the collective artist-run spaces of the 1970s and 1980s. By the beginning of the 1990s, having successfully transitioned to funded organisations, the inexorable tendency towards expansion foregrounded the desire for further legitimisation for contemporary art spaces. This tendency became intrinsically connected to the requirement to show need to funding bodies for increased support.

Having completed the first step in this larger acceptance of contemporary art, contemporary art spaces looked to the next forward step. The art museum, exclusion from which had provided the impetus for establishing the collective artist-run spaces that gave rise to contemporary art spaces, continued to provide an aspirational model. This desire for legitimacy by alternative artists had been present from the 1970s. Grayson recalled the 1970s as a period when alternative artists, relegated to basements and clubs, would walk past the art museums dreaming of a day when their art would be hung on art museum walls.  

As a result of this relentless drive towards ever larger models of institutionalisation, tensions arose between contemporary art space directors and the boards who supported continued growth, and local emerging and established contemporary artists who needed contemporary art spaces to enable the development and showing of new works that fell outside the exhibition parameters of the commercial galleries and art museums. A particular example examined in this chapter is Sydney artist Dale Frank’s exhibition *Satellite of Love*, co-curated by

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8 Richard Grayson, interview with the author, September 2011, Istanbul.
Smith and the artist, and shown at CCAS in association with NGA’s exhibition *Virtual Reality* over the summer of 1994/1995.

The structure of the contemporary art space during the 1980s allowed for an intense, personal, start to finish engagement with exhibiting artists. This “grassroots” curatorial input had a decisive impact on the growth of contemporary art practice and its increased visibility within the community. The position of the director/curator provided an opportunity to broadly affect the contemporary arts milieu. During the 1990s, this position became increasingly critical to the success or otherwise of the contemporary art spaces in general. One of the changes in curatorial practice during the 1990s was that while the contemporary art spaces were still essentially dealing with artists excluded from the mainstream, by the mid 1990s the focus was changing to artists who were very much included. The mark of an effective curator became about the quality of artists that could be attracted to the contemporary art space.

In chapter 5’s exploration of BRG from 1981 to mid-1987 and in chapter 6’s examination of CCAS from amalgamation until 1994, the roles of the coordinators and the collective, and the inaugural CCAS director were examined in terms of these two quite different iterations of the space: the collective and the funded organisation. I showed how the institutionalisation of the space progressed and what effects this had on the exhibition of contemporary art in the capital, as the culture of the collective, artist-run space transformed to a fully funded and administered contemporary art space. One consequence of this more highly administered structure was that successive boards came to play an increasingly important role in decision-making, particularly in setting different curatorial agendas through the hiring of directors. At the end of 1993, the CCAS board, seeking to bring the
organisation into line with changing national and international curatorial parameters, looked to hire a director whose focus would transform the organisation.

### 7.2 A New Direction: Trevor Smith

After almost ten years in arts management in Canberra, inaugural CCAS director Anne Virgo was spending increasingly long periods away from the city, leaving the highly experienced administrator, artist Brenda Runnegar, in the role of acting director, supported by CCAS members. In October 1993, the CCAS board—which then included Christopher Chapman (chair), Deborah Clark (secretary), and from CSA, artist/lecturers David Watt, Ruth Waller, Pam Debenham, Martyn Jolly and Anna Eggert—accepted Virgo’s resignation and advertised the director’s position.

The board reflected the paradigmatic changes that had occurred over the 1980s as collective artist-run spaces transitioned to funded contemporary art spaces. Board members were working arts professionals: educated, progressive and supportive of the contemporary art space model. It had been six years and three months since amalgamation and, with CCAS now established as the principal conduit for the exhibition of contemporary art in Canberra, the board sought a new type of director/curator, one who would bring national experience and international perspectives to the organisation and therefore to the capital’s contemporary arts community.⁹

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⁹ Deborah Clark, CCAS Chairperson, at that time, Conversation with the author. March, 2013.
A nationally placed advertisement, “seeking a Director with substantial curatorial, managerial and administrative abilities”, required that, along with “relevant tertiary qualifications in Contemporary Art History, Practice or Administration”, the applicant should have “a demonstrated ability to effectively liaise with government funding agencies, corporate and community organisations, all levels of the art museum and gallery profession, and especially artists.” The position attracted a salary of $36,638 - $40,946 per annum, more than two times the annual salary of $15,000 offered ten years previously for the coordinator’s position at BRG.

The interviews took place over a day at CSA, in a room whose long windows revealed the length of Childers Street. As Jolly recalled it, towards day’s end, he looked up and out through the windows to see a tall, dark-haired man, “striding with great energy and purpose” towards the school’s entrance. This, it transpired, was Smith. Successful in interview, he was appointed as CCAS director at the end of 1993. He commenced a three-year term on March 9, 1994, by which

12 Martyn Jolly, conversation with the author, October, 2014.
13 Canberra Times welcomed Smith in print a full month before he arrived, (Robert Macklin, “A Capital Life”, Canberra Times, February 5, 1994, 49), attributing the exhibition, Mark Dubner’s The Querulous Quest of Quiff to Smith. Perhaps the title and the subject matter—“humour, pathos and sexuality are used within a narrative structure to illustrate the protagonist’s travails”—sounded like something a young Canadian contemporary art space director would come up with? In fact, this exhibition had been organised some months before during Virgo’s directorship. In Canberra Times, February 28, 11, Smith’s appointment was announced under the headline “New director for Contemporary Art Space’, giving his starting date as March 9, 1994. On Thursday March 17, the Board of Management held meet and greet drinks in the gallery for Smith, prior to the opening of the touring exhibition Queerography.
time Runnegar—CCAS’s administrator of eight years—had been acting director for the five months since Virgo’s move to APW in November of 1993.

Upon Smith’s appointment, Helen Musa writing in *Muse* identified a general initial feeling of surprise among the local arts community, reporting in March 1994 that “As a Canadian trained overseas [Smith’s] appointment may at first appear surprising.” Smith was 29 years old when he arrived in Canberra. He had graduated with a BA in Art History from the University of British Columbia in 1986, and then worked as a curatorial assistant at the Mackenzie Art Gallery, established in 1953 in Regina, the capital of Canadian province Saskatchewan. After moving to Sydney with his Australian wife, he spent 18 months as the Art Gallery of New South Wales (AGNSW) site manager for the 9th Biennale of Sydney (1992/93). This last engagement, *Muse* reported, “obviously gave him a valuable insight into the contemporary art scene here in Australia”.

The use of the word “obviously” may have been somewhat tongue in cheek; Smith’s brief exposure to Australian art since his arrival in the country was largely Sydney-centric. Both his Canadian training and employment and his Biennale engagement, however, were important factors in the board’s decision to hire him and greatly influenced his own curatorial decisions over his three years at CCAS. He had, firstly, a demonstrated commitment to the exhibition of Indigenous art. The Mackenzie Art Gallery, from which he had come, had a proud record of achievement as a leader in First Nation exhibitions. Smith’s time there, the recent foregrounding of Australian Indigenous art through Australia’s 1988 bicentenary, as well as his Sydney gallery connections, contributed to his curatorial commitment to Indigenous

14 *Muse* magazine, March, 1994, CCAS archives.
15 Ibid.
art. Secondly, Smith worked with and must have been influenced by Anthony Bond, artistic director of the 1992/93 Biennale of Sydney, who sought to “expand the understanding of Internationalism” in his selection of “mainstream artists” and “emerging artists from beyond the traditional centres”.

Thirdly, Christopher Chapman’s position as CCAS chair and Chapman’s connection to Dale Frank and the Sydney gallery scene meant that the two shared similar concerns and interests and were able to collaborate on the Dale Frank exhibition *Satellite of Love* over the 1995/96 summer. Smith’s high energy and internationalist viewpoint were exactly the qualities the Board was seeking, qualities which would have outweighed his lack of local knowledge, restricted Australian art knowledge and inexperience as a director.

By the time Smith arrived, the bulk of the 1994 exhibition program was in place at both Gorman House and at the Manuka space. The program included: receiving (as opposed to sending out) international and national touring exhibitions; exhibitions from queer and outsider artists; sculpture and performance exhibitions; and continued forums on arts connectedness and the state of the arts in the ACT. A period in July was set aside for the new director’s first exhibition.

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17 What CCAS provided for Smith was, in a sense, his regional service, enabling him to apply for and accept a position three years later as curator of contemporary art at the Art Gallery of Western Australia.
7.2.1 *Romantisystem*

As noted in the previous section, Smith’s Sydney connections were a strong contributing factor to his curatorial decisions at CCAS. His first exhibition, three and a half months after arrival, was the group show *Romantisystem*, which hung in the Gorman House gallery from July 1–31. According to the press release, it explored “the intermingling of subjective and systematic approaches to artmaking”\(^{18}\) and featured 14 artists from Canberra and “around Australia”. Of the artists in exhibition, Rosalie Gascoigne and Neil Roberts were from Canberra, 11 were from Sydney and Robert MacPherson was from Brisbane. By opening night, Sydney artist Paul Saint had been added to the list of exhibiting artists. The interstate artists scarcely constituted an Australian wide representation. This is unsurprising given Smith’s Sydney-centric introduction to Australia’s art fraternity; the majority were luminaries of the Sydney gallery scene with a number from Sydney gallerist Roslyn Oxley’s eponymous gallery. The balance included Sydney artists Ian Burn, Maria Cruz, Bronwyn Clark-Coolee, Matthys Gerber, Lindy Lee, Ruark Lewis, Euan McDonald, Susan Norrie, Jacqueline Rose and sculptor Kathy Temin. The selection of artists speaks to the change occurring in curatorial practice where a curator’s worth was judged by the quality of artists a curator could attract to an exhibition.

During the 1990s the exhibition catalogue assumed a heightened importance within the exhibition. The press release promised “A post-event catalogue of the exhibition . . . including essays and installation photographs”.\(^{19}\) Although the

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\(^{19}\) Ibid.
catalogue failed to materialise,\textsuperscript{20} it nonetheless retained a sort of ghost-life throughout the exhibition, featuring, in its non-presence, in the many reviews that \textit{Romantisystem} generated. Faced with a somewhat curly curatorial premise and with this “catalogue to come” promise central to the press release and exhibition, and additionally without wall text or other textual markers, local reviewers Peter Haynes, Sasha Grishin and Kerry-Anne Cousins rose to the exhibition’s challenge with mixed results.

Haynes’ review in the Reviews section of \textit{Art and Australia} comprised one of a slowly increasing number of texts in national art magazines about Canberra’s local art scene, reflecting the growth of the visual arts sector and its increasing national penetration. In his review, which began and ended with comments relating to the absence of a catalogue, he elliptically wrote that because of this absence, “the works in the exhibition therefore operated as illustrations for an unarticulated text which paradoxically opened them to a wider dialogue about the nature of (some) contemporary art practice.” What are we to make of Haynes’ comments that “the clues though, are those plastic expressions deployed around the gallery space and it is precisely these which Smith used as the unarticulated text.”? Does Haynes mean that the works speak for themselves? Concluding “we must engage directly with the works if we are to begin to understand the impulse for Smith’s curatorial premise” Haynes seemed relieved that there was no catalogue, as “too often the text becomes the exhibition”.

\textsuperscript{20} Sasha Grishin, reviewing an October 2005 exhibition at CCAS from Ruth Waller and Tess Horwitz for \textit{Canberra Times}, acerbically wrote at the end of that review, “I still have not seen the catalogue for the \textit{Romantisystem} which the curator Trevor Smith promised to issue to explain his thinking behind the exhibition. A year has passed so I have stopped holding my breath.” Sasha Grishin, “Conventional Departures”, \textit{Art, Canberra Times}, October 24, 1995: 18.
Discussing a Neil Roberts work, Haynes wrote that “Within a minimal, formal vocabulary he creates a highly expressive amalgam theoretically contradictory to its imposed limitations”. “Other artists [in the exhibition]”, he continued, “adopt an assertively interrogative approach to the art history of which they are a part”, citing Norrie, Lee and Rose (the three woman artists in exhibition) as “clear though complex examples of this.” Haynes concluded that the exhibition’s “challenge” was “the directness of the confrontation offered by the works chosen by the curator. Its meaning lay in this challenge and not in the unseen/unread verbal defence.”

This review, while it indicated a willingness to engage with Smith’s curatorial premise, was ambivalent.

Grishin, a regular visitor to national and international galleries, wrote for the *Canberra Times* that “‘Romantisystem’ is a curious word invented to describe a curious exhibition representing the work of 15 artists, most of whom are from Sydney.” He reminded readers that most artists were well known to Canberra audiences, thus underscoring the art literacy of the 1994 population, but was largely unmoved by the curatorial premise:

While it is difficult not to be impressed by this selection of some very fine work in a wide range of mediums, even if much of it is predictable in its unconventional properties, the lack of surprises or startling discoveries makes this for me a somewhat directionless exhibition, a show case rather than an argument.

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21 All of Haynes’ quotes are from “Antisystem”, *Art and Australia* 32, no. 3 (Autumn 1995): 444. Original emphasis on all.
Grishin illuminated Smith’s curatorial premise for *Canberra Times* readers in writing that the exhibition:

is built around the notion of a dialectic between what could be termed a subjective approach to art making and a systematic approach. . . . The two are generally viewed as antithetic to one another, and the curator . . . has attempted to set up unexpected contrasts and oppositions to form new relationships between the works. . . . Without the assistance of a wall text or catalogue (although one is promised for September), the beholder is thrown into the exhibition to form his or her own associations and interpretations of the curatorial intent. This is only a partly satisfactory approach . . .

What is interesting about these critical reviews is their charting of the mixed community reception surrounding this change in the presentation of contemporary art in Canberra. The lack of a catalogue and wall texts as a point of contention in Haynes’, Grishin’s, and in Kerry-Anne Cousins’ review which follows, masks what was really happening. The change in emphasis from local to national during Smith’s directorship occurred a very short time after Canberra artists had succeeded in carving out their local identity from within the cultural and funding imperatives of a national capital space. Some members of Canberra’s arts community were understandably reluctant to relinquish this local focus in favour of national

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22 All of Grishin’s quotes are from Sasha Grishin, “No Discoveries in a ‘Showcase’ Display”, *Canberra Times*, Art, July 26, 1994: 16.
representations. Smith had however been hired to bring art within the local space into line with national curatorial and exhibition agendas. His perceived radical approach, brought to the fore with this exhibition, was not well understood within the local context in this first showing of his curatorial intent. As a sign of Canberra’s growing maturity, however, his effort was appreciated. Cousins’ review sums up this dichotomy of confusion and support.

Reviewing for the August edition of *Muse*, Cousins—like Grishin—believed there were 15 artists in exhibition and also that the lack of any supporting documentation made the exhibition unnecessarily opaque to viewers:

Smith suggests that two traditionally opposing artistic approaches can be present together in the same artist’s work. . . . Unfortunately this is not communicated to the viewer who is required to accept these theories without being given the necessary background knowledge to take part in the debate.

Cousins believed that the terminology lacked “any clear definition.” With the title eliding “Romanticism” and “Systemic”, she wondered if the Romanti[cism] of the title was “used in an art historical sense” or if it was “equated, as it appears to be in this context, with expressionism”? Cousins pointed out that while Systemic related to 1950s/60s American colour field painting, Smith appears to have equated the term with a “cool and impersonal” artistic choice. Cousins claimed that without any explanation of the terms:

the point of the exhibition’s unifying theme becomes lost and meaningless. Paradoxically, the catalogue in which all these ideas
may have been able to be discussed at greater length and presumably be made clear, will not be appearing until later.

Despite these reservations, Cousins concluded that the exhibition was:

one of the best surveys we have had in Canberra recently of contemporary art trends. . . It is to be welcomed that [Smith] is looking towards creating an exciting, interesting and thought provoking forum for contemporary art in Canberra.\(^{23}\)

\textit{Romantisystem} highlighted emerging problems that were connected to the appointment of an inexperienced director. These included a lack of record-keeping and a perceived disconnect between the CCAS charter and its implementation, which in itself was a clear marker of the tensions surrounding the changing identity of contemporary art spaces nationally. The former manifested early in a mistake over included artists’ names and the total number of exhibiting artists in the PR, the decision to do away with a visitors’ book—which precludes an examination of public response to this and other exhibitions in Smith’s first year, the lack of wall texts and the non-appearance of the promised catalogue. Although these could be explained by a postmodern anti-systems bent, they are more likely due to the new director’s administrative inexperience, the lack of staff at the time within CCAS and funding alternatives to pay for an accompanying catalogue.\(^{24}\) It is likely that Smith—

\(^{23}\) All of Cousins’ quotes are from “Art”, \textit{Muse}, August 1994.

\(^{24}\) Smith is now a highly respected and experienced curator of contemporary art with over 20 years’ experience in the field. He is currently curator of the Present Tense at the Peabody Museum in Salem, Massachusetts.
having come from a commercial, highly resourced, Sydney contemporary arts scene—would have believed that the national capital would deliver a likewise highly resourced contemporary arts milieu.

Cousins’ comments welcomed the wider contemporary arts dialogue that _Romantisystem_ appeared to herald, and underscored one of the board’s primary reasons for hiring Smith. However, the privileging of Sydney’s commercially successful artists sat uncomfortably with some CCAS members and pointed to a lack of understanding concerning the previously accepted CCAS core policy of supporting local emerging artists. eX de Medici believed that the contemporary art space charter was to:

- promote the work of emerging artists, not promote the work of commercially successful artists from very successful hard-core commercial galleries. It’s sort of like a cultural cringe inside another cultural cringe inside another one whereas I believe the Bitumen River Gallery didn’t really care about those debates at all.  

  de Medici’s multiple iterations of “cultural cringe” identified national and local tendencies to validate, as culture, that which came from outside. In the first instance (as examined in chapter 2 in the context of national arts funding), the cringe as an Australian phenomenon speaks to the national tendency that—until the rise of the Whitlam Government in the early 1970s—classed culture as that which came

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25 eX de Medici, interview with the author, April 9, 2012.
specifically from England. Locally, the cringe referenced the trend that saw successive intakes of graduating students from CSA leave Canberra after graduation to make their careers in southern capitals, particularly Melbourne. In Chapter 5, it was noted that many of the founding members of the BRG collective had left the Territory by mid-1984 to further their careers (see p. 223). de Medici’s third iteration of the cringe draws attention to the developing culture within CCAS as she saw it; this was reflected more widely in the national contemporary art spaces that eschewed exhibiting work by local contemporary artists in favour of those from other Australian capitals, especially Sydney. This speaks again to the growing tendency of the curator as star and the quality of that curator being verified in the quality of artists they attracted.

There is no doubting Smith’s energy and optimism, nor the local arts community’s efforts to make him welcome. Interviewed by arts journalist Helen Musa at the end of July and asked how he was settling in, he replied “Obviously, it has been a huge learning curve, but people have been generous. . . [T]hey mightn’t agree, but there is a willingness to be open to possibilities.” During his first active year in the local arts community he was interviewed regularly on local radio 2xx; opened the mid-year graduate diploma exhibition at the ANU Drill Hall Gallery in August, the ANCA tenants’ exhibition in September, and an exhibition at Jardine Gallery in October; chaired panels; spoke at conferences; and instituted a program of visiting local artists in their studios in an effort to get an overview of current arts practice in the ACT.


7.2.2 Satellite of Love

A powerful example of Smith’s curatorial intent occurred at the end of 1994, when Canberra’s contemporary arts consumers were invited to take a bold leap into the conceptual contemporary. Dale Frank’s solo exhibition *Satellite of Love* (see Fig. 12 above) garnered reviews that indicated some critical resistance to continued theoretically conceptual work from interstate artists. The exhibition was installed at CCAS from December 11, 1994 to January 29, 1995. At the same time, from December 10, 1994 to February 5, 1995, the artist was included in the group exhibition *Virtual Reality* at NGA. *Satellite of Love* and Frank’s works in *Virtual Reality* provide a comprehensive example of the differences in curatorial possibilities between CCAS and NGA during this period; while Frank’s works at
NGA could have migrated across to CCAS, *Satellite of Love* could not have been shown at NGA. This is mainly because exhibits in *Satellite of Love* were designed to cause perceptible, and at times negative, physical effects on viewers. Equally, these two concurrent exhibitions illustrate the particularity of Canberra’s small and interconnected arts community, which made curatorial collaboration possible: in this instance, between those working within the institutional model on one hand and within the contemporary art space model on the other.

Christopher Chapman, then an assistant curator in Australian art at the NGA, provided the critical collaborative link. *Virtual Reality* (NGA) was curated by Mary Eagle with Chapman as assistant for art component. Chapman had been chairman of the CCAS board when Smith was hired. Smith, who provided an essay in the *Virtual Reality* catalogue, and Chapman, who wrote the catalogue essay for *Satellite of Love* and the Dale Frank essay in the *Virtual Reality* Catalogue, shared an interest in contemporary theories and conceptual art, and were both passionate exponents of Frank’s work. (Frank’s Sydney gallerist, Roslyn Oxley, had supplied a number of the artists for Smith’s *Romantsystem* exhibition earlier that year.) The exhibitions were billed as being “in association with” each other.

The exhibition signalled CCAS’ emergence as a highly relevant national contemporary arts space. By 1994, Frank had become widely known for his conceptual, performative, mercurial and challenging art practice. *Satellite of Love* approached the apogee of conceptual art practice in Australia at the time, with a mix

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of objects whose conceptual links proved challenging to reviewers, audiences and

gallery staff.\footnote{See below comments by Chapman, Barron and Clark.} A wish list letter from the artist to Smith, written some weeks before
installation, exemplifies Frank’s free-ranging, fearless, associative approach; despite
inherent challenges, Smith and Chapman together were able to mediate the
installation process to an eventual successful conclusion.

Once again, the local critical reception to Smith’s curatorial intent indicated
a residual intolerance to theoretically challenging contemporary art from a non-
Canberra based artist.\footnote{See critical responses to 7.2.1 \textit{Romantisystem} pp. 256-264.} The November media release informed readers that
“automobiles, family snapshots [and] bodies” would be “touchstones” in the body of
work and that a 32-page colour catalogue, with the essay by Chapman, would be
available at the opening. Chapman’s essay in the \textit{Satellite of Love} catalogue would
prove contentious for Sonia Barron, who reviewed the exhibition for the \textit{Canberra
Times} in January 1995. Barron wrote that Chapman had gone to “extraordinary
lengths to justify, in terms of current and not-so-current art practices and theoretical
writings, what I can only describe as a deliberate assault on the senses.” Thinking at
first that she had walked into a “post Christmas disaster site”, Barron concluded:

\begin{quote}
After reading the catalogue and looking again, it all became a bit
nasty and a deadly serious mind-bending exercise. The artist as
victim, or a proxy for perceived social ills, is a fashionable posture.
\end{quote}
The twist with this installation is that the viewer is being deliberately victimised by the artist.33

Barron has picked up on the artist’s use of the word “victimisation” as quoted in Chapman’s catalogue essay;34 arguably, in this instance, the word victim has been hijacked in service to the reviewer’s negative response. However, rather than viewers being “deliberately victimised”, the artist was hoping to engage exhibition visitors in a duologue. In a fax to Chapman, Frank wrote, “All participants in this work including the audience could be seen as part of the terrorism/victimisation here. The roles are not clear.”35 The review indicates that Frank, whose work is essentially “concerned with notions of the physical, the physiological and psychological”,36 succeeded, as Chapman writes, in his aim of “[creating] a shift in perception which is actualised and apprehended directly by the viewer. . . . [An intense experience] we are unfamiliar with and deeply unsure of.”37 Chapman believed that, in reference to the viewer, “What is at stake is the possibility of complete surrender”.38 Frank’s purpose was therefore not to victimise the audience but to continue to explore the very concept of reality and to push the boundaries of conceptual art practice in the interests of this exploration. In fact, his aim was to invite the audience, in the most visceral way, to act as a participant in this questioning of reality.

33 All of Barron’s quotes are from “Viewers are Deliberately Victimised”, Canberra Times, January 13, 1995: 12.
34 Chapman, Satellite of Love, third page of text in unpaginated catalogue.
35 Chapman, Satellite of Love, final line of final footnote in unpaginated catalogue.
36 Chapman, Satellite of Love, third page of text in unpaginated catalogue.
37 Chapman, Satellite of Love, final page of text in unpaginated catalogue.
38 Ibid.
An unexpected consequence arising from the exhibition was that it led to a formalising of management’s responsibilities to gallery visitors. The final list of works in *Satellite of Love* numbers 17 and is essentially not very different from the wish list Frank faxed to Smith in November 1994. Components of works included “a small colony of redback spiders” and “chemically active paint”\(^{39}\). At the last minute,\(^ {40}\) exhibit no. 17—*For John (no, not John N.) This Is Not A Disco, I’m Only Dancing* (disc-jockey, living sculpture, music, lights, atmospheric fog)—was dropped, as the requirement of having a live DJ and a “living sculpture” in residence throughout the life of the exhibition proved impossible to accommodate.\(^ {41}\) Elements of the exhibition were contentious, with one exhibit being closed down by the ACT Department of Health shortly into the exhibition’s run: exhibit no. 7, *Tolerance + Acceptance—Fatima’s Global Cannon With The Allure and Acid Of The Fat Cow’s Afterbirth* (plastic, galvanised iron, water, varnish), constituted a hip-high swimming pool with a slick of varnish covering the water’s surface. As the water began to evaporate, the varnish fumes permeated the gallery and several staff members came down with headaches and nausea.

CCAS Chairperson (1994-1995), Deborah Clark, understatedly writes in her 1995 report that “*Satellite of Love* proved to be something of a learning experience for all concerned”.\(^ {42}\) The intervention of the Department of Health led to CCAS developing a draft health and safety policy at the beginning of 1995:


\(^{40}\) Room sheets have exhibits no. 7 and 17 ruled through with black lines.

\(^{41}\) Exhibit no. 15, *Untitled (For Christopher)—After Joseph Beuys* (television monitor, VCR, selection of 4 videos—*The Abyss, Point Break, Starman, The Last American Hero*), acts as an homage to Chapman who has written extensively on Frank’s oeuvre.

Recognising the hazards occurring in the arts industry, the [sic] CCAS will take every practicable step to provide and maintain a safe and healthy work environment for all employees. Although the [sic] CCAS exists to promote and support experimental art practices, when proposed work includes potentially noxious substances or other elements which may have a deleterious effect upon the workplace environment, this must be taken into consideration in the assessment of exhibition proposals.43

Despite the exhibition’s critical reception and irrespective of the scandal associated with the Department of Health’s closure of exhibit no. 7 and the artist’s unhappiness with that departmental intervention, Satellite of Love retains a powerful memory-life in the history of contemporary art exhibition in Canberra.

Smith had come to Canberra with a minimum of practical experience, but with a good academic background and knowledge of contemporary theories and a brief but intense exposure to Sydney’s contemporary arts milieu. His first solo year could not have been an easy transition for him and was obviously not for some others, including incumbent CCAS staff and those members who were committed to the local model. However, it could be argued that this same lack of experience allowed him to move beyond the status quo of the nationally accepted, bureaucratised, contemporary art space model in place by 1994. By not understanding that status quo, by virtue of having only had eighteen months of

experience in Australia, Smith was likely less burdened by the accepted/expected paradigm.

At the heart of Smith’s lukewarm reception from some quarters was an unshakeable belief that the contemporary art space model’s primary agency was in its privileging of local emerging and mid-career contemporary artists. However, in hiring Smith, the CCAS board had distinctly flagged a desire for a more internationalist curatorial approach that would inject a contemporary theoretical component into the CCAS exhibition calendar.

Ultimately, the exhibitions Romantisystem and Satellite of Love were a distinct alternative to all that had gone before. They provided a permissive model for the flowering of performative and travelling exhibitions that Barney, as assistant curator and then as director, would institute from 1995 to 2002. Barney defined Smith as “hard-core, deeply passionate about contemporary art. He swept away any cobwebs or conservatism that may have crept into the program.” This “passionate” commitment to difficult contemporary art set the tone for the next period at CCAS.

With Smith’s appointment, the CCAS board fulfilled their criteria of positioning CCAS as nationally relevant within this rapidly changing national sector. They were so successful in this endeavour that 12 months after Smith’s appointment, they were forced to make another appointment. The following section investigates the appointment of Jane Barney whose local focus acted as a balance to Smith’s internationalism.

7.3 Jane Barney

By November 1994, the CCAS board was grappling with a breakdown in the relationship between Runnegar and Smith.\(^\text{45}\) The two had proved ill-suited professionally and their relationship continued to deteriorate over the months leading up to November. Vivienne Binns, now living in Canberra and teaching at CSA, had joined the board in 1994. She remembered that they were “like chalk and cheese, really different, really didn’t understand one another.”\(^\text{46}\) Smith’s postmodern, internationalised, urban conceptualism and Runnegar’s local community orientation were deeply at odds: “she didn’t like or understand what he wanted to do and he didn’t like her style and what she was doing and there just developed a standoff”.\(^\text{47}\)

Binns had by this time amassed a great deal of experience leading community organisations through successful creative endeavours. She and Clark took on the responsibility of negotiating a détente. The board verbally supported both Runnegar and Smith for their different but equally valuable approaches and required that Smith take separate management/coaching classes. Binns arranged mediation sessions for the two and “smoothed things over.”\(^\text{48}\) She believes that by the time Runnegar resigned at the end of January 1995, “it felt OK . . . whereas the other way [without mediation] everyone would have been hurt and damaged.”\(^\text{49}\)

\(^{45}\) Runnegar was CCAS administrator for eight years and acting director on a number of occasions, including during the eight months prior to Smith’s appointment. At the end of 1993, Runnegar had endured the legitimate disappointment of being overlooked, in favour of Smith, for the director’s position.

\(^{46}\) Vivienne Binns, interview, February 26, 2012.

\(^{47}\) Ibid.

\(^{48}\) Ibid.

\(^{49}\) Ibid.
The loss of long-term workers brought a decrease in the previously deep connection between the gallery and the local contemporary art community. In December 1994, administrative assistant Lois Selby also resigned, after four years of service. This meant that by February 1995, CCAS staff comprised Smith, who had been in Canberra for ten months, and newly appointed gallery assistant Megan Elliot. Reflecting on the period directly preceding her own appointment as assistant curator, Barney believed that the board had realised there was “potentially a risk of disenfranchising” local artists by hiring someone who was more connected to art and artists outside of Canberra. In April 1995, Barney began her new role as assistant curator.

The appointment would have far reaching consequences, positioning CCAS nationally as a dynamic contemporary institution and presenting Canberra artists to national and international audiences. It made the best of Smith, allowing him time, within a more structured workspace, to continue to move the organisation forward. Barney and Smith worked closely together over the next two years. They were a well-matched team, personally compatible and professionally complementary. Barney was and remains a supporter of Smith’s achievements and of their time together, crediting the success of their professional partnership with a division of duties that allowed her to “focus on the Canberra connections [while] he was more focussed on the bigger connections.”

In contrast to Smith’s academic path to CCAS, Barney’s trajectory, both in her own photographic practice and in her career as a curator and director, was elliptical. She came to Canberra as a three-year-old in 1963 and, like many

51 Ibid.
Canberrans, moved away and back to the city at various times. She was awarded degrees in political science and history from ANU and then worked under a Community Development Program (CDP) trainee scheme at 2xx. This community radio station was a conduit for multi-artform practitioners, interviewing local and visiting artists and employing, in various capacities, numerous arts practitioners. Barney had been taking her own photographs, mostly still lifes, for some time and through 2xx was exposed to a variety of artists and creatives. She approached Photo Access with a request to do a cibachrome colour course and “had this fantastic experience. . . . I hadn’t done the basic introduction to black and white. They said ‘don’t worry we’re doing this intensive weekend course.’”  

This led to two years as Photo Access project officer. After this she moved to CSA where, from 1990 she was employed as an assistant at the CSA Gallery and from 1992 to 1994 as professional practice coordinator. In 1993, while the SofA Gallery curator Julie Ewington took up an Australia Council VAB Writer’s Fellowship, Barney stepped in as acting curator, assuming the role in her own right in 1994. During this time, she curated, among others, two graduate exhibitions and a staff exhibition. By the time she arrived at CCAS in April 1995, she had amassed a depth of local arts knowledge, and developed an energetic curatorial vision and a commitment to expanding national and international exhibition opportunities for local artists.  

Smith’s inexperience was confirmed when Barney, a week into her appointment in April 1995, asked where the exhibition program was so she could begin planning. She later recounted:

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[H]e said ‘Well I haven’t really got it written down anywhere.’ He was actually running three spaces in his head. I would be getting calls from artists and they would be saying ‘I think I have a show on then’ and I would ask Trevor and he would say ‘No, so-and-so has a show on then and this one is on the following month.’

She immediately set to work getting relevant systems into place, the first of which was a spreadsheet that timetabled upcoming exhibitions in the Main Space and the Cube at Gorman House and at the Manuka gallery.

Having set up structures and systems that would support the work of CCAS over the next five years, Barney launched into exhibition planning. She recalls making a conscious curatorial decision from the beginning:

I took it into my head as a bit of my mantra [to] actively embrace messy stuff when it came along because I think you can’t be in a

53 Ibid.
54 Making it even more extraordinary that Smith was keeping the exhibitions list in his head was the fact that the CCAS Manuka gallery moved to fortnightly exhibitions at the beginning of 1995. The February 1 press release from CCAS that year states that this doubling of the number of exhibitions hosted annually “[reflects] the diversity and excitement in the Canberra arts scene [providing] even more opportunity for local artists and audiences to participate in the excitement of contemporary art.” Curiously however, given this marketing of the Manuka gallery as local, the opening exhibition at Manuka for 1995 was a show of “exciting works by young Melbourne artists”, graduates of the Victorian College of the Arts, titled Displacement On a Summer Holiday. Smith, as reflected in the article in “Art” in Chronicle, February 20,1995, was by then marketing the Manuka gallery as being “recognised in Sydney and Melbourne as being on the cutting edge of Australian art”.
contemporary art space and be hanging things on the wall all the time—you’ve got to have some mess.  

In conversation with those who had had a long association with CCAS, and remembering that Smith had only been at CCAS for a year, Barney became aware that conservatism had crept into the program during Virgo’s long tenure. Increasingly the gallery had been filled with exhibitions that could be hung on the wall. The general consensus was that “Anne didn’t like messy stuff.”

Among Barney’s many achievements at CCAS was her implementation, with Smith’s support, of a national touring program and her forays into international touring and, finally, international/local artist exchange. She was deeply committed to the Canberra community and to revealing local artists to local audiences and then moving the works of Canberra artists out into the wider national and international arts communities. It was Barney who provided the impetus and energy for the international tours that marked the organisation’s growing confidence and maturity in contemporary art practice. By the end of her time with CCAS in 2002, the BRG collective which began as a local response to a lack of space and exhibition opportunities for emerging artists had completed its transformation to an internationally confident and relevant contemporary art space.

Barney staged important exhibitions in local Indigenous art, in the intersections between new media and art, and performance art exhibitions and programs. The latter, particularly if it involved “a bit of fun”, was a strength throughout her seven years at CCAS. She recalls of the period from 1995 onwards,

that performance art “was quite mature for a town of this age.”\textsuperscript{56} Performance art was one strand of the multi-arts practice in the young arts community where multiple art forms were blended in backyard gatherings, garages and at early openings at Megalo, BRG and Gorman House. Barney’s aim was to have “at least some [and] sometimes whole programs of performance art where the gallery space would be taken up for four weeks with a series of performances.”\textsuperscript{57} This was possible because of the number of performance artists living in the city, the majority of whom were students at CSA’s Sculpture Wepartment under then head of sculpture and CCAS board member, David Watt. Barney’s time at CSA meant she was intimately aware of the trend towards performance in the Sculpture Workshop. Her desire to open the gallery to performance art and to offer large scale performance opportunities to the artists helped it to flourish in Canberra and at CCAS during the period from 1995 to 2002.

\subsection*{7.3.1 Beautiful Home}

\textit{Beautiful Home: Just What is it that Makes Today’s Homes So Different, So Appealing?} remains a singular example of an artist-occupied gallery exhibition in Canberra.\textsuperscript{58} It was a very local affair that occupied the gallery over five weeks, from July 11 to August 8, 1998. Canberra artists and CSA students Bronwen Sandland and Paull McKee brought the concept of a transformed, occupied main gallery space to Barney. It would be messy, which Barney liked, and, even better, had the potential to

\textsuperscript{56} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{57} Ibid.  
be transgressive. Artist driven, with an over-arching performative ethos and ripe with multiple transformative possibilities, the proposal fulfilled many of Barney’s objectives and fitted closely with her personal CCAS mantra. The exhibition manifestly occupied the gallery space by importing the artists, the objects and the 1970s time period into the space in such a way that space, artists and audiences were transformed. Essentially, for five weeks, the gallery became home for a 1970s couple (see Fig. 13 below), “the perfect couple, liv[ing] the dream politics of domesticity under the microscope.”

Fig. 13. Bronwyn Sandland and Paull McKee, Beautiful Home: Just What is it that Makes Today’s Home So Different, So Appealing? CCAS, July 11–August 8, 1998. Installation photograph. CCAS image archive

The original first phrase of the exhibition title was *Home Beautiful*, a deliberate borrowing from the eponymous magazine that had for some time been an arbiter of domestic Australian taste and homemaking. Barney was still amused 15 years later retelling the story of the unexpected and unsuccessful negotiations that ensued between CCAS and *Home Beautiful*:

One of the people on our team said, “I know someone on the magazine and I’ll write to her and see if they want to put in some sponsorship or have their editor come down and talk about the history of the magazine or have some other involvement.” Anyway, she wrote and we got a letter back from their lawyer saying, “Desist from using our name *Home Beautiful* or we will sue you.” So I thought, “OK there’s no spirit of fun there.” So we wrote back and said “OK we won’t use *Home Beautiful*. Are you comfortable with us using *Beautiful Home*?” and they said “Yes that would be fine.” The invitations had been sent [under the name *Home Beautiful*] and there was a bit of pre-publicity in *Art Almanac*. I had to name all the places where the name *Home Beautiful* would appear and make a disclaimer in the back of the catalogue.⁶⁰

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⁶⁰ Jane Barney, interview, September 19, 2102. The catalogue for *Beautiful Home* bears the following disclaimer: “Re: *Beautiful Home*—the exhibition formerly known as *Home Beautiful*. The exhibition *Beautiful Home*, formerly known as *Home Beautiful*, has no connection with the magazine ‘Australian Home Beautiful’ published by Pacific Publications Pty. Ltd. Canberra Contemporary Art Space apologises unreservedly to Pacific Publications Pty. Ltd. for the use of the name ‘Home Beautiful’.”
The exhibition’s tag line, *Just What is it that Makes Today’s Homes So Different, So Appealing?*, is taken from the title of Richard Hamilton’s 1956 iconic pop art mixed media collage, created for the group exhibition *This is Tomorrow* at London’s Whitechapel Art Gallery. A staple study image for art school students, *Just What is it that Makes Today’s Homes So Different, So Appealing?*, was remade by Hamilton in 1992—for a BBC series titled *QED*—as *Just What is it that Makes Today’s Homes So Different?*. Its second incarnation, which Hamilton created on new media software, reworked original elements to reflect changes between 1956 and 1992, both in the international political arena and within the domestic realm. Sandland and McKee could not recall whether they were aware of this second incarnation, but it seems possible that it was referred to during art theory lessons.\(^{61}\) In any case, it seems clear that in *Beautiful Home*, the tagline operated to signify that the exhibition occupied a time frame outside of the contemporary, that the installation constituted domesticity as art and that its intended import was rather more humorous than serious.

Sandland and McKee were little more than acquaintances when they conceived the idea for an exhibition that required that they act as husband and wife for the duration. In presenting the idea to Barney they indicated that they wanted to begin as if at the start of the marriage, enjoy the loveliness of that early relationship, and then proceed through turmoil to the eventual dissolution of the relationship. Barney remembers that she warned them:

\(^{61}\) Bronwyn Sandland, Conversation with the author, February 16, 2013.
Be careful. You’ll be in a public space performing this and you
don’t want to get to the breakup too early because we don’t want a
whole month of you in the gallery fighting. And neither do you.\textsuperscript{62}

Initially the artists planned to leave the gallery and go to their respective
homes on Mondays and Tuesdays when the gallery was closed to the public. On the
first of these Mondays both left the gallery but before the end of the day “they came
rushing back and said ‘Actually, we’ve decided not to go home because it’s too hard
to extract. We want to just stay here and live here’.”\textsuperscript{63} Their self-imposed exile from
their everyday lives constituted a gallery-based immersion that has remained
unparalleled in Canberra.\textsuperscript{64} The artists filled their co-opted space with furniture and
objects that referenced home decor of the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s. These were not
beautiful objects but rather mismatched signifiers of an everyperson’s home, chosen
for their power to elicit layers of memories. McKee, sporting muttonchop sideburns,
shoulder length hair and a beard, had a wardrobe of vintage outfits, and Sandland
chose her many outfit changes from a rack of vintage op-shop clothes. Curiously, as
Naomi Horridge writes in the catalogue essay that followed the exhibition: “In the
melange of styles time slipped and it became apparent that neither artists nor

\textsuperscript{62} Jane Barney, interview, September 19, 2012.
\textsuperscript{63} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{64} In 1978, the artist Micky Allen staged \textit{Photography, Drawing and Poetry: A Live-in Show} at Ewing and George Paton galleries, University of Melbourne. In 2008, she
remembered the experience: “The Live-in Show was my first solo exhibition. In it I wanted
to change the experience of the gallery goer from one of white walls, hush, hush, don’t
speak, say what you really think when you get out of here—to one of sit down, relax, absorb
the work at varying rates, discussing as you go, integrating the experience of being in a
gallery with other life activities.” Accessed July 10, 2016,
audience were sure what actually happened in which decade.” Nor did they appear to mind.

For Beautiful Home, the gallery was set up as a notional house, albeit one without physical walls. Spaces quickly assumed gendered identities; McKee commandeered his “den”, Sandland personalised the “bedroom”. The exhibition also became, as Barney remembers “very much about their relationship”, and an example of the power of space to transform those who inhabit it versus those who visit it, in unexpected ways:

It was a very brave thing to do and it did at times become almost them versus the intruders, the visitors; there were moments when it would become stressful for them and then they remembered that they wanted people to come and visit.66

The enormous public response to Beautiful Home surprised artists and gallery staff. A much larger than expected number of visitors attended the exhibition and took part in various events. Of the opening day McKee wrote:

[W]e had three hundred people. We were overawed. We put Skippy on the tele, wrapped a rug around us and said “Hey”. Everyone sat down in the lounge. A German woman said, “this is the first bit of Australia I saw”. . . . At the housewarming [that night] two hundred people partied, it was a hoot. We had a guy playing the Hammond

Organ and a cover band playing Burt Bacharach. A dapper silver moustachioed man in his sixties came in, to tell the staff that his wife had asked for something really unusual to do on Friday night. They came for the pyjama party . . . in red dressing gowns and pyjamas.67

*Beautiful Home’s* public program was extensive. As well as the opening night housewarming party and the aforementioned pyjama party, the artists hosted a fondue party, video nights and a bridge afternoon. Of the latter, Barney recalls:

[I] got my old mum who played bridge to come and do a bridge day and we got the *Canberra Times* Bridge writer to come down and he did a real analysis of one of the hands in his bridge column.

*[Beautiful Home]* went to all of these illogical extremes.68

There were unexpected audience interactions. While nostalgia was deliberately privileged in the exhibition plan, objects familiar to viewers from their youth or childhood elicited life stories that were at times exhaustingly personal for the artists to hear; neither artist was expecting the level of intimacy that evolved between themselves and audiences. Following the exhibition Sandland wrote, “We didn’t prepare ourselves for how much energy it takes to listen to everyone”.69

Barney, who remained both a keen observer and a willing participant in the unfolding process, retains clear memories:

The punters would come in on the weekend and they’d be rifling through . . . as Bronwyn said “. . . our undies”. Things were left open and a bit spilly and a bit messy. Bronwyn was a big knitter and she would create giant pompons, often in colours to match her clothes.70

The immersive nature of the exhibition affected the relationship between artists and gallery staff as much as between artists and audiences. In reminiscing about the exhibition, which she remembers as “an amazing experience”, and which required gallery staff to negotiate their working space differently, Barney reflected more widely on this concept of navigated, negotiated space:

As people working there you had to navigate your way around. Our office at that time was right next to their home. You were conscious that you couldn’t just walk through the gallery to the storeroom, for example, as there were people living there. So the gallery became our negotiated space [in this exhibition and others]. We used to comment sometimes that you would quite enjoy the reclamation that used to go on for four days between exhibitions. It was our space in

that time; it was as though you would wipe the space clean and start again.\textsuperscript{71}

Some gallery staff had more difficulty than others negotiating this separation between exhibition space and working space. While Sandland didn’t have a “day job” and was therefore in the exhibition space full-time, McKee, as most “husbands” did during the period represented in exhibition, went out to work every day. Barney was made aware after the exhibition came down that:

one of the staff working with me, who was this little skinny person that was always hungry, would suddenly materialise in the gallery every time they would organise lunch or dinner. “Oh we were feeding three people,” Bronwyn said. “You know, it was our home and we were getting a little bit sick of it because she would turn up for lunch every day.”\textsuperscript{72}

The variables inherent in the exhibition concept and design for Beautiful Home included this always-present, transgressive potential between artists and staff associated with negotiating the transformed gallery space. Additionally, they included the unpredictable nature of artist/audience interaction. With the latter, any perceived control that the artists may have thought they had rapidly slipped away. The combinations of objects, artists/performers and an audience for whom the usual boundaries were removed created a volatile, liminal environment. While other artists

\textsuperscript{71} Jane Barney, interview, September 19, 2012.
\textsuperscript{72} Ibid.
were making performative interventions into historic homes in this period, the particular 24-hour-a-day immersion practiced by Sandland and McKee was unique in Canberra. The western gallery construct is essentially designed to house exhibitions that are generally static once installed, and where viewers are not usually encouraged to interact with the art. In any single exhibition period, each viewer, although his or her individual responses will vary, can generally expect to encounter the same exhibition. Performance art at CCAS, and in particular in Beautiful Home, became a product of many interactions that were unknown before they occurred. The usual boundaries were absent, the number of visitors was high and the results were therefore unpredictable.

7.4 Exhibiting Minorities and Touring Exhibitions at BRG/CCAS: A Comparison

This section examines the representation of minorities in exhibition at BRG/CCAS. These were largely successful and often groundbreaking incursions that provided a foil to the growing number of official cultural spaces and institutional exhibitions that marked Canberra as a national capital space. BRG and CCAS were contiguous iterations of the same physical and conceptual space, although their governance and funding parameters were different. Both iterations showed a commitment to exhibiting the works of artists who were members of minority groups or who worked in mediums that fell well outside established parameters. During BRG’s existence, when the local community was vigorously agitating for recognition within the national capital space, “minority exhibitions” served to clearly differentiate between local emerging art and the institutional/commercial national capital space reality. Minority exhibitions at CCAS gradually moved away from this
focus on creating a clearly differentiated local community to display a growing maturity and confidence within national and, from the mid 1990s, international markets.

As established in chapter 5, BRG was in essence anti-establishment, acting in opposition to both the institutional and the commercial gallery models in the city from foundation in 1981 through to merger in 1987. BRG’s early struggle to survive without access to local or national funding—in itself, a marker of minority within the established art scene—has been previously discussed. Early exhibitors and collective members can be defined as coming from obvious minority groups within a city that, at that time (as outlined in chapter 2), existed primarily as Australia’s national capital space.

Both the first and second exhibitions at BRG, *Bill Posters Appreciated* and *Dreamtime Machinetime*, heralded profound changes in the reception of contemporary poster making and urban Indigenous art respectively. Toward the end of the 1980s, escalating changes would see both artforms move from the margins into the mainstream.

The position of the poster in Australian art history in the 1980s made visible the end of modernism and the rise of popular culture. Posters and prints in *Bill Posters Appreciated* were sourced from local, national and international printmakers and cooperatives making works at the margins of art practice, championing causes whose protagonists came from minority social groups. Roger Butler recalls this period as a time when NGA was “putting in place strategies for acquisitions on a number of fronts Australia wide”.73 These included the acquisition for the national

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73 Roger Butler, email to the author, August 3, 2011.
collection of more than 30 posters in the period from 1981 to 1983, from members of Megalo who were exhibiting at BRG and the artists from Australian and international collectives who had been represented in Bill Posters Appreciated. Butler recalled his reaction to that exhibition, writing that it caused him to think of:

the whole movement and all those that were producing posters in the ACT and elsewhere. Colin Little was a focus; the example of Earthworks and then his work at Megalo highlighted the diverse strength of the movement.  

Little died in October 1982 at the age of 30, a decade after he had established the Earthworks Poster Collective (1972–1979, Tin Sheds, Sydney). Butler contextualised Little’s oeuvre within a short history of poster making, in his essay for the Colin Little Retrospective exhibition at BRG (August 10–23, 1983). The exhibition underlined the primary link between the genesis of BRG and its roots as an outlet for the poster making culture as demonstrated in Canberra by Megalo. Throwing light on the wider national context, Butler concluded that, “A fitting response to [Little’s] career is that the poster, traditionally regarded by Australian art museums as ephemeral and unimportant, has had to be reassessed.”

BRG continued to engage with printmaking throughout the period leading to amalgamation in 1987. BRG’s engagement with Indigenous Australia was uneven during the period to amalgamation. It was not until 1995, when Smith conceived the exhibition Naii Ngarrambai Wanggirali Burrangiri Nangi Dyannai Ngurui (the lay of the land is

74 Ibid.
how you know your country; when you look behind you, you can always see your
tracks) that was subsequently developed by gallery assistant Megan Elliot, that
Indigenous exhibitions became an annual CCAS occurrence. The first of the
Indigenous exhibitions at BRG was Trevor Nickolls’s Dreamtime Machinetime (as
examined in section 5.1.4).

Nickolls was already in a minority as an Indigenous Australian; his body of
work in BRG’s second exhibition Dreamtime Machinetime was, as a manifestation
of urban Indigenous art in 1981, in a minority of one. His position as the heraldic
messenger of the urban Indigenous art movement has been previously identified.
Nickolls, who in 1976 was a prize-winner in Canberra’s Civic Permanent Art Award
(established 1971), first exhibited works in Canberra with the ACA (ACT) in May
1977 at its CTC Gallery location.76 This brief showing at CTC Gallery, from 11am
to 10pm over four days, passed largely unnoticed, although W. L. Hoffman
mentioned it in his May 26 “The World of Music” column in the Canberra Times,
writing that the exhibition showed “how people of a different culture and a different
frame of reference see modern society.”77 Nickolls himself, who in that year was
studying at the CCAE,78 hoped the works would “show people how to appreciate the

76 Design and Art Australia Online. “1976 Canberra Civic Permanent Art Award.”
Accessed August 15, 2016,
permanent-art-award/.
78 CCAE (which became UC in 1990) was established in 1967. Prime Minister John
Gorton’s speech at the unveiling of its Foundation Stone, on October 28, 1968, reminds us
how geographically small Canberra was: “One more thing, Sir, I would say. This college is
being built in open country, but within measurable time, within a short time, there will be
around it the new town of Belconnen.” John Gorton, “Speech at Unveiling of Foundation
search by black people for identity and dignity in our modern technological
society." As noted in chapter 5 (see p. 165), Nickolls’s return to Canberra in 1981
to take up the H. C. Coombs Creative Arts Fellowship led to the meeting on campus
with Colin Little that resulted in the decision to stage *Dreamtime Machinetime* at
BRG.

Nickolls’s exhibition was seminally important. Much more than just another
step in the paradigmatic shift of Indigenous art from ethnographic display in
museums to fine art exhibition in institutional and commercial galleries, it
constituted the first cohesive manifestation of urban Indigenous art in exhibition in
Australia. The following discussion outlines the trajectory of Indigenous art in
exhibition in Australia preceding *Dreamtime Machinetime* and looks briefly at the
reception and flowering of Urban Indigenous art post-*Dreamtime Machinetime* to
further illuminate this shifting paradigm.

In 1959, Tony Tuckson, at the time the deputy director of AGNSW, made
the pioneering taxonomic leap to exhibit Indigenous art in a gallery context for the
first time. NGV was the only Australian institution in the 1970s to purchase
contemporary Aboriginal art for its permanent collection. NGV opened its gallery of
Oceanic art “whose prime purpose [was] the exhibition of Aboriginal art” in 1984. In
the 1980s, NGA and the Art Gallery of Western Australia included the acquisition
of Indigenous art in their collection policies, but it was not until the 1990s that
Australia’s other state galleries began to purchase contemporary Indigenous art.
Commercial galleries also began to curate exhibitions of Western Desert and

79 Hoffman, “The World of Music”.
80 “Aboriginal Art and the National Gallery of Victoria”, *National Gallery of
Arnhem Land art during the 1980s. A handful of government-funded exhibitions toured internationally towards the end of the 1980s, reflecting the Federal Government’s interest in promoting the iconography of North Australian Aboriginal art as the international cultural face of Australia’s Bicentenary celebrations. The highest profile was *Dreamings: The Art of Aboriginal Australia*, organised by the Asia Society with professional input from the collections and anthropology staff of the South Australian Museum.\(^{81}\) In its contemporary form, re-classified as fine art, the exhibition of an efflorescence of Indigenous art practice—including, since the 1990s, urban Indigenous art—has become increasingly intense.

Another early link between BRG and NGA was forged as a result of Nickolls’s relationship with BRG. Three years after his 1981 *Dreamtime Machinetime* exhibition at BRG, *Koori Art ’84* introduced Sydney audiences to contemporary urban Indigenous artists for the first time. Wally Caruana characterised the exhibition, which was held at Artspace in Sydney, as “a watershed . . . for urban Aboriginal art and artists.”\(^{82}\) The purchase by the AGNSW, from this exhibition, of Jeffrey Samuels’ *This Changing Continent of Australia* had been previously recognised as the first acquisition of urban Indigenous art by a national or state gallery.\(^{83}\) The NGA, however, acquired Nickolls’s eponymous painting *Dreamtime Machinetime* in 1982 as a result of seeing it in exhibition at

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\(^{81}\) *Dreamings: The Art of Aboriginal Australia* opened in New York in October 1988, then toured to Chicago, Melbourne and finally, in 1990, to the South Australian Museum.


\(^{83}\) Ibid.
BRG in 1981, thus making the NGA the first institution to purchase an urban Indigenous work. 84

Many of the thirty artists involved in *Koori Art '84* had previously been working in isolation. With the aim of increasing exhibition, curatorship and professional development opportunities, a number of these Indigenous artists founded Boomalli Artist’s Co-operative in 1987. *Boomalli* means “to strike or make a mark”, and throughout the end of the 1980s and into the 1990s, Boomalli acted to significantly increase the profile of a number of city-based Indigenous artists. By the early 1990s, Brenda L. Croft, Djon Mundine, Hetti Perkins, Bronwyn Bancroft, Fiona Foley and Daphne Wallace had emerged as the first generation of Indigenous individuals working in the combined roles of artists-curators in Australia.

Nickolls’s seminal importance to urban Indigenous art cannot be overstated. On hearing of his death in October 2012, Vernon Ah Kee, a founding member of proppaNow, Brisbane’s urban Indigenous artist’s collective wrote:

> In 2012 we are still grappling with identity and art. It is a healthy dialogue I think. And Nickolls is as much a part of that discourse as he ever was. I think back to when I first moved to Brisbane in the early 1990s and people began talking more and more about this

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thing called ‘Urban’ Aboriginal art. Trevor Nickolls was before all that.85

BRG’s engagement with Indigenous Australia included one other exhibition also held in its first year of operation. This was a photographic exhibition of Indigenous Australians from non-Indigenous Australian artist Judo (now Juno) Gemes titled *We Wait No More: A Selection of Photographs and Textures*. Photography was familiar to gallery visitors and presented a generally more accessible view of Aboriginal people than had Nickolls’s *Dreamtime Machinetime* thesis. Visitors’ book responses included: “Impressed with stillness and respect for the people. Can feel the hope and strength”; “Very impressed with poetry, stillness & feeling in images.” However, the colonial concept of the noble savage was also alive and well. This was evidenced by the response “Thanks for the faces—noble. I was impressed by how well the people looked” and the following comment that, in its admittance of “a lack of knowledge”, echoed the wider non-Indigenous understanding of 1980s Aboriginal Australia:

Impressed by openness honesty of the faces. Felt in harmony with their strong identification with the land. Felt backward about my lack of knowledge about Aboriginal achievement. Renewed my

belief in equality, identity and people. Tremendous eye-opener. I hope this exhibition travels across the country.86

It would be 13 years before BRG’s successor CCAS hosted another Indigenous exhibition in what would be a very different national environment, both politically and in terms of contemporary art. By then contemporary Indigenous art, including urban art, had gained national and international currency.

Two other exhibitions during BRG’s first year continued the collective’s socio-political engagement, giving an otherwise unlikely visibility to disenfranchised Canberrans. These were Our Place and The Foundry—On the Road. The Foundry, like Jobless Action, was a CYSS-funded employment creation enterprise, managed by one part-time and two full-time cocordinators, whose programs were designed to equip unemployed young people with new skills. Charles Livingstone, chair of The Foundry Association, (which managed The Foundry) described the organisation’s house in Braddon, which attracted around 50 people a day, as “an important clearing house for people’s problems—a place where there is always someone to talk to” 87

Funding had enabled The Foundry to provide opportunities for clients to work with craftspeople at Ainslie Village. Previously, artworks made by Foundry clients would not have progressed to exhibition; BRG’s open access policies, however, were expressly designed to accommodate such a group. While the works displayed by the 18 artists did not act as “a personal expression of frustration or a political

“bludgeon”,\textsuperscript{88} the exhibition politicised the proposed cuts to CYSS programs that would directly affect The Foundry and through coverage on ABC TV’s \textit{Nationwide} program, BRG was contextualised nationally, for the first time, as socially relevant.

The second of these exhibitions, \textit{Our Place}, initiated by Julia Church, was an exhibition of works by children with disabilities from Chapman Hostel that included wall hangings, pastel drawings, paintings, t-shirts and bags. In 1976, the UN General Assembly had declared 1981 as the International Year of Disabled Persons. \textit{Our Place} constituted Church and BRG’s response to this international initiative and provided a locus for Church’s community-focused practice. The Chapman Hostel children went on to stage performances with the money raised from artwork sales. The exhibition was linked to the ethos that had emerged in the 1960s of art as a useful tool for social change and it provided an example of art practice whose intent was to improve the quality of life for those minorities at the margins of Canberra society, a community practice still in evidence at Megalo today. Church recalls that she and Mark Denton were among a handful of artists working in the community in this way at the time:

\begin{quote}
When I was still at art school Mark and I used to go out to various care centers and work with people and do occupational art—in some way helping people to deal with the frustration of being institutionalised. I used to work with intellectually disabled kids; they were really frustrated with their situation, they were in a hostel and a lot of them were quite capable of living in the community
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{88} Ibid.
[and] wanted their independence. I’d taken them to Bitumen River before so we decided to make an exhibition together. I taught them how to screenprint . . . that was a lot of fun and [later] we did performance stuff as well but not at BRG.89

Reviewing for the Canberra Times, Grishin noted that “it was yet another important undertaking by the Bitumen River Gallery”. That Church was well suited for the role of supporting such community art projects is made obvious by Grishin, whose descriptions of the works foregrounded their “vigour . . . stunning boldness and a strong expressive use of colour” and “immediate unimpeded vision”:

Our Place is not an exhibition that you need to approach with charitable intention; as an exhibition of art it is a bold, brilliant and rewarding experience. There is a richness and vitality in the range of the imagination in the work on display . . . What emerges from this exhibition is a range of strong artistic personalities with real emotive, expressive and imaginary powers that speak of an unusual sense of creativity.90

7.4.1 Tony Ayres

Tony Ayres and de Medici joined the BRG collective in 1983. Both destined for international careers, they made significant contributions to the collective’s

89 Julia Church, interview, September 30, 2012.
continuing commitment to exhibit work from members of minority groups and from artists working in non-traditional mediums.

Ayres came to Australia from Macau with his mother and sister in 1964, towards the end of the White Australia policy and before the first wave of Asian immigration that brought Vietnamese students and the first “boat people” to Australia. “We were,” remembers Ayres, “pretty much in white Australia.”91 After two years at ANU, he transferred to CSA in 1983, where he majored in photography but found himself drawn to printmaking. As flagged in chapter 5, Ayres was among the student artists particularly supported by Martin. He began working with the members of BRG in 1983, and in that year “co-opted” de Medici—who had returned to Canberra to take up painting at CSA—to the collective.92 Ayres was a polymath whose developing interests, following on from art school, included filmmaking. De Medici remembers him as “a good member . . . a brilliant guy [with] an amazing work ethic.”93

His presence as an openly gay, Asian man opened up an aesthetic not otherwise easily accessed by collective members or the wider Canberra public. A number of his prints, referencing issues faced by gay men in Australia in the first half of the 1980s, were purchased from the artist for the NGA collection in 1993.94

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92 eX de Medici, interview with the author, April 9, 2012.
93 Ibid.

In 1984, Ayres brought Chilean-born artist Juan Davila to Canberra. A proponent of art in service to social and political change, Davila had immigrated to Melbourne in 1976 at the age of 28. Ayres had met and spoken “briefly” to Davila during Artist Week in Adelaide in March of 1984, having attended with Virgo, then in her first year as BRG c-coordinator. He wrote to Davila on April 1 about the possibility of Davila speaking during the Artforum program at CSA, “through the auspices of Bitumen River.” Asking for “some kind of continuation of your artist week talk”, Ayres requested “a subject such as the direction that socially progressive artists should/could be taking, the limitations of the current state of painting in terms of the politically radical etc.” Davila was paid a fee of $60 plus accommodation, meals “or anything like that.”96

Ayres continued to explore gay themes in an exhibition of manipulated screenprints titled *The Image of Desire*, shown from April 10 to 28, 1985 at BRG. These were works that had, in the main, been produced during the artist’s final year at CSA in 1984, and included the prints that would be purchased by NGA in 1993. The screenprinted poster advertising the exhibition was gifted to NGA by CCAS in 1993. Darkly homoerotic, redolent with intimations of violence, the exhibition provided previously unseen content for audiences, many of whom appreciated the essay that made them feel “ok about not understanding the visual leads!” Included among these was Roland Manderson who wrote, “Thanks very much for the essay.

95 Ayres’ poster advertising the 1984 BRG exhibition *A New Spirit in China Painting*—to which Grishin had ascerbically responded in the visitor’s book “Where’s the new spirit?”—was gifted to the NGA by CCAS in 1993. CCAS archives, Visitor’s Book, 1984.

96 All quotes in this paragraph from Tony Ayres, letter to Juan Davila, April 1, 1984.
I’m sick of art speaking for itself. . . . I am thankful for the view of the person responsible for making it.”

Ayres’ catalogue introduction provides a superb example of how important and effective written mediation from the artist can be for viewers; the essay was perfectly attuned to an audience unfamiliar with the intense visual language of gay culture, the words gently leading viewers to a contextual understanding:

Initially the prints operate to a highly specific sense of audience. They are meant to be viewed by gay men. The images, words and situations they describe are drawn from contemporary urban homosexual terminology—s/m, gloryholes, pornography. The content acts as a critique of the way in which desire is represented within this context. Understanding of this critique is most available to gay men who are familiar with the imagery.

Grishin believed that the images provided “a brilliant and provocative critique of the modern western society’s homosexual subculture.” He wrote that the work was “sophisticated . . . technically and in its thinking . . . going considerably beyond making a simple social statement or seeking to be attractive aesthetic objects.” Grishin also noted that BRG was about to mark its fourth year in operation, “continuing to provide an outlet for important art otherwise not seen in Canberra.”

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7.4.2 eX de Medici and CCAS: Minorities and Touring Exhibitions

de Medici, who grew up in Canberra in a politically active family, explored minority forms of art practice and championed disenfranchised minorities from the beginning of her career. She attended art schools at Riverina CAE and Darling Downs Institute and completed her undergraduate degree in Visual Arts at CSA in the mid-1980s, majoring in painting and photo media. She also studied multi-track recording and sound sampling at Canberra School of Music. Her early works included a two-hour performance on the Cahill Expressway—“a really good place to place flesh . . . it is completely artificial”\(^\text{100}\)—where she crossed the road 27 times, making a chalk line as she reached each verge, before she was removed by officers of the Department of Main Roads, and a performance at the Canberra rubbish tip where she hung her own unsuccessful works among the city’s messy detritus. She described this latter performance to reviewer Virginia Cook as being “about success . . . how to have a successful exhibition at the dump is really quite difficult.”\(^\text{101}\) During Work Saints, de Medici worked for five consecutive days from 9am to 5pm, creating one large charcoal drawing a day, reflecting Canberra’s bureaucratic working hours. The message behind the performance and exhibition was the concept of the artist as a worker like any other:

[O]ne of the reasons I am doing “Work Saints” is that artists are not seen as workers. . . . [T]hree per cent is magic, ninety-seven per cent


\(^{101}\) Ibid.
is work. . . [Y]ou get dirty, you get tired, you want to have a break.¹⁰²

The BRG members’ show *Nowhere Utopia* (March 3–14, 1987) spanned the crossover period that took BRG through to CCAS. It was a touring exhibition that evidenced minority arts practices, as well as commenting, through its title on the dissolution of the utopian ideals of the collective/artist-run space. It provided an example of how a medium that was first shown in a collective and then rejected as “not art” by an established art space could be subsequently invited, three years later, into the space that had previously rejected it. de Medici recalls that:

Andy [Hurrell], Elena [Gallegos] and I approached the ACP for a show of [these photocopied works] and we got back a letter (and they were the cutting edge of photography in Australia at that time) and they wrote back and said, “We’re sorry, this isn’t photography, goodbye”. And then about three years later we were invited to show and we told them to fuck off. Because by then we’d finished with it and they were just finding it.¹⁰³

In this way, photocopy as a medium traversed a path from marginality to mainstream acceptance as seen in: print/poster making, on which Megalo and BRG were founded; urban Indigenous art, as in the case of Nickolls’s *Dreamtime Machinetime*; and exhibitions by people with disabilities, as in the case of *Our

¹⁰² Ibid.
¹⁰³ ex de Medici, interview, April 9, 2012.
Place. A difference with the photocopy medium as exhibited in Nowhere Utopia was that its use was a knowing exercise; for the artists, the worthlessness of the materials provided their political raison d’être; an opportunity to say something worthwhile through a medium rejected by the dominant art world.

![Image](image-url)

Fig. 14. Nowhere Utopia. BRG touring group exhibition at THAT Space, Brisbane, March 3–14, 1987. Installation photograph. See far right: eX de Medici’s Pistol. 1985, gridded black and white laser-copied image, 1200cm x 1600cm, printed on Canon’s first prototype laser photocopier as a 16-piece gridded image. CCAS image archive
Nowhere Utopia included the first of de Medici’s geo-political gun imagery.\textsuperscript{104} Pistol (1985, gridded black and white laser-copied image, 1200cm x 1600cm), “a revolver from a very old dictionary”,\textsuperscript{105} was printed on Canon’s first prototype laser photocopier as a 16-piece gridded image (see Fig. 14 above). This work and three others were the early results of the artist’s residencies around Australia, working with Canon multifunction laser printers-photocopiers that allowed her to increase the size of images until they were “building size . . . whacked up with wallpaper paste.”\textsuperscript{106} de Medici remembered that “It was very tedious because you’d have to get them all cut properly and the machine didn’t quite grid them all up correctly.”\textsuperscript{107} At the time, clean finishes were secondary to the primary aim of the work; de Medici recalls that “It wasn’t a big issue about making perfect things because no-one was going to buy them; you were just going to throw them away anyway.”\textsuperscript{108} Images were sourced from “everywhere”.\textsuperscript{109} The second work in the series, knife (1985, gridded black and white laser-copied image, 15 panels, 2000cm x 1500), blown out and mysterious, was from “a very strange small photograph of my deceased grandmother’s wedding cake with a hand with a big knife coming into the picture”. The third work, damaged in transit on return from

\textsuperscript{104} Twenty-five years later, that work and de Medici’s knife work were exhibited in Bad Girls, curated by the author (Canberra: CCAS, February 8–March 16, 2013).

\textsuperscript{105} de Medici, interview, April 9, 2012.

\textsuperscript{106} de Medici would work again with Canon in producing her billboard for I Am You; Artists Against Violence, Artists for Tolerance. This Goethe Institute travelling exhibition at CCAS in 1994 was arranged by Trevor Smith. See this chapter, pp. 309–311.

\textsuperscript{107} eX de Medici, interview with the author, April 9, 2012.

\textsuperscript{108} By 2012, when this researcher sat with de Medici choosing works for the CCAS Canberra centenary show Bad Girls, these works had attained an iconic status and I was excited but nervous about putting these fragile pieces on the wall in case they were damaged. eX remarked “If they get damaged don’t worry. Do remember it’s just a miracle that these have survived. They’re photocopies. It’s raw and base and it’s not a problem for me if they get damaged.” Interview with the author, February 1, 2013.

\textsuperscript{109} Ibid.
Brisbane, was a colour photocopy of a scene from *South Pacific* privileging the homoerotic in the poses of the male protagonists.\textsuperscript{110}

d e Medici has been “fascinated with signifiers of power for as long as [she] can remember. It’s the one thing that just never goes away; [power] and the paradoxes within [its signifiers].”\textsuperscript{111} This fascination with power and its concomitant effect on the powerless drove de Medici’s attempts to subvert what she regarded as Virgo’s increasingly prosaic curatorial aesthetic. de Medici had advocated for the continuance of BRG as an artist-run collective space, believing that the mandate of such a space should be the support and guidance of emerging artists. She had voted against the handover of the BRG constitution that allowed the formation of CCAS and, throughout the period of Virgo’s directorship of CCAS, took every opportunity to subvert what she saw as creeping institutionalisation.

Over the five years following the handover of BRG’s constitution to CCAS, (1987–1992), de Medici and Runnegar took every opportunity to inject alternative notes of performance and messiness back into the exhibition calendar—tropes that had defined the early days of BRG. de Medici believed then, as she does today, that “a contemporary arts space should be a place where emerging artists should be given the correct respect . . . and assistance.”\textsuperscript{112} As time went on, the relationship between Virgo and de Medici soured:

\textsuperscript{110} Viewing these black and white photocopies 25 years later, the blacks retain their crisp outlines, belying the passage of years.
\textsuperscript{111} eX de Medici, interview with the author, April 9, 2012.
\textsuperscript{112} Ibid.
Issues arose between me and Anne and older members who slipped away. . . . Gradually through Anne’s [time] it became much more conservative, although at the same time we would do things, Brenda and I; Anne would go [out of Canberra] and Brenda and I would be scrabbling through the proposals and [would then] notify people and say “you’ve got a show” without [Anne’s] permission—subversive incursions while she was away. 

De Medici’s early explorations into art forms considered worthless by the establishment, such as performance and photocopy, reached the apex of alternative, minority art practice with tattooing. In 1989, an OzCo grant afforded her the opportunity to spend a year studying the medium in California. Tattooing provided a forum in which her primary interests coalesced: minorities; minority practice; power and its signifiers; and gay culture, which was flourishing in the tattoo world between the 1950s and the 1980s. Importantly, it also fundamentally changed her manner of working and set her up for the later execution of the powerful, intricate, large-scale works on paper that would make her international reputation:

I’m very ordered when I work. Tattooing made me that way because you’re dealing with blood and diseases—I started tattooing at the height of HIV/AIDS so everything had to become absolutely

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113 Ibid.
ordered. I believe tattooing absolutely changed every aspect of how
I worked.\textsuperscript{114}

By the beginning of 1994, de Medici had fully incorporated tattooing into
her art practice. Over the next 18 months, exhibitions at CCAS and aGOG—
respectively titled \textit{Inside Out: Out of the Mainstream: A Group Exhibition} and
\textit{Scratching}—illustrated her seminal engagement with this minority form and
cemented her position as the only contemporary artist working with this medium as
an alternative contemporary art practice.

These two exhibitions, held concurrently at CCAS and aGOG, highlighted
the \textit{process} of tattooing. Immediately preceding Trevor Smith’s first self-curated
exhibition \textit{Romantisystem}, Runnegar and de Medici curated \textit{Inside Out}, which ran
from 3–26 June, 1994. This marked the last of their many ventures together for
BRG/CCAS. In title and in content, the exhibition privileged those on the fringe.
Included were the detritus of de Medici’s tattooing practice in the form of 100
bloody napkins. de Medici is explicitly not named as an artist in exhibition; her
choice was to acknowledge the contribution of the blood patches as artworks
provided by the 100 tattooed people from whom they came. Deborah Clark,
reviewing de Medici’s solo exhibition \textit{Scratching} at aGOG, brought the focus back
to the artist, writing of de Medici’s work in \textit{Inside Out} that:

\begin{quote}
[The napkins] were displayed in plastic bags, like a body of
specimens, and their nauseating quality was somehow cumulative.
The work was called \textit{The Blood of Others} and its reference to
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{114} Ibid.
scientific samples was underscored by the idea of guilt and bad conscience, making mileage out of the blood of others. Implicit here is the complicity of the artist, like the imperialist, exploiting and souveniring the bodies of her subjects.\textsuperscript{115}

de Medici’s contribution to \textit{Inside Out} also included a number of air-brushed motorcycle bike tanks, that, as with the bloody napkins, were unattributed. Ruth Ellis, in the brief catalogue essay, writes that “The act of customising the motorcycle to an internal and personal agenda flows clearly to the act of tattooing and customising the flesh machine through pigment and blood.”\textsuperscript{116} Other works in \textit{Inside Out} were: a tipi erected in the gallery—in deliberate opposition to White Cube strategies—from the nomadic and mutable outsider collective Electric Tipi; a selection of woodworks from NSW prison inmate, Canberran Bob Cummins; embroidered skulls from Vicki Bell; and an installation from two ex-Brickworks artists and Canberra performance group Splinters members Stuart Vaskess and Adam Herbst. This installation’s notes instructed the:

guest [to] enter through The Bower, make obeisance at the Dragon Flower Shrine, cook the sacred sausage on the Barbecue of Desire (dedicated to an armless yet devastating deity, devoted to the

\textsuperscript{115} Deborah Clark, ‘Scratching the Surface’, \textit{Art Monthly Australia} (July 1994): 30.  
cooking of meat) light the sacred candles (3) and eat the sandwich provided by the fruits of heaven.\textsuperscript{117}

The next showing of de Medici’s tattoo practice took place outdoors. Trevor Smith’s Sydney connections facilitated the Goethe Institute’s international travelling exhibition \textit{I Am You: Artists Against Violence, Art for Tolerance} from October 12 to November 6, 1994. The works of 20 artists from Europe and the USA (including Marina Abramovic) were joined by a CCAS-commissioned work from de Medici (see Fig. 15 below). The works were represented on large billboards that were erected on the median strip in front of Gorman House on Ainslie Avenue, in the suburb of Reid. The location was one of 200 around the world exhibiting the billboards throughout 1994. \textit{I Am You; Artists Against Violence, Art for Tolerance} aimed to bring to world attention to growing aggression in Europe against refugees and political minorities. The press release stated, “Racism, intolerance and xenophobia are unfortunately global phenomena and their effects are also felt here in Australia.”\textsuperscript{118} de Medici’s billboard presented a group of tattooed people, an outsider minority in the mid-1990s, in various linked poses.

\textsuperscript{117} Stuart Vaskess and Adam Herbst, in Ibid.

Fig. 15. eX de Medici, *United Colours*. Gridded colour laser-copied image, in Goethe Institute’s international travelling exhibition, *I Am You; Artists Against Violence, Art for Tolerance*, CCAS, October 12–November 6, 1994. Installation photograph. CCAS image archive

Staging the exhibition in Ainslie Avenue was a bold intervention into public space years before the Stanhope Labor Government public arts policy (2001–2011) made public art commonplace. The public reception of *I Am You; Artists Against Violence, Art for Tolerance* and its large-scale public profile was not entirely positive. In the following example it was quite misunderstood. Canberra was then and is now a billboard-free city; for local residents living at Reid’s outer edge, the global implications of tolerance paled beside their sympathy for those who they thought were being hectored. In a letter to the *Canberra Times*, titled “Billboard Horror”, (Ms) P. Sanders of Reid complained:
I am writing in protest at the erection of certain hideous billboards, which have appeared recently in the centre of Ainslie Avenue. These billboards carry messages such as “Clean your House” and “I Am You” (referring to the human brain.) One could only conclude from these that the government tenants, who are obliged to gaze on them every day of their lives, instead of enjoying the previously aesthetically beautiful Ainslie Avenue, are perhaps not quite normal and need to be given a visual moral lesson. Perhaps those who have provided this lesson in morality could arrange to put their own houses in order first.¹¹⁹

The last of de Medici’s exhibitions foregrounding tattooing opened at CCAS in March 1996. In 60 Heads, the tattoo was overtly presented as contemporary art, in a whole-of-gallery exhibition that provided another example of the attention given to minority groups and minority art forms in exhibition at CCAS. One of the results was that an entirely new demographic entered the gallery, in the process setting a new benchmark for visitor numbers. Barney, then CCAS assistant curator, remembers the exhibition as “a real pleasure to work on. It was a beautiful moment where the tattoo levelled the playing field.”¹²⁰ In assessing the diversity among exhibition visitors, Barney concluded that:

eX was ahead of her time. Every tattooed person in Canberra and the surrounding region visited that show. We had truckies, bus

¹¹⁹ Ms P. Sanders, letter to the Editor, Canberra Times, October 21, 1994: 10.
drivers, bikers . . . not our normal clientele, but our normal clientele were there too because some of our regular clientele were in the photos.\textsuperscript{121}

A full-colour catalogue, whose production was supported by the ACT Cultural Council, accompanied the exhibition. It included two essays; one from Gordon Bull, then head of the Art Theory Workshop at ANU School of Art; and one from Jenny McFarlane, then assistant curator at City Gallery, Canberra, who had previously written about the artist’s work, and who—along with Barney—had been instrumental in bringing the concept of \textit{60 Heads} to exhibition.\textsuperscript{122} Encapsulated in the essays was the idea—new for western society in the mid-1990s—that the tattoo and contemporary art are joined at an interface. Long the terrain of bikers, jail inmates and sailors—and devoid of the cultural signifiers that marked the place of the tattoo in non-Anglo societies—the tattooed in western society were, at the end of the last century, perceived as outsiders and not as the emblems of a contemporary arts practice.

Seventy-four candid snapshots, without artifice, many taken just after the tattoo had been placed on the skin, were chosen (see Fig. 16 below) from around 400 of the photographs in the rapidly growing photographic database that de Medici collected from 1989 to 1995 in studios in Europe, North America and Australia. Tattoos ranged from the wonky, homemade \textit{Dad} and \textit{Mom}, to exquisite miniatures, and complex sleeves and body suits, while the portrait subjects ranged from young

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{121} \textit{Ibid.}
\item \textsuperscript{122} McFarlane continues to write about de Medici’s work to the present day.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
boys to hard men to girls next door. Not all of the tattoos were the work of de Medici herself. She recalled the “groups within the groups”:

Some of them were the ultra-young, 14 or so, with home tattoos. They would come into the tattoo shop and [I’d say] “get out, you’re a baby—you’re not even allowed to be in here.” [But I’d ask] can I take a photograph of that and they’d go “Yeah whatever.” Then there are [those people] directly after the tattoo process, they’re dishevelled, they’re bursting with endorphins, they’re kind of not there—I find they’re post-coital or something—you know, post-pain. Maybe 10 percent of the 60 Heads photographs are tattoos I’ve done and 90 per cent are just post-tattoo people. I’d be in studios anywhere in the world and I’d [ask] “Oh can I take a photo?”

123 eX de Medici, interview, April 9, 2012.
Fig. 16. eX de Medici, *60 Heads*. Exhibition detail, laminated inkjet prints, 59.4cm x 84.1cm, CCAS travelling exhibition, ACCA, Melbourne, January 24–March 2, 1997. Installation photograph by K. Pleban. CCAS image archive
Fig. 17. eX de Medici, *60 Heads*. Laminated inkjet prints, 59.4 cm x 84.1 cm, CCAS travelling exhibition, ACCA, Melbourne, January 24–March 2, 1997.
Installation photograph by K. Pleban. CCAS image archive

The exhibition design was intentionally egalitarian and, as a touring exhibition, was beautifully conceived. It was cheap and practical to travel and uncomplicated to install. In the design, all 74 portraits were hung in a straight line at eyeline height, so that no one subject took precedence over any other (see Fig. 17 above). The snapshots were prepared for exhibition as laminated A1 inkjet prints, again courtesy of de Medici’s collaboration with Canon Australia, thus combining her then dual interests of photocopy and tattoo. These could be sponged clean and packed into one A4 size wooden crate. The number of works could be expanded or contracted depending on the size of the receiving venue. Barney remembers calls from venue curators who, with a show called *60 Heads*, were surprised to find 74 portraits inside the travelling case. Smith had chosen the exhibition’s name;
confusing perhaps in its non-matching numbers, but it rolled off the tongue and had a clean graphic presence in publicity. It was “hugely popular”\textsuperscript{124} with venues, touring from its opening at CCAS in March 1996, to Performance Space in Sydney in May 1996, Australian Centre for Contemporary Art in Melbourne in March 1997, Institute of Modern Art (IMA) in Brisbane in June/July 1997, 24HR Art in Darwin in August 1997, through to its final Australian destination at the Goldfields Art Centre, Kalgoorlie in January, 1998\textsuperscript{125} where de Medici recalled that it was “the first time miners had stepped into their regional gallery.”\textsuperscript{126} The exhibition concluded touring, three years later, with an international showing at the 1998 Fotofeis: Survey of International Photography in Glasgow, Scotland. “Eventually,” recalled Barney, “we had to say enough.”\textsuperscript{127}

The exhibition marked the end of de Medici’s long and fruitful alliance with BRG/CCAS. “I felt that 60 Heads was a big effort and [that] afterwards it was time to step away and let other people in.”\textsuperscript{128}

The success of 60 Heads was assisted by its egalitarian structure, ease of touring and installation, and curatorial ethos that was inherent to CCAS and driven largely by Barney during the period from 1995 to 2002. This curatorial ethos privileged the artist-generated exhibition, which was then supported and facilitated by intelligent curatorial guidance and often grounded with a sophisticated catalogue. de Medici was ahead of her time, as was Barney for recognising the potential of the exhibition to transcend the simple portraits. de Medici—who brought the concept to

\textsuperscript{124} Jane Barney, interview, September 24, 2012.
\textsuperscript{125} Touring of the exhibition to ACCA, IMA and 24HR Art was announced in NETS media release, October 19, 1995, CCAS archives. 1995 Scrapbook.
\textsuperscript{126} eX de Medici, interview, April 9, 2012.
\textsuperscript{127} Jane Barney, interview, September 24, 2012.
\textsuperscript{128} eX de Medici, interview, April 9, 2012.
a receptive Barney as assistant curator—harbours a belief that then director Smith was less than enthusiastic about the exhibition concept, initially feeling that it was “too rough, it wasn’t glam, it wasn’t associated with a commercial gallery”. The exhibition’s long touring life and high visitor numbers bear out Barney’s judgement to proceed and, importantly, Smith’s support for her decision.

7.4.3 A Second Wave

*60 Heads* marked the beginning of a second wave of touring exhibitions that emanated from CCAS from 1996 to 2002. Smith’s director’s report at the end of 1995 included a comment that, “To my knowledge before 1994, the CCAS had never organised an exhibition tour”. This claim that travelling exhibitions were not historically part of the CCAS history is erroneous and reflects not only the lack of corporate memory available within CCAS by 1995 but also points to a reading of CCAS that disavows its historical links to its antecedent, BRG.

Arrangements made between Anne Virgo, Ross Wolfe of OzCo’s VAB, and Arts ACT, included provision for CCAS to assume the funding previously given to BRG. The meeting of BRG members that approved the handover of the BRG constitution to the newly incorporated CCAS has been previously examined. These factors decisively indicate that although BRG and CCAS embodied different constitutional frameworks they were indivisibly linked as a contiguous organisation. This understanding allows for a comparison of touring shows between BRG and CCAS. What is revealed is that the collective’s touring exhibitions were predicated

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129 eX de Medici, interview, April 9, 2012.
131 See chapter 6, p. 233.
on taking the local to a national audience in a necessarily modest way; by the mid-1990s, CCAS was confidently operating in the international market, asserting its right to international recognition.

Examining BRG’s Scrapbooks revealed three significant examples of interstate touring BRG shows: an exchange with Iceberg Gallery in Melbourne in 1983; the tour of Causes to Hobart, Launceston, Perth and Adelaide in 1984; and the touring of Nowhere Utopia to Brisbane in 1986. The impetus for the Iceberg show came from ex-BRG member Karilyn Brown who was working at the Melbourne gallery by early 1983. Soon after her arrival in Melbourne, she wrote to Alder: “I was pondering the idea of a group show at Iceberg, representing the Bitumen River Gallery artists, what do you think?” 132 This first BRG travelling exhibition showed the works of 14 artists using a variety of mediums including sculpture, lithographs, silk screened posters, oil paintings, and crayon and pencil drawings. 133 Marcus Breen reviewed it for the Melbourne Times, highlighting Andrew Powell’s sculptures, Tony Ayres’ silk screens, and the works of Colin Russell and Stephanie Radok. Of the latter, alluding to Canberra’s dual national capital/local dichotomy, Breen wrote: “Stephanie Radok’s work exemplifies something of the restraint of the Canberra mentality, with some of the edge still intact.” 134 The exhibition from the Canberra collective provided the first non-institutional opportunity for Melbourne audiences to witness expressions of local emerging art.

132 Karilyn Brown, Iceberg, letter to Dianne, BRG, undated [presumed February/March, 1983].
133 It was the second time that the work of young Canberra artists had been exhibited interstate; first showings from CSA student printmakers had taken place at the George Paton Gallery at the University of Melbourne in the early 1980s, organised by head of the Printmaking Workshop, Jorg Schmeisser.
One of the reminiscences collected from early BRG members on the occasion of BRG’s fifth birthday was from Andrew Powell, who submitted a pencil drawing of his Canberra lounge room that showed posters from early Canberra printmakers, along with a story of getting the work to Iceberg Gallery:

I remember some good things that happened in the early days of BRG—like our trip to Iceberg Gallery in Melbourne. 12 members submitted about 4 or 5 works each, [then] Dave Turnbull, myself and Nick Cosgrove drove my Kombi and Dave’s FC packed with all this art to Rankin Lane and the next day we hung the show. We stayed for a few days, across the lane in Julie Higgenbothem’s studio, felt a bit funny hanging around all the rad femmes—but they were good to us, Julie and her friends drove us around and we pasted up posters (on a couple of the posh gallery art marts as well) bit like a cloak and dagger scene—anyway we drank lots of wine and coffee and the local Iceberg crowd seemed happy with the work, we even had some air time on [community radio station] 3cr. . . . [I]t was an interesting time—I remember the effort by people like Alison Alder and Paul Ford and others that made B>R>G> [sic] progress when the gallery was young. . . . [N]o wage, living(sic) [sic] on the dole, making good out of not much—so good on them.135

Less than three years after BRG opened, its tenacity and relevance were recognised when its second touring show gained modest local and Commonwealth

135 BRG 5th Birthday show, CCAS archives, envelope “5th Birthday Show”. “living(sic)” is from original notation.
funding support. In early 1984, BRG for the first time secured touring funding from DTLG and the CDF to tour the exhibition Causes to Praxis Gallery in Perth for an arrival date of April 27. Ayres, who was travelling to Perth for Easter, offered to print the invitations at the Praxis workshop. March dates were added for Cockatoo Workshop in Launceston and Chameleon Gallery in Hobart, with the tour ending at EAF in Adelaide in May. Mark Denton wrote to Chameleon in March to thank the gallery for “the enthusiasm shown towards the ‘Causes’ show.”

The last of the BRG travelling shows prior to amalgamation was Nowhere Utopia. Norman Ainsworth and de Medici took two briefcases containing the photocopied works of 27 members to THAT Gallery Brisbane by train in June 1987, because, as de Medici recalled, “We couldn’t afford to freight the show.” The show’s poster was printed at Megalo.

There are significant differences in funding and organisation between the 1980s exhibition tours at BRG and the CCAS touring programs of the mid-90s to early 2000s. The preceding examples from the BRG collective exemplify the necessarily ad hoc approach of the time. All the elements needed to tour an exhibition were essentially cobbled together on the go; prior to Causes there were no precedents to follow, and in spite of the small one-off grant that facilitated touring Causes to Praxis, there was no ongoing funding to support a touring program and little experience of touring to draw upon within the collective.

The touring programs from 1995 to 1997, with Barney and Smith working together, and from 1997 to 2002 with Barney as director, were markedly different from the early BRG tours. Barney’s funded, full-time position encouraged long-term

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137 eX de Medici, interview, April 9, 2012.
program planning and she was committed to touring CCAS-generated exhibitions nationally on a regular basis and internationally where possible. Planning and commitment, however, required funding to succeed. During the period from 1994 to 2002, which incorporated the appointments of both Smith and Barney, there was no CPI increase in the annual OzCo or Arts ACT grant to CCAS. As the Canberra-based exhibition program became increasingly ambitious, Barney needed to raise additional funding in order to maximise touring opportunities. Her solution was to raise money for one major touring show a year. Securing funding for an annual touring exhibition had positive on-going repercussions throughout the entire program. It meant that Smith was able to announce in the 1995 director’s report that, between end-1995 and 1997, “there [will be] at least three exhibitions touring with a total of thirteen dates between them.” These exhibitions, which would be developed by and open at CCAS, “could be paid for with the touring funding and that would free us up a bit more money to spend on the rest of the year”.

CCAS sent a strong message of continuing support for Indigenous artists when Barney and Smith decided that the first exhibition to tour internationally would be the Indigenous exhibition Black Books. This exhibition had its genesis in 1994 when Barney, in her final year at the CSA Gallery, curated an exhibition of journals by Aboriginal and Maori women titled Black Books. The women, including local Ngunnawal Aboriginal elder Matilda House and Canberra-based Maori musician Mereana Otene Waaka, were given loose-leaf journals in which they wrote every day for a month. The resulting works were exhibited on black plinths with patrons given black gloves with which to turn the pages.

139 Jane Barney, interview, September 24, 2012.
Another manifestation of local/national collaboration through CCAS occurred when Smith offered Aboriginal urban artist Gordon Hookey, whom he had met in Sydney, an artist-in-residence placement at Gorman House for early 1995. During the residency, Hookey developed a body of work for a solo show, *Interface Inyaface*, that opened at CCAS’ Manuka gallery in April 1995. At the same time, Smith envisaged that Hookey would work with local Canberra Indigenous artists from the Ngunnawal, Wiradguri and other nations, on a collaborative exhibition as part of the Inaugural National Sculpture Forum. This resulting exhibition was *Naii Ngarrambai Wanggirali Burrangiri Nangi Dyannai Ngurui* (*the lay of the land is how you know your country; when you look behind you, you can always see your tracks*), which was developed by gallery assistant Megan Elliot and opened at CCAS on April 8.

The press release stated that the exhibition comprised “Work by artists from the Ngunnawal community and Aboriginal artists living and working in Canberra focus[ing] on the region’s past, present and future.”140 The exhibition garnered wide local press with reviews from Sonia Barron (*Canberra Times*) and Kerry-Anne Cousins (*Muse*), a story in *Canberra City News*, and two articles in the *Chronicle*—one on *Naii Ngarrambai Wanggirali Burrangiri Nangi Dyannai Ngurui* and one on Hookey.141 The latter article described the exhibition as providing a “commentary on issues which arise from western cultural encroachment and impositions.”142

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140 *What’s On?*, Gorman House Arts Centre newsletter, April 1995.
142 *Chronicle*, “Encroachment and Impositions”, 17 April, 1995, CCAS archives.
Progress, the briefly-produced member’s newsletter of Gorman House Arts Centre, also featured Hookey’s story on their front page.143

Works from Barney’s CSA Gallery exhibition Black Books and Smith and Elliot’s CCAS exhibition Naii Ngarrambai Wanggirali Burrangiri Nangi Dyannai Ngurui were also selected for an international showing of artworks generated by CCAS. At the end of 1996, CCAS, in association with local Aboriginal elders Iris Clayton and Matilda House, toured Black Books to the Australian Embassy in Manila. Barney’s Filipino contact was April Pressler, at that time Australia’s cultural attaché to the Philippines. Barney worked in this instance to maximise exhibition opportunities with work that was already at hand, as she would continue to do over the next five years at CCAS.144

7.5 Canberra/Brasilia

Twenty years after the unfunded BRG collective opened the doors of its tiny reclaimed gallery space in the old shelter shed of St Christopher’s School in Manuka, CCAS embarked on an international artist exchange. Smith conceived the ambitious idea to link the world’s two most famous planned modern cities, Canberra, Australia and Brasilia, Brazil in 1996, with Shane Breynard as the Canberra artist and a Brasilia artist to be chosen. Smith left CCAS in 1997 before the concept could be realised, but in 2001, with the Centenary of Federation providing additional funding opportunities for the contemporary art sector, Barney developed the idea

144 Another example of the CCAS commitment to continued development of Indigenous artists was the exhibition Black Humour, which opened at CCAS on July 12, 1997. This exhibition subsequently toured to IMA in Brisbane, 24HR Art in Darwin, Boomalli Gallery in Sydney, Koori Heritage Trust in Melbourne and Tandanya in Adelaide.
through to conclusion with Smith’s unqualified support. Through the process of developing the exchange, the parameters that had previously governed CCAS touring exhibitions were extended to include the movement of and collaboration between artists from both countries. *Canberra/Brasilia* provides an outstanding example of a successful inter-country artist exchange using the relatively small resources of a regional contemporary art space. The project highlighted how effectively CCAS could perform when acting as host to a visiting international artist and, importantly, how far the organisation had come from its early preoccupation with supporting the development of local visual arts practice, to a mutually supported international undertaking.

This was not a project that would have been undertaken by the NGA, nor would this project, with its negligible commercial potential, have found a place within the commercial milieu. Moreover, the exchange could only have happened between Canberra and Brasilia. It was a site-specific collaboration on an international scale and yet the resulting exhibitions were inherently and intrinsically communal and personal; using an expression of old technology, Indigenous material, and expressions of nature, the artists’ works were enacted within and against outstanding planned-city designs. In thinking about *Canberra/Brasilia*, Barney’s only givens were the major similarity between the two cities in their genesis as planned capitals and the decision to use Breynard as the Canberra artist. It was an open-ended, curatorially fertile space.

Breynard had lived in Canberra for 27 years, having graduated from ANU SOA with a first class honours, the University medal and a masters of arts degree by research. His photographic art practice was concerned with the interaction of cultural values, specific architectures of the built environment, and its surrounding landscape.
When Barney approached him to ask if he was still interested in the concept that Smith had broached five years previously, he was coming to the end of four years in London and returning to Canberra as managing editor of *Art Monthly Australia*. The timing was good. Barney additionally liked his “odd, esoteric take on things.”

With Breynard locked in, Barney travelled to Brasilia to find a local artist, who “knew Brasilia in the same way that Shane was really embedded in Canberra.”

The most interesting contemporary art is often generated by artists working at the margins and, for this reason, international visiting curators reliant on in-country dealers for introductions can find it difficult to access the artists they are hoping to find. This is the problem that Barney faced:

> We got introduced to painter after painter after painter after painter—we were getting a really hard sell from dealers—we went to Sao Paolo but I was pretty clear in my mind that it wasn’t going to be a Sao Paolo or a Rio artist.

Back in Brasilia and at the end of another long day of consecutive meetings where the art on show included “painting, more painting; kind of irrelevant subject matter that had nothing to do with the city”, Barney was beginning to feel “hysterical”. She arrived for the day’s last meeting—at a classic Oscar Niemeyer designed apartment block in the heart of the original 1960s-built accommodation precinct—to meet with artist Marta Penner:

146 Ibid.
147 Ibid.
148 Ibid.
[T]here were kids everywhere and mess everywhere and she’s pulling out these pinhole photographs of the Brasilia interstices, all the crummy places between the shiny designed Oscar Niemeyer bits that only someone who lives there could possibly know. I knew the moment I saw those things that this was it. I got back to her and I said “I want you to do the show” and she said “I’m amazed that you picked me because I’m not really in the crowd and my partner said to me ‘Why are you even bothering to meet with those people? They never pick us’” and I said “No you’re definitely it. You’re it. I have no doubt.”149

Barney determined that Breynard and Penner would travel to each other’s cities to make individual and collaborative works; Breynard to Brasilia in June and Penner to Canberra in late August–early September, with the results being exhibited at CCAS and in Brasilia and Rio. The catalogue essay reveals that the exhibition incorporated:

a collection of the documents, objects and photographs from [the artists’] urban work. It is a coalescence of visual art, urban planning, public art, text and architecture; and a contemporary reflection on life in two of the world’s most unusual cities.150

149 Ibid.
The artists’ experiences whilst in each other’s countries were markedly different. While Penner had all the advantages of the CCAS networks to support the development of her work during her stay in Canberra, Breynard’s experience was somewhat negatively coloured by not having a host gallery in Brasilia. Based at the university, he was more reliant on Penner as a facilitator and a working partner. Barney believes this meant it took longer for Breynard’s concept to emerge. “His experience wasn’t as streamlined as hers [but] in the end it all came together.\footnote{Jane Barney, interview, September 24, 2012.}

Breynard pursued two ideas in Brasilia. The first was working with Brazil’s Indigenous bed, the ubiquitous hammock, designed to be cool and transportable. The second comprised laser-cut timber names—painted in eucalypt colours—of the eucalypt trees native to the Canberra region, installed in the Roberto Burle Marx designed landscaped environment around the Neimeyer designed superquadra apartment blocks. In Canberra these laser-cut timber names can be seen on the walls at CCAS (see Fig. 18 below).
Breynard’s laser-cut works, and the catalogue essays, are indicative of a major problem with international touring shows that have a text component and are enacted between countries that do not share a common language. The tree names and the catalogue essays were both being shown/read in Canberra and Brasilia and so needed to be translated into Portuguese. Barney recalls the process:
The first translator we had was a bit of a clunker and the second had a nice turn of phrase so some of those essays in the catalogue are a pleasure to read and some are not so pleasurable.\textsuperscript{152}

Penner shared that characteristic of Breynard’s that Barney had so liked: “an odd esoteric take on things”. She had lived in Brasilia for 15 years and had begun photographing around the city during her master’s degree, three years before Barney met her. The pinhole camera images—realised using a coffee can with a hole punched in its base—that had so excited Barney, ostensibly had little to do with the modernist Oscar Niemeyer designed city. Penner had photographed the city from an entirely unexpected and quirky perspective that could only have been obvious to someone whose knowledge of the shining planned spaces extended to the interstitial; those unseen or otherwise forgotten places inhabited and traversed by the marginalised and dispossessed; spaces that neither Brasilia nor Canberra had allowed for in the city planning process.\textsuperscript{153}

When Penner arrived in Canberra, she went straight to CCAS and immediately set off on foot towards the Commonwealth Science and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO) building with her pinhole camera. From that first walk she began taking “these amazing pictures. . . . She kept coming across homeless people.”\textsuperscript{154} However, as with her work in Brasilia, Penner was not interested in photographing the people but in exploring the in-between spaces, [\textsuperscript{152} Ibid.\textsuperscript{153} Still today the question of whether cultural precincts can be effectively imposed on spaces in a city or should be allowed to arise naturally is one that comes up in forums in Canberra. It is particularly relevant at the moment to the developing Kingston Foreshore precinct, as first mooted in the Final Report of the Select Committee on Cultural Activities and Facilities, ACT Legislative Assembly (June 1991).\textsuperscript{154} Jane Barney, interview, September 24, 2012.]
situated around the designed spaces, that these people inhabited. The resulting body of work from Canberra bears many similarities to those photographs made by her in Brasilia.

In both Canberra and Brasilia, Breynard and Penner worked with hammocks. In Brasilia, in a collaborative work titled entre-redes, reflecting Breynard’s interest in the intersections between the built environment and nature, the artists suspended hammocks between the uppermost branches of the large trees that ringed the superquadra apartment blocks, connecting individual apartments to the living environment. In Canberra, Penner’s installation of hammocks, hung through the stairwells of the inner-city Currong Apartments, fulfilled the artist’s interest in spaces that existed within and yet outside planned affluence (see Fig. 19 below). Additionally, this installation reflected the gulf existing between contemporary art practice and civic rules, recalling the tone of some of the public response to the Ainslie Avenue billboards exhibition I Am You; Artists Against Violence, Art for Tolerance from 1994. Barney related the brush with officialdom:

[Penner] strung up hammocks between the stairwells and all the tenants were coming up and saying it looks great and taking pictures and within an hour and a half the housing people had turned up and said “Get those hammocks down from there someone might jump”!  

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\[155\] Ibid.
Both Breynard’s Brasilia experience and the touring component of the exhibition to Brasilia would have been more effective with a host gallery in place at the Brasilia end who was able to facilitate Breynard’s work in the same way that CCAS facilitated Penner’s visit and exhibition. As it was, Barney arrived at the exhibition to find herself in a Neimeyer designed gallery space, which, in Brasilia, are “a dime a dozen.”\textsuperscript{156} The thrill of attending opening night within the iconic architecture was tempered by the realisation that the exhibition was being held in an “under-funded, under-paid-for, government-owned Niemeyer space that [was]

\textsuperscript{156} Ibid.
falling apart [with] three people and a dog coming through for an exhibition opening.157

The value of the project lay in more than the sum of its parts. Its successful conclusion signalled the maturing of an arts space that had begun as a contested, local, unfunded collective space that arose in response to local social and political imperatives at the beginning of the 1980s. The BRG collective displayed an early commitment to increasing the national profile of local artists with several modest tours of BRG exhibitions and through attendance at national forums by its initial coordinators Alder and Virgo. When the CCAS board hired Smith as director at the end of 1993, it did so in order to bring CCAS into line with national and international paradigmatic changes in curatorial and exhibition practice. Although the decision was not without detractors, the appointments of Smith, and then Barney, transformed CCAS. During their collaboration as director/curator in the mid-1990s and subsequently though Barney’s time as director, national and international touring programs reflected the growing maturity of the Canberra visual arts community. *Canberra/Brasilia*, Barney’s last major project for CCAS before she left the organisation in 2002, positioned CCAS as a nationally relevant, fully funded, confident contemporary art space, whose curatorial decisions defined local practice as internationally relevant and mutually supported.

157 Ibid.
8. Conclusion

Late autumn in the Australian Capital Territory is all limpid sky and crisp outline. In 2013, as Canberra turned 100 years old, a remarkable work of art rose through the crystalline air; an otherworldly creature, redolent with symbolic references to the ancient natural environment below and to the planned twentieth century capital nestled within; *Skywhale*, the hot air balloon designed by Australian artist Patricia Piccinini, was aloft (see Fig. 20 below). Piccinini’s breathtakingly strange creature, whose evolutions and adaptations are connected to ideas of human intervention into the natural world, reflect the Canberra in which she grew up. In its colours of sky, limestone plains, treed ridges and escarpments, in its imaginative physical characteristics that combine allusions to the natural and the man-made, and in the passionate conversations that surrounded its commissioning and delivery, *Skywhale’s* artistic complexity echoes Canberra’s own.

![Skywhale](https://example.com/skywhale.jpg)

Fig. 20. Patricia Piccinini, *Skywhale*, 2013. Photo: Martin Ollman
This national capital is enlivened and humanised by its warm and inclusive arts community. Outsiders might perceive that a now well-resourced local arts sector is a direct outcome of Commonwealth-supported national capital life. This is simply wrong. It is instead, and overwhelmingly, the product of passionate, consistent, local community engagement and activism over more than thirty years. Today, the city benefits from the inspired, local political and arts leadership of the past, the continuing spirit of mentorship, collaboration and friendship that pervades the visual arts community, and a deep regard for excellence in education through the ANU School of Art. A broad, tightly-knit spread of student, emerging, mid-career, and senior artists make their homes and their artworks in the ACT.

Echoes of the burgeoning arts community of the early 1980s resonate strongly in Canberra today. Artists, arts workers, and institutions who emerged at that time are now nationally and internationally effective; highly visible protagonists and crucibles of Australian art development and practice. Amongst them is nationally acclaimed artist Alison Alder, who returned to Canberra in 2010 to head Megalo Print Studios, the organisation whose birth she had assisted 30 years before. Alder transferred to the ANU SofA in 2012 as Head of the Printmaking Workshop; the same Workshop that provided her own training from 1978 to 1981. Only a very brave person would have predicted that the small group of impoverished students, emerging artists and activists who established Megalo in the tumbledown shed in Ainslie Village, and to BRG in the abandoned bus shelter at St. Christopher’s Church would go on to have national and international careers. The organisations they founded in activism and hope have retained their individuality, have grown in strength, and are vital threads in the contemporary cultural fabric of both the ACT and Australia.
In charting the development of arts practice in the city between the 1920s and 2001, and within BRG/CCAS between 1978 and 2001, this dissertation has exposed the rapid evolution of Australia’s modern national capital. Created principally as federal capital and national capital space, the city has been transformed into a national capital that is a complex, dynamic centre for contemporary arts practice and exhibition. This thesis makes an original contribution to an increasing body of historical research about Canberra. Its principle innovation is in considering the national capital from a new perspective, where the development of arts and cultural practices are revealed as generative forces in the city’s development. The focused case study of BRG/CCAS from 1978 to 2001 is shown to be contiguous within the wider history of the development of the arts and of culture in the city from the 1920s to 2001.

There are fertile opportunities for further research in this area. The loss of Australia Council funding to the contemporary arts sector in May 2016 indicates a clear and pressing need to assist arts funding bodies and arts ministers’ understanding of the critical importance of not only restoring but increasing funding to contemporary visual art organisations in every State and Territory. These spaces are vital to Australian artists’ continued development and to international perceptions of Australia as contemporarily culturally relevant. This could be done through an analysis of the history and importance of the sector’s national body, Contemporary Art Organisations Australia. Comparative studies of regional and city-based contemporary art spaces would also assist relevant bodies in understanding their importance. A comparative study of contemporary art spaces in

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1 See chapter one, footnotes 11–24.
the modern planned federal capitals of Canberra and Brasilia would be fascinating and timely. These two cities, which Smith and then Barney so creatively imagined and conceived as ripe for artists’ exchanges and exhibitions in the 1990s, would today present opportunities for assessing the impacts of local and federal funding on the development of contemporary art and the effects of that funding and development on international perceptions of two modern, national federal capitals.

One of Australia’s most pressing issues concerns reconciliation between, and rehabilitation of Indigenous/non-Indigenous relations. Locally, the BRG/CCAS archives provide considerable material for research into their engagement with local and national Indigenous artists in exhibition, building on the work done in this research. While the parameters of my dissertation have not allowed for such an in-depth study in this area, further research would contribute to positive public perceptions of contemporary Indigeneity in Australia. A deeper analysis of CCAS’s engagement with Performance Art during the 1990s is also rich in research possibilities. Analysing the connections between the Sculpture Workshop at CSA and performance art emanating from CCAS will reveal further unique aspects of art practice in the national capital and assist today’s artists, arts workers, art consumers and local and national funding bodies in continuing to build a picture of Canberra’s contemporary arts development.

One of the aims of this dissertation has been to make a thorough analytical response to Timothy Pascoe’s misconception of the importance of visual arts development in Canberra. He characterised this, in the mid-1980s, as “not particularly strong” and as lacking the “opportunity for uniqueness.” While those

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² Pascoe, *Arts in the ACT*, 57.
with a vested interest in local contemporary arts initiatives would intuitively oppose such claims, recent government funding policy has revealed a return to views that devalue the importance of local contemporary arts spaces in our communities. CCAS, along with Australia’s network of contemporary art spaces arose as an unfunded collective in response to local needs. Federal and local arts funding from the mid-1980s through to the present day has provided for the ongoing development of these grass-roots organisations. Today they are profoundly effective conduits for artists in their journey from arts schools through to their representation in commercial galleries, in regional, state and national galleries, in international art museums, and in Australian and international biennales. Donal Fitzpatrick, Head of the School of Design and Art at Curtin University of Technology, characterises the contemporary art space as providing: “The heavy lifting of a vibrant visual culture,” allowing for “the unsteady and the tumultuous, in spaces electric with the risk of failure and prickling with unease.”

This research may help strengthen the case for increased funding in this area against the losses we have recently witnessed.

At CCAS the response to de-funding was solution focussed. In the week prior to the announcement, Director David Broker successfully interpreted the political mood and, in preparing CCAS curator Alexander Boynes and gallery manager Sabrina Baker for funding cuts, called a meeting whose guiding principles were innovation and resilience. In the immediate short-term, and reflective of the unique local solutions to funding crises enacted in the 1980s, CCAS announced a fund-raising auction, whose $250 tickets sold out on release. Forty-two local artists, 

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4 Conceived and managed by current CCAS Gallery Manager, Sabrina Baker.
from emerging artists to those with international reputations, who had exhibited at CCAS over the preceding three years, donated works that were then awarded, in blind pairings, to 52 ticketed patrons. The success of the auction showed the Canberra community’s deep affection for, engagement with, and understanding of CCAS’s critical importance to Canberra’s continued contemporary arts development.

The second decade of the twenty-first century in Canberra has witnessed increasing activity in contemporary art, music, dance, performance, design and literature from young practitioners with an emphasis on cross-art form collaboration. What distinguishes this surge from that occurring in the late 1970s and 1980s is that today’s artists stand on the shoulders of giants; of those whose early, and ultimately successful battles for recognition, for spaces, and for funding, amongst the clamorous rhetoric of the national capital space’s cultural pre-eminence, laid the fertile ground for subsequent generations of arts practitioners. This study, and the continued writing of our local art history, means that their early achievements, critical to the success of today’s visual arts community, will not remain unsung.
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**Canberra Contemporary Art Space Archive:**


Bitumen River Gallery/Canberra Contemporary Art Space image archive in progress.