Chapter Five

The Heroic Years of Mildura

Part II: 1975 – 1978

Introduction

In Australia, as in much of the western world, including England and the United States, the period between 1975 and 1978 was one of economic and political turbulence. The ongoing stagflation, severe cuts to government spending and high rates of unemployment were common and signalled the end of the post-war boom and the beginning of a period of economic volatility and austerity. As discussed in chapter three, the Whitlam Labor Government was voted in with substantial majorities in both the 1972 and 1974 elections, the latter being a double dissolution election with an even balance of power between Labor and the Liberal-National Country Party in the Senate. Although committed to implementing major social policies and administrative reforms that required significant government investment, Australia’s increasingly precarious economic circumstances throughout 1975 – highlighted by an overseas loans scandal and resulting in the resignation of two cabinet ministers – led to the Senate blocking the supply bill. The deadlock was broken with the Governor-General’s dismissal of the Whitlam Government and the installation of Malcolm Fraser and the Liberal-National Country Party coalition as the caretaker government on Remembrance Day, 11 November 1975. The controversy surrounding the constitutional crisis that emanated from this action had powerful reverberations throughout the Australian art world. Although the coalition won the 1975
and 1977 elections with overwhelming majorities, there was a remnant taint of illegitimacy surrounding the Fraser’s right to govern.\textsuperscript{481}

In the new government’s commitment to ‘reducing expenditure, streamlining the public service and providing responsible economic management’, Fraser appointed an Administrative Review Committee or ‘Razor Gang’.\textsuperscript{482} The impact of fiscal restraint – the Australia Council’s budget for 1975–1976 was effectively reduced by 32 per cent compared to the previous year’s allocation – collided with the zenith of growth in government investment: in the new tertiary education schemes, gallery infrastructure and funding developments, and arts bureaucracies (both state and federal).\textsuperscript{483} Diminishing resources created a far more competitive environment within the burgeoning autonomous art world. The review committee was critical of the Australia Council’s performance. Recommendations included making administrative savings so that more funds were directed to the arts, limiting the autonomy of the artform boards and bringing them under the control of the Council’s governing body, and amending the Australia Council Act to acknowledge the council’s formal role as the government’s advisory body.\textsuperscript{484} These new directives plus the impact of the findings of the Industries Assistance Commission (IAC), released in late 1976, which questioned the effectiveness of public assistance to the arts in terms of community benefit, opened up this autonomous world to increased public scrutiny.

The confluence of previously separate, developing streams – of the expansion of the tertiary system of art schools and art history departments and the linking of cultural policy with the ‘broader policies of education and social reform’ – backed by significant funding, led to a chain reaction from 1973 onwards which resulted in these quantitative

\textsuperscript{481} On 13 December 1975, the Liberal-National Party coalition won government with one of the largest majorities in Australian electoral history \url{http://whitlamdismissal.com}, viewed 15 March 2009.
changes manifesting as major qualitative changes.\textsuperscript{485} The injection of funding not only made the field bigger but also radically different. Through the Australia Council a nationwide system of symbolic exchange was established. The speed of this chain reaction served to cause a misrecognition. The autonomous field has its roots in the 1960s and in particular in the expansion of the tertiary system to embrace a new parallel system of colleges of advanced education, which included art schools.\textsuperscript{486} By the early to mid 1970s, this expansion meant that there were was a cadre of graduate students – trained as artists, art teachers or art historians and curators – available to take up new opportunities in the new art bureaucracies, regional and experimental galleries, expanded teaching positions and expanded education staff requirements in the state art galleries. Dispositions nurtured in the new education systems which favoured the new definitions of professionalism and innovation, meant that an increasing number of graduates were suited to government funded activities and not the commercial art world. In effect these graduates, sharing the same dispositions with young, experimental artists in their new positions across the expanding field, constituted the new ‘educated and informed’ audience for contemporary art. Bourdieu observed: ‘The fate of groups is bound up with words that designate them: the power to impose recognition depends on the capacity to mobilise around a name.’\textsuperscript{487} The keywords here were: experimental, innovative, advanced, avant-garde, non-commercial and professional.

In March 1975, the act enshrining the renamed Australia Council as a statutory authority ‘under the ministerial responsibility of the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet’ was passed.\textsuperscript{488} Within three fiscal years, the funding commitment to the arts had trebled

\textsuperscript{487} Bourdieu, \textit{Distinction}, op.cit., p. 481.
from $7 million under the previous Liberal-Country Party Government in 1972–1973 to $21 million in 1974–1975. The impact of such a rapid increase in investment and policy development by the federal government was further enhanced by the growing support and development of state arts ministries and, in some cases, the elevation of the arts within the ministerial responsibility of the state premier. This was particularly so under Don Dunstan’s Labor Government in South Australia and in Victoria under the Liberal Government of Rupert Hamer and his appointment of Eric Westbrook to head the Ministry for the Arts.

During the two years since Sculpturscape ’73, the art institutional networks expanded considerably with increasing emphasis on the professional development of their respective members. The Victorian Public Galleries Group (VPGG), renamed the Regional Galleries Association of Victoria (RGAV) in 1972, successfully instituted a separate directors’ conference within the annual meeting of the boards of trustees of the member galleries, in order to give voice and recognition to the professional staff. Also in 1972, David Thomas, director of the Newcastle Region Art Gallery established the Regional Galleries Association of New South Wales. This was indicative of the growth in numbers of regional galleries and their needs for professionally trained staff.

The Interstate Directors Conference was the annual meeting of the state gallery directors, which in 1969 had voted to invite regional gallery directors to attend. By 1973, the organisation changed its name to the Australian Gallery Directors Conference (AGDC) and in 1974, at a Visual Arts Board (VAB) meeting, the following comments were noted in the minutes by two members, Mr David Thomas (director, Newcastle Region Art Gallery) and Mr John Bailey, chairman (director of the Art Gallery of South Australia):

Council Act 1975 was proclaimed and the Council became a statutory authority under the Ministerial responsibility of the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet.’
The conference should include representation from all Australian public galleries and be Australia-wide in fact as well as in name … [and] the Board should allow the Conference to devise its own constitution before assuming that it would have to fund a similar body representing regional public galleries.489

The VAB allocated $64,000 to the AGDC at its meeting on 27 September 1974, $10,000 of which was for a permanent secretariat, established in 1975 in Melbourne with David Thomas as the director. The AGDC provided member regional and state galleries with a ‘forum … giving the combined public art institutions the character of a national network’.*490

New policies promulgated by the VAB of the Australia Council and backed by significant funding, ensured the rapid expansion of the sector. Funding assistance for alternative exhibiting venues such as the Experimental Art Foundation (EAF) in Adelaide (1974), the Institute of Modern Art (IMA) in Brisbane (1975) and the Sculpture Centre in Sydney (1974) expanded the network for McCullough and the Mildura Arts Centre, and increased exhibition and professional development opportunities for artists.

The VAB’s Australian Contemporary Art Acquisition Scheme aimed at assisting state, regional and the new university and art school galleries in supplementing their collections with works by living Australian artists. As Cr. A.R. Burr, chairman of the MACAC, noted in his 1975 Annual Report, the Mildura Arts Centre had ‘doubled the size of the art collection’ since the implementation of the VAB scheme.491

For Mildura, the significance of the expansion of university fine arts departments and the expansion of art schools into colleges of advanced education lay in the circulation and rise in professional status of key figures, supporters and participating artists. In 1974 two new university visual art history departments were established. Donald Brook was

491 ‘Chairman’s report to the Annual General Meeting of the Mildura Arts Centre Advisory Council’, Mildura Arts Centre, Annual Report 1974–1975, op. cit. From the data in the Annual Reports I am unable to quantify whether this claim is precisely true; however, it would be fair to suggest that the scheme’s impact had been substantial.
appointed as foundation Professor of Visual Arts at Flinders University, Adelaide and Patrick McCaughey as foundation Professor of Visual Arts at Monash University, Melbourne. Both of these appointees were members of the recently established Art Association of Australia (1973) which aimed ‘to promote study and research in art…brining together…people who are engaged in the study, research and teaching of art and art history throughout Australia’, a new professional network of academics and curators.\textsuperscript{492}

In 1974, a policy paper presented to the VAB by board member Patrick McCaughey on developing an artist-in-residence program for universities and colleges of advanced education, was adopted. One of the proposed objectives of this program was to raise ‘the standing and prestige of the artist within his society … [through his] association with a tertiary educational institution”\textsuperscript{493} Again, it is clear that the intention behind this new policy, in its linking of status and recognition, was that the burgeoning tertiary sector was identified as the source of the audience for new art and artists. For sculptors who were already lecturers within the autonomous art schools of the CAE system, who controlled the training, selection and entry into the profession (through awarding qualifications), this program represented a doubling of their recognition as professional artists.

An expansive engagement with contemporary art by the state art galleries in Sydney, Adelaide and Melbourne in the form of small, focused project exhibitions occurred throughout 1975. The Art Gallery of South Australia began in 1974 with a series of Link exhibitions. The National Gallery of Victoria’s series of Artists’ Artists exhibitions focused specifically on contemporary Victorian practitioners. But it was the Art Gallery of New South Wales which undertook an ambitious program of ten monthly Project shows, mostly contemporary in focus, throughout 1975 which drew critical praise for ‘its

\textsuperscript{493} Of the four universities involved with first funded artist-in-residence programs in 1975, Monash University invited Peter Tyndall and Flinders University, Tim Burns; both participants in the 6\textsuperscript{th} Mildura Sculpture Triennial.
new policy of mounting the special Project show, regardless of whether or not they are
aimed for a direct hit at the establishment itself. 494

The three years between 1975 and 1978 reveal the tensions and adjustments by the
rapidly developing institutionally networked art environment in response to increasing
federal and state governments’ fiscal restraints, coming off such a high funding base and
great influx of graduates. It was a period in which the nascent autonomous field of visual
arts practice, manifest at Sculpturscape ’73, began to clearly differentiate itself from the
commercial market economy as an alternative market and shifted the criteria for
consecration and legitimation in its favour. The dramatic changes in the two Mildura
Sculpture Triennials of 1975 and 1978 which are detailed in this chapter provide
evidence of the developments that evolve within this autonomous field in response to
conflicting external political, economic and social pressures.

John Davis’s trajectory from 1975 to 1978 provides material for the analysis of the
artistic and professional dispositions and capital (economic, social and cultural) necessary
for a sculptor and teacher to negotiate recognition within this new system. For
McCullough, his career as a professional arts manager, entrepreneur and curator was
sufficiently recognised by the visiting VAB members and staff at the 1975 Mildura
Sculpture Triennial to ensure his invitation to direct the 2nd Biennale of Sydney in 1976.
McCullough’s position operated on the border between the field of power (political and
economic) and the dominated field of artistic production. His was a pragmatic position
that recognised the ultimate dependence of this new artistic field upon its patrons, the
three levels of government within Australia. However, his misrecognition of the
relativeness of the autonomy of the artistic field in relation to his position ultimately as an
employee of the Mildura City Council would bring about a final denouement at the 1978
Triennial.

and AGNSW ran these programs for several years. The NGV’s Artists’ Artists series of exhibitions ran only
during 1975, as part of the Arts Victoria ’75 promotion by the new Ministry for the Arts in Victoria.
6th Mildura Sculpture Triennial – Post-object show

The Victorian premier and Minister for the Arts, Rupert Hamer, officially opened the 6th Mildura Sculpture Triennial on Easter Saturday, 29 March 1975, acknowledging that Mildura was a ‘spiritual home’ for sculptors. Official guests included various state and federal elected representatives from the region, Eric Westbrook, director, Ministry for the Arts and members of the Park Development Committee (although Sir Roy Grounds sent his apologies). The VAB representative was sculptor and participant Ron Robertson Swann (who was also there in his capacity as a member of the Park Development Committee). Directors of state and regional galleries, curators, critics, artists and their families, art students, dealers and collectors were all present. For the local councillors, members of MACAC and the Mayor of Mildura Cr Beasy, the presence of Rupert Hamer and Eric Westbrook, both of whom were intimately linked to the history and development of the Mildura Arts Centre and the Mildura Sculpture Triennials, lent legitimacy to the 1975 triennial. Cr Beasy and the Mildura City Council were also very aware of the symbolic benefit of the presence of a number of state and federal parliamentarians at the opening, for the town and district of Mildura.

The event spread out of the gallery, down the Sculpturscape escarpment and flood plain, into the main street, and took up residence in various vacant premises such as the Ozone Theatre, a disused delicatessen, a discarded office and service station. There were many performances not documented in the catalogue and an area was allocated in the Sculpturscape environment for student contributions and unscheduled installations.

McCullough was pleased with the extensive national coverage the triennial received as a result of the Australia 75 festival in Canberra and the fact that the triennial headlined the Arts Victoria 75 festival as well. A number of these reviewers also wrote for

496 A further challenge to Mildura’s position was the burgeoning regional gallery network in Victoria. By 1975, there were 16 Victorian regional galleries, all members of the professionally staffed Regional Galleries Association of Victoria (RGAV) that reported to the Ministry for the Arts which was established in 1973 with Eric Westbrook as director. The RGAV grew out of the Victorian Public Galleries Group, which was established in 1957 with a membership of six regional galleries. By 1968 membership had
international art magazines, thus extending the coverage and potential reach of the event. However, there the local paper gave voice to disgruntled locals.

**Selection Process**

Following the successful assertion of artists control by the threatened boycott prior to the last triennial, McCullough travelled to the key centres – Sydney, Melbourne and Adelaide – to discuss the direction of the forthcoming event, to seek recommendations for invitation from his core advisors and to encourage them to bring their students. Apart from McCullough’s usual core group of Adelaide advisors from the SASA, the South Australian contingent for the 1975 Mildura Sculpture Triennial also included newcomers Donald Brook, who brought one hundred of his fine art students from Flinders University; Noel Sheridan from the EAF (as an acquisitions selector for the 6th Mildura Sculpture Triennial); and Bert Flugelman, from the SASA. These three had previously been associated with the University of Sydney and its art workshops (Tin Sheds) and had been part of McCullough’s core group of selectors from Sydney. The implied post-object theme of the event, evident in the selection of works which included a greater percentage of performances, some quite confrontational, drew its inspiration from Donald Brook as the principal theorist. The New Zealand selection was made by Jim Allen, associate professor of Fine Art and one of the leading proponents of post-object art in New Zealand, and Ti Parks (previously from Melbourne and part of the ‘Hampton Mafia’) who was a visiting lecturer in sculpture at the School of Fine Arts, both at the University of Auckland.

pronounced. Of the 108 participants, over half were from Victoria (52 per cent), which had by far the largest number of tertiary art schools, and of the Victorian participants, it is the homogeneity of their representation – forty (70 per cent of their quota) were under thirty years of age, qualifying as emerging artists, recent graduates and some current students – that is particularly exemplary of the predominance of the new education system. Although there was still a predominance of artists aged over thirty years in the participants from the rest of the states and New Zealand, there was an overall rise in the number of emerging sculptors for the whole triennial to 58 per cent. This represented a significant rise in the category of emerging participants since 1973.

Professor Bernard Smith, head of the Power Institute of Fine Art at the University of Sydney, had written a series of highly critical articles concerning the direction of government funding of the arts in The Australian newspaper. His final article, which would have been widely discussed in arts circles, was critical of the expansion in the number of art schools and the consequent increasing number of students being trained as professional artists.

In Australia there is a more pressing need at the moment to sustain and encourage creative activity in the visual arts at present … Most [of the government’s funds] should be directed towards stimulating present activity … if you want to develop a genuinely creative arts policy you apply the bulk of your funding to the growing points of art, to the support of young, unknown artists … Five million dollars should be set aside to evolve a policy for the visual arts in which the artist is treated as a professional and not as a genius on the dole.497

Smith’s reckoning was that the current education policy was creating a large pool of emerging artists, with little prospect of any success in supporting themselves as artists. He also implied the very real issue that the rapid expansion in art schools, their elevation to tertiary CAEs and the rapid increase in the number of graduating students had resulted in devalued, professional qualifications.

In light of Smith’s criticism, the 6th Mildura Sculpture Triennial offered a highly selective, national, professional development opportunity to the increasing number of

497 Bernard Smith, ‘The way of the Sun King or Czarina?’, The Australian, 1 March 1975.
emerging artists invited to participate: validation (through invitation), exhibition, consecration and in some instances, acquisition. For McCullough’s core educator-sculptor selectors, the process validated their credentials as influential members of the field in the eyes of their students and recent graduates. For all participants it offered a unique opportunity to increase their cultural and social capital through extending their network of contacts.

**Funding and sponsorship**

The opening of the triennial included the launch of the celebratory post-1973 publication, *Sculpturscape ’73: an exhibition in Mildura Australia*, that was part of a supplementary funding of $10,000 provided by the VAB following the success of the 1973 triennial event. This detailed and informative catalogue of news clippings, commentary and high quality reproductions of works in-situ, became the definitive record of that event.

There were some local issues to be negotiated. McGlashan’s Transport, a long time supporter of the triennials, notified the MACAC well in advance that they could no longer offer their sponsorship of free freight for sculptors.\(^{498}\) W.R. Young’s of Adelaide continued to assist with the freight of works to and from Adelaide, along with the Union Steam Ship Co. of New Zealand, which provided trans-Tasman freight sponsorship. McCullough acknowledged the Queen Elizabeth II Arts Council of New Zealand for its ‘support for New Zealand exhibitors and their art-works’.\(^{499}\) Ansett Airlines’ ongoing in-kind sponsorship arrangement with McCullough, which flew reviewers free of charge to the triennial, was still in place.

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\(^{498}\) Sculptors were advised to notify MACAC if their works required freighting from the city depots as this would now be paid for through the Mildura Arts Centre’s Sculpture Triennial budget. McGlashan’s withdrawal of support was in many ways a response to a reduced demand because of the change in the working practices of participants. Although the number of exhibits and exhibitors increased significantly between 1970 and 1975, the nature of the works changed significantly from object-based works, transported and installed, to increasing numbers of installation, process and ephemeral works comprising documentation, performance, new media and found material, created in-situ by artists and assisted by students, prior to the opening.

\(^{499}\) McCullough, Acknowledgements, *6th Mildura Sculpture Triennial*, op. cit.
Councillor Burr in his MACAC chairman’s report, stated that ‘the Visual Arts Board and the Community Arts Board [of the Australia Council for the Arts] have provided useful grants for Mildura Arts Centre’s projects’. With regard to funding the 6th Mildura Sculpture Triennial, the VAB contributed $24,000 for exhibition costs, catalogue publication and art purchases. Apart from an annual state grant for the running of the Mildura Arts Centre, the Victorian Ministry for the Arts contributed funding and support from the Arts Victoria 75 project of $10,000 to the 6th Mildura Triennial, as part of the sesquicentenary celebrations of the founding of the state of Victoria. At McCullough’s instigation a number of artists sought funding from the VAB to enable them to create work for the triennial, including John Davis’s hire of video equipment for his work Place and Tony Coleing’s To do with Blue.

The VAB’s Australian Contemporary Art Acquisition Scheme, between 1974 and 1976, provided $13,545 in funding to Mildura Arts Centre towards acquisitions of work by living Australian artists. Further assistance from the VAB included $10,000 in 1974 towards the production of plans for the Park Development committee. The investment in the 6th Mildura Sculpture Triennial by the VAB was multi-layered and extensive.

The fundamental shift in funding from local and business support to government funded institutional support was particularly evident at this triennial. Whereas in the past, funding from the Victorian government had been based upon contributing funding where there was evidence of local support (usually in the form of funds raised by the local community), with the advent of direct funding from the Australia Council, artists and institutions (such as the Mildura Art Gallery and the triennial) were now directing their activities to suit current policy developments.

Within this new framework of support, McCullough was keenly aware that the triennial was increasingly in competition with many new and expanding institutions located in the

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502 As has been noted earlier, the chairman in the 1974–75 annual report noted that funding contributions from this scheme ‘doubled the size of the art collection’.
metropolitan centres which catered for experimental and avant-garde activity as part of their regular programming. Many of McCullough’s core group of artists in Melbourne, Sydney and Adelaide participated on the committees and boards of these new organisations and were involved in their policy and programme development and operational grant seeking.

Selected Works

One of the most memorable works from the 6th Sculpture Triennial, for those who witnessed it, was Kevin Mortensen’s Delicatessen, necessitating the finding and use of a disused delicatessen and an actor to play the part of the eccentric owner (Figure 60). Mortensen created props to hang in the shop and developed the script with the actor Ed Rosser, using J. G. Ballard’s book Terminal Beach as an inspiration. Noel Sheridan pronounced Delicatessen as ‘the outstanding work at Mildura’.503 Ken Scarlett’s reaction provided an account of the experience:

It is relatively easy to describe Delicatessen … but extraordinarily difficult to explain how successful it was. I walked into what appeared to be an empty, disused shop in the main street of Mildura. There were a few objects, looking somewhat like legs of ham, hanging from a butcher’s rail. They were made from animal bones, balsa wood, pieces of canvas and polyester resin – and were obviously the work of Kevin Mortensen. It was some time before I became aware of a slightly strange gentleman, in a rather out of fashion blue suit. When I began to talk with him the whole situation changed – becoming both more real and yet quite surreal at the same time … the whole environment and performance were contrived, yet it took on a surrealist quality that was strangely convincing.504

Delicatessen’s subtle engagement with concepts of memory and place and the unsettling ambiguous elisions between real and imagined were played out to great effect. As Sheridan observed: ‘The art/life dichotomy is given one more turn, but this time with

503 Noel Sheridan, ‘Notes on twelve exhibits by NOEL SHERIDAN, MA., Executive Officer of the Experimental Art Foundation of South Australia, and Honorary Advisor to Mildura Arts Centre on non-purchasable works to be considered for awards in the SIXTH MILDURA SCULPTURE EXHIBITION’, 6th Mildura Sculpture Exhibition, op. cit., p. 8.
great precision and imagination … the transition between the real and the fabricated is kept in constant suspension while the whole thing, in its dying, asks life.  

Fluxus inspiration, present in Dave Morrissey’s 1962 shed in 1973, extended in 1975 in Mortensen’s Delicatessen and further as the modus operandi of Terry Reid’s (Fluxum) and Bob Kerr’s (Fluxee) mail art project, Open Drawers, as well as Nick Spills’s Homage to the Lone Banana. Jim Cowley’s Smouldering Man Suicide Ltd, a video recording people’s responses to a be-suited man walking through the city with a lighted fuse dangling from his jacket, carrying a briefcase with information on suicide, and his collaboration with Bob Ramsay in City Confrontation Piece, were also informed by the same rationale that the ‘work of art … had shifted to the position of a catalyst for an interactive relationship between art maker and art receiver’.

However the very concept of post-object art, founded upon an open propositional and experimental definition of art, and its supporting discourse, were the product of a new definition of the professional artist as intellectual, research-directed and qualified. The ‘educated and informed’ audience for this new work were the products of the rapidly expanding tertiary education system, not the general public. Artworks proclaiming to be about communication were codified within a system only understood by those educated

506 The Open Drawers project begun in 1974 to mark the 10th anniversary of Fluxus exchanges was an alternative communication network amongst artists in NZ and the ‘Eternal network’ of international mail artists. The project was based at the University of Auckland art school library. Setting up a ‘newsroom’ within the Ozone Theatre, where the touring exhibition, 12 New Zealand artists, was located, Kerr and Reid worked on the production of The Mildura Papers, a composite newspaper format of broadsheet, the Auckland (sic) Star and two tabloids, the Canberra Telegraph and a miniaturised Sunraysia Daily. Contributions were sought from participating artists as well as mail artists throughout ‘Australasia, Pacific Rim and global’, as outlined in their proposal. The contributions were mixed with local news, reviews of the triennial and their own satirical editorialising, including a report on their performance of burning 2000 copies of their previously published mail art newspaper, The Inch Art Issue, which had been banned in NZ. Open Drawers: The Mildura Papers and the individual and collaborative works of Adelaide artists, Jim Cowley and Bob Ramsey were, like a number of other performance/artworks at the triennial, premised upon social critique and art as communication. According to Daniel Thomas in his review, ‘Sculpture in the streets’, Sydney Morning Herald, 3 April 1975, Cowley and Ramsey were responsible for a facsimile newspaper poster which appeared down Deakin Avenue in time for the triennial opening on Easter Saturday, which proclaimed ‘MILDURA LOCAL CRUCIFIED BY ARTISTS?’. The artists reported that they would ‘document the city’s reaction to this provocation’.
within it. The New Zealand participation, including the works by expatriate Kiwis in Britain, received praise from Daniel Thomas: ‘the most professional avant-garde pieces’, and Elwyn Lynn: ‘more creative and intellectual … than their Australian counterparts’.  

For participants, artists and students alike, it was perhaps the only opportunity to meet one’s interstate peers and establish productive networks. Graeme Sturgeon in his review for The Australian noted that, ‘The Mildura sculpture exhibition becomes a marketplace for ideas as much as an opportunity to see what new directions are being explored.’ He continued with an observation that clearly delineated McCullough’s intention:

> It has become increasingly clear that Mildura plays a much wider role in contemporary art than originally envisaged and is giving a useful exposure to the more extreme forms of present-day art without worrying too much about neat categorisation.

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509 Paul Worstead, the instigator of Life Modelling and Casting News, along with collaborators Marie McMahon and Michael Callaghan, had first attended Sculpturscape ’73 as students of Noel Sheridan from the National Art School, Sydney. They graduated in 1974 and returned to the 1975 Mildura Sculpture Triennial for one last issue of LM&CN. Michael Callaghan was then working at the Tin Sheds as a tutor in post-object art with Aleks Danko. They worked out of the Central Street Cooperative Site, a small deserted office building on 10th Street, Mildura, producing a typed document, *The Last Sculpture Show: no clean nose allowed*, A life modelling and casting news production April 1975, a compilation of comments and discussions with people and artists who ventured into the space.


511 ibid. Sturgeon in his retrospective assessment of the 1975 triennial retreated from this more expansive ‘snapshot’ view to a concern with sculptural styles: ‘This diversity of styles in contemporary sculpture demonstrated … not an open-minded pluralism but a lack of purpose and a confusion of direction.’ See his Sculpture at Mildura: The story of the Mildura Sculpture Triennial 1961–1982, op. cit., p. 78. Sturgeon’s later comments about Mildura indicated an ambivalent attitude towards its ‘door opening catholicity’; perhaps too broad a selection by McCullough with no hierarchy of styles.
Figure 60: Kevin Mortensen, *Delicatessen* 1975 (three views).
Figure 61: top, Alison Cousland and Margaret Bell, *Untitled* 1975, plants, 15 x 20 x 17 metres. Photo: Ken Scarlett.

Figure 62: bottom, Jillian Orr, *Strung out* 1975, timber and rope, 1.83 x 6.10 x 1.83 metres.
Figure 63: top, Domenico de Clario, *Untitled* 1975, mixed media, dimensions variable.

Figure 64: bottom, Bill Gregory, *A record of the largest mono-foetal structure on this planet* 1974, 40 sheets of etched glass, 0.51 x 2.44 x 0.51 cms each.
Figure 65: top left, Tim Burns, *I couldn’t think of anything else to do – see* 1975, polaroid photograph. Photo: Tim Burns.

Figure 66: top right, Andrew McEwan Coplans, *Capability Recycled* 1975, red gum, 4.57 x 4.57 x 3.4 m.

Figure 67: bottom, Members of the Australia Council’s first Visual Arts Board and staff on tour in Mildura 1975. From left standing: Noella Yuill, James Gleeson, Mary Shaw, Elizabeth Churcher, John Baily, Bruce Le Compte, Ann Lewis, Rie Heymans, Ron Robertson Swann; front: Klaus Kuziow, Katrina Rumley and Richard Lund. Leon Paroissien archive.
Figure 68: top left, Bert Flugelman, *Untitled* 1975, six polished aluminium tetrahedrons buried in trench 450 cm deep at Commonwealth Park on the hill beside Coranderrk Street roundabout, Canberra. This work was included as an earthwork in the exhibition Young Australian Sculptors, curated and organised by Tom McCullough and part of the Australia 75 festival in Canberra. The photographs of the process of excavation and burial were exhibited at the 1975 Mildura Sculpture Triennial.

Figure 69: top right, Tony Coleing, *To do with Blue* 1975, painted mild steel, 7.32 x 6.10 x 6.10 cms. Collection Australian National Gallery (now NGA).

Figure 70: bottom left, Inge King, *Black Sun*, painted steel, 239 x 2-8 x 72 cms. Collection Mildura Arts Centre. (*Black Sun II* was commissioned by the Australian National University in 1975).

Figure 71: bottom right, Ron Robertson Swann, *Quietly Wild* 1974, painted steel plate, 153 x 399 x 305 cms. Acquired in 1975 by the NCDC, Canberra.

All these works were included in the Young Australian Sculptors exhibition, held in the Commonwealth Gardens in Canberra as part of the Australia 75 festival. They were then transferred to Mildura and exhibited in the 6th Mildura Sculpture Triennial 1975.
Acquisitions and grants to artists

The selection panel of McCullough, Sheridan and Sturgeon announced the allocation of $8000 for acquisitions to the Mildura Art Centre collection. The five works purchased were *Black Sun* by Inge King, *Untitled 2/75* by Reg Parker, *Sunsize* by Ti Parks, *The Gigantic Xmas Sale* by Don Walters and *Gatehouse* by David Wilson (Figure 70). Noel Sheridan as ‘honorary advisor to Mildura Arts Centre’ adjudicated the $2000 prize for ephemeral work. On his recommendation that the criteria applied to formal sculpture experiments would not be appropriate to post-object works, the money was split equally between all seventeen participants in this category. A number of other works that had been on display at the *Young Australian Sculptors* exhibition – curated and organised by McCullough at the Australia 75 festival in Canberra and then transported to Mildura – were also purchased by the ANG, the ANU and the National Capital Development Commission (NCDC) (Figures 68-71).

The multi-layered financial support available to sculptors and the triennial through the VAB and other government funded agencies, and the increasing absence of financial support from the local community and businesses for acquisitions and purchases was indicative of a separation developing between a local ownership and relationship with the

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512 McCullough, in a letter to NGV director Gordon Thomson, sought permission to invite Sturgeon, then exhibitions officer, as one of the selectors for the 1975 triennial stating that ‘he has shown considerable interest in recent Australian sculpture, and his contact with artists will provide valuable advice when we select $8000 worth of work for our collection’ (Directors Correspondence 1975, NGV Research Library). Sturgeon was also at the time on the selection committee of the VAB’s Australian Contemporary Art Acquisition Scheme, which between 1974 and 1976 provided $13,545 in funding to Mildura Arts Centre towards acquisitions of work by living Australian artists.


514 Tony Coleing, *To do with Blue* was acquired by the ANG; Robert Parr, *Flowers* was purchased by the NCDC; series two of Inge King’s *Black Sun I* was commissioned by the ANU; Russell Brown, *Sentinel I* was purchased by the NCDC (given that *Sentinel III* was listed as exhibited at Australia 75 and both *Sentinel II* and *Sentinel III* were exhibited at the Mildura Triennial, I suggest that there may have been a misprint in listing the work); and Ron Robertson Swann *Quietly Wild* was purchased by the NCDC.
triennials and the increasingly autonomous artistic field which appeared in town once every three years.

**Audience**

The 6th Mildura Sculpture Triennial brought together a significantly large group of sculptors, artists and students, along with state and federal politicians, directors, curators and trustees of state and regional galleries, board members and officers of the state and federal funding agencies as well as collectors and dealers. The increase in visitor numbers during the triennial events was primarily due to the intra and interstate art world visitors. The presence of the premier and his Director of the Ministry for the Arts was intended to draw a larger regional and metropolitan audience from Victoria, in order to launch and promote the major, state year-long cultural initiative, Arts Victoria 75.

The VAB and its support staff convened a meeting in April in Mildura ‘so that members would have the opportunity to view the Sixth Sculpture Triennial’ (Figure 67). Apart from the official civic reception, McCullough entertained the VAB group at his weekend retreat at Kings Billabong, which provided him with further opportunity to discuss policy directions and also promote Mildura’s sculptural project. As he noted in his report to the MACAC, the attendance of the VAB in Mildura indicated the level of national esteem with which the sculpture triennials were held. Mildura still had a role to play, but now occupied a place in an increasingly crowded field, where competition for funds and attention, required an adept ability to clearly define a unique niche within the field.

Although crediting the triennial as ‘the most important survey of what’s happening in Australian (and New Zealand) sculpture’ in his review in 1975, Daniel Thomas, a year

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515 ‘Visual Arts Board meeting in Mildura’, *Sunraysia Daily*, 22 April 1975. The members of the Australia Council’s first VAB tour in Mildura were Leon Paroissien (director), Noela Yuill (project officer), James Gleeson (board member and artist), Mary Shaw (project officer), Elizabeth Churcher (consultant), John Baily (chairman and AGSA director), Bruce Le Compte (project officer), Ann Lewis (board member and Gallery A director), Rie Heymans (consultant), Ron Robertson Swann (board member and sculptor-participant), Klaus Kuziow (VAB project officer), Katrina Rumley (previously director, Geelong Art Gallery, VAB project officer) and Richard Lund (project officer).
later, disputed McCullough’s claim to engage ‘directly a larger percentage of the general public than any other artistic event yet designed in Australia’. As Thomas saw it, ‘The Mildura sculpture exhibitions, though containing many of the key works of Australia art in the 1970s, are seen by few except critics and artists, for that small city is rather remote … By 1975 in Australia the new art had achieved its own big-city institutional support, more accessible than Mildura, more frequent than state art museums.’ Thomas was referring to the VAB’s funding of alternative exhibiting spaces such as the EAF in Adelaide, The Ewing Gallery at Melbourne University, One Central Street and the Sculpture Centre in Sydney, and the IMA in Brisbane.

Thomas’s comment needs further elucidation. It was not that the audience for the new art was any different, or necessarily broader and larger, between the cities and Mildura during the triennials. Increasingly, the audience in Mildura was primarily the intra and interstate artists, students, and the rest of the visual arts network that visited and camped in Mildura specifically for the event, rather than the local populace.

The significant difference between the regional centre of Mildura and the new metropolitan art centres was the frequency of access and the convergent audience of participants in the various organisations that had begun to coalesce into a recognisable visual arts field in each city. Thomas’s statement acknowledged the integration of avant-garde activities on the fringe of the Australian desert into the mainstream institutions of Australian art at one and the same time as the birth of these new institutions. In a sense, it could be said that the institutional framework was created for the purposes of integrating these new art practices into the larger metropolitan network of Australian art institutions (state art museums, experimental spaces, art schools and art history and theory departments, critics, dealers) that constituted the visual arts field. However, the divergence of opinion in attitudes and over time would become a marked feature by the

1978 triennial and subsequent historical reporting. The divergence of views by various commentators could be attributed to the differing positions within the field, or positions outside the field such as those occupied by the Mildura councillors.

Mildura in 1975, as an experimental field offering opportunities to students, recent graduates and a burgeoning group of younger artists interested in inter-disciplinary exchanges, still had a role to play. Furthermore, the triennials provided a broad selection of current work from which curators could draw upon for their own projects. However, the regular access and exposure that the metropolitan alternative exhibition spaces could provide to emerging artists and students, combined with the VAB’s view of the triennial as an adaptive model, was the next challenge to the uniqueness of the Mildura Sculpture Triennials.

**Tom McCullough: 1975–1976**

I always had this aim for Mildura of keeping one step ahead of other regional galleries.

McCullough was very conscious that what he had created in the Mildura Sculpture Triennials was unique and that this required protecting. There was a competitive edge to his approach. There was all the more to lose now given the investment in the triennials by the major funding agencies. The threat was more likely to come from other galleries and other national events.

McCullough’s quote – ‘We could lose our position and therefore our government sponsorship and all the privileges that come with taking an initiative’ – implied a

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518 As Noel Sheridan observed: ‘Many of the categories that were nascent at Mildura were later refined and processed as discrete practices. Much of the energy that was evident at Mildura came to the EAF in Adelaide to fuel activity there and write the history of that space.’ See Noel Sheridan, ‘How the old canons were destabilised in Mildura in 1975’, *Artlink*, vol. 13, no. 2, 1993, p. 19.

519 An important effect of the significant increase in funds available and distributed to the expanding institutional field of the visual arts was ‘a more articulated structure at the field level’, resulting in a mimetic isomorphism, where ‘organisations copy each other’s structures and procedures’. See Victoria Alexander, *Museums and Money: The Impact of Funding on Exhibitions, Scholarship and Management*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington and Indianapolis, 1996, pp. 112–13.

520 Tom McCullough, interview with the author, 30 March 2006.
conscious awareness of a major shift that had taken place, nationally, in little more than two years.\footnote{ibid.} For McCullough and Mildura, the focus had shifted from a local, regional funding basis with few competitors to a complex, national and interconnected field of professional practice, defined by extensive funding tied to new and rapidly evolving policy and program criteria. The impact of centralised, institutional funding in the form of the Australia Council for the Arts increased inter-organisational links and ‘fostered a more articulated structure’ in recognition of the evolution of an organisational field.\footnote{Paraphrase and quote from Alexander, *Museums and Money*, op. cit., pp. 112–14.} The Mildura Sculpture Triennials were therefore central to the development of new art making and presentation in Australia and this new model had to be defended by continuing to be innovative.

**McCullough and the 6th Mildura Sculpture Triennial**

Westbrook invited McCullough to participate in the organising committee for Arts Victoria 75, a new ministry initiative with a budget of around $250,000, to raise awareness of the diversity of the arts in Victoria.\footnote{Tom McCullough, quoted in an unpublished interview with Geoffrey de Groen, 1 October, 1976. Copy of transcript of interview located in McCullough archive, PA 97/33, Box 6, SLV, p. 6.} It was agreed that the 6th Mildura Sculpture Triennial would be moved back one year to be the inaugural event to launch this initiative with Mildura wearing the mantle of ‘A City for Sculpture’. As Director, Ministry for the Arts Victoria, Westbrook’s brief introduction on the opening page of the 1975 Mildura Triennial catalogue acknowledged the funding body’s perception of the triennial event’s prestige:

> The Victorian Ministry for the Arts is happy to be associated with Mildura’s Sixth National Sculpture Exhibition. This will be the first of sixteen festival exhibitions which will take place in country centres throughout the State. It is good to know that these sculpture exhibitions have become important events in the art calendar of Australia and are now visited by overseas critics and reported in international journals.\footnote{Westbrook, ‘Arts Victoria 75’ in *6th Mildura Sculpture Exhibition: An opening feature of Arts Victoria 75*, Mildura Arts Centre, Mildura, Vic., n.p.}
McCullough was aware that Graeme Sturgeon, temporary exhibitions manager at the NGV, had commissioned a survey among artists in Victoria from which he intended to draw up an exhibition list of *Artists’ Artists*. He had planned a series of small project shows at the NGV to run throughout the year, as part of the gallery’s contribution to Arts Victoria 75. Among the artists selected, most of the sculptors were part of McCullough’s core group of Victorian artist-advisors. Sturgeon was drawing upon McCullough’s successful consultative model of peer assessment.

Concurrent with the Arts Victoria 75 arrangements, McCullough had been approached to organise an outdoor sculpture exhibition on the shores of Lake Burley Griffin in Canberra as part of a cultural festival entitled Australia 75, and received Australia Council funding towards freight costs. The works selected were object-based and the majority of participating artists were drawn from McCullough’s Mildura contacts. Canberra, as the capital city of the Commonwealth, the administrative heart of the nation and the centre for burgeoning national cultural institutions, was also a major commissioning centre. Representatives from the NCDC had attended past Mildura Triennials to source works and artists for commissions. McCullough’s focus for this exhibition was to create a dramatic presentation for commissioning bureaucrats, whether architects, curators or other agents based in the nation’s capital, as well as to maximise available pre-publicity for the forthcoming triennial, later that month. In many respects, this one-week outdoor sculpture exhibition echoed the early Mildura Triennials of the 1960s with their emphasis on sales and commissions of object-based work.

As the launch event for Arts Victoria 75, McCullough was keen to expand the idea of Mildura as ‘A city for Sculpture’ for the 1975 triennial. The event spread into town,

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525 In a letter dated 30 December 1974 to Tom McCullough, Leon Paroissien noted that the VAB ‘resolved to offer the Mildura Arts Centre a grant of $2000 plus a guarantee-against-loss of $1000 to extend the value of the Mildura Sculpture exhibition by showing some works in Canberra at the time of the Australia 75 Festival’, Mildura Arts Centre archive, folder 1975 Mildura Sculpture Triennial. Held from the 8–16 March, *Young Australian Sculptors* comprised 31 sculptors and 38 works including an earthwork by Bert Flugelman. Many of the works were then transported to Mildura for the opening of the 6th Mildura Sculpture Triennial including the photo-documentation of the stages of Flugelman burying the tetrahedrons next to Lake Burley Griffin in Canberra.

526 Refer this Chapter, footnote 512, for a list of NCDC purchases.
taking up residence in the abandoned Ozone Theatre (where the NZ participants exhibited with film and video works as well as a travelling exhibition entitled *Six New Zealand Artists*); a disused delicatessen, the site of Kevin Mortensen’s memorable performance work; an abandoned service station and information centre next door and along the main thoroughfare Deakin Avenue, the location of a number of major works that had been commissioned for the Australia 75 exhibition. In total 105 artists participated with a total of 149 works; of the invited artists 51 per cent were participating for the first time, a significant number having previously attended triennials as students. As McCullough related: ‘artists themselves were the fountainhead … I’ve based a lot of my decisions in Mildura on the up-and-coming young artists, as suggested by the more established artist, or people whose work I consider is experimental.’

Following his interstate round of discussions with artists, McCullough introduced more ephemeral, post-object and performance works into the sixth triennial than previously. Attending the Adelaide Festival in early 1974, he had the chance to catch up with his Adelaide core group, which now included Bert Flugelman and the recently arrived Donald Brook. Brook, in his capacity as founding Chair of Visual Arts at Flinders University, had decided that he would establish a post-object art and documentation collection in the Flinders University Art Museum.

There had always been a New Zealand presence at the Mildura Sculpture events since their 1961 inception; however, although the 1975 participation was statistically comparable to attendances in 1970 and 1973, the intellectual impact of the works from New Zealand was noted by a number of critics.

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527 I am grateful to Dr Pamela Zeplin for the following footnote from her unpublished PhD thesis, *The Neglected Middle Distance: Australian and New Zealand visual arts exchanges, 1970 – 1985*, School of Art History and Theory, Faculty of the College of Fine Arts, University of New South Wales, 2005: ‘The Ozone Theatre housed a self-contained and QEII-sponsored exhibition of London-based New Zealand artists (John Panting, Darcy Lange, Ken Griffiths, Stephen Furlonger, Boyd Webb and Terry Powell), which had previously toured their home country in 1974 as *Six New Zealand Artists*.’

528 A supplementary catalogue page noted that of the 149 works, four works did not appear as indicated in the catalogue.


530 ‘They had absorbed a professional approach to making sculpture … As a group their sculpture was outstanding and showed up much of the work of their Australian peers as out of date and worse still,
As Daniel Thomas pointed out in his review of the triennial, it was ‘perhaps the most important survey of what’s happening in Australian art’ because of sculpture’s embrace of performance and participatory work as well as film and video art.\(^{531}\) Alan McCulloch in the *Melbourne Herald* extolled the triennial’s ‘door-opening catholicity’ in terms of the sheer diversity of the works and the scale of the event.\(^{532}\)

The move into town aimed to expand the audience for and exposure to new forms of artmaking. Within this expanded concept of audience, McCullough included the increased number of visiting university and art school students as well as planned school excursions to the triennial: ‘The 1975 exhibition may manage to involve directly a larger percentage of the general public than any other artistic event yet designed in Australia.’\(^{533}\) The misrecognition within McCullough’s claim for the largest audience for an artistic event in Australia was the ambiguity within his definition of an audience. The Mildura Triennial’s principal audience was not the general public but the expanding tertiary art education system, which comprised participants, their assistants and students, and the selectors. The control of the selection process by the lecturers in the tertiary system (who predominated in McCullough’s core group of advisors), where the contest for control of the definition of ‘art’ was being fought over, ensured the reproduction of their dispositions so that those selected to participate would in future become the selectors for the Mildura Sculpture Triennials.

\(^{531}\) Thomas, ‘Sculpture in the streets’, *Sydney Morning Herald*, op. cit.


\(^{533}\) McCullough, quoted in ‘Premier to open sculpture show’, *Sunraysia Daily*, op. cit.
Sculpture Park Development Committee

Having secured $10,000 in VAB funding, the Sculpture Park Development Committee met six times between August 1974 and end of 1975, during which time designs for the realisation of a sculpture park in the Sculpturscape area were presented to the Mildura City Council for public viewing. The cost of the engineering works required were presented in a budget submitted to the MACAC in August 1975 and totalled $262,446. Although the progress report concluded that ‘it is hoped that substantial support will be given to this project, at every possible level’, there were already indications of the financial pressure that the municipal council felt it was being asked to carry was beyond its regional scope. 534

In his annual report, MACAC chairman, Roy Burr (and Mildura City Councillor) cautioned:

I must emphasise that the Arts Centre complex serves a vast part of North West Victoria and South West New South Wales. Therefore it should not be the sole responsibility of Mildura City Council to provide the bulk of the finance to operate it ... because of the area served, increased responsibility should be taken by the Federal Government in particular. 535

At the very same time that McCullough was increasingly thinking of Mildura and his role as being part of a much larger national field, there were mounting voices of dissent and concern within the community of Mildura about the costs of supporting a program which

534 ‘Considerable expenditure by Mildura already has been necessary in terms of officer expertise, administrative costs and publication of the original FEASIBILITY STUDY. None of this has been shown in the enclosed balance sheet, nor has the capital value of the site been calculated, or the huge cost to Mildura Arts Centre in developing its unique reputation through six national sculpture triennials since 1961.’ Quote sourced in ‘Progress Report by the Development Committee for a Cultural Park to be sited near the City of Mildura Arts Centre’, produced by Bruce Mackenzie and Associates, North Sydney, 1975, n.p.

535 Chairman’s Report, Mildura Arts Centre Annual Report 1974–1975, op. cit. It is also interesting to note that the Mayor of Mildura (also a member of MACAC) Cr Lloyd Beasy accompanied McCullough to the official opening of Australia 75 in Canberra to view the sculpture exhibition in Commonwealth Gardens, by Lake Burley Griffin. Although impressed ‘he believed Mildura’s proposed Rio Vista Park would be in every way equal to, if not better than, the Canberra park’. The Sunraysia Daily continued that the prime minister, who officially opened the festival stated that ‘the financing of festivals such as Australia 75 was a Federal and not a municipal responsibility’, presumably fuelling the expectation of Mildura City Council of further federal funding for a national initiative such as the triennials. See ‘Canberra visit for arts opening’, Sunraysia Daily, March 11, 1975, p. 3.
was not orientated towards the local but to a distant field that was largely alien to them. At this point, the tensions between McCullough as a player within the national field and McCullough as an employee of regional city gallery begin to become evident. The gap between these two positions would by 1978 become unbridgeable.

**Assessment of McCullough**

McCullough’s reputation and sphere of influence as a regional gallery director had expanded since the success of Sculpturescape ’73. In what was still nationally a small, interconnected art world, he was increasingly involved in state and national arts committees and professional associations that required frequent absences from Mildura. 536

By 1975 staffing levels at the Mildura Arts Centre had risen to nine employees: one director, six Council employees and two teachers seconded from the Victorian Department of Education (whose salaries were paid by the department). The state government contributed to the cost of the director’s salary. It was a well-organised situation that, with forward planning, could manage the centre and its diverse programs in the absence of the director. Although a multi-function centre such as Mildura, with museum, art gallery and theatre, represented an important investment by the state and local governments, it still presented Mildura City Council and the local community with significant costs and responsibilities.

It was now ten years since McCullough had been appointed to the director’s position and nine years since the opening of the Arts Centre facilities. With the conclusion of the triennial, he conducted a storage, office accommodation, and repair and maintenance audit. A report with costs estimated at $36,000 was submitted to MACAC in which he concluded, ‘There is an understandable reluctance to commit this small community to further capital expenditure and borrowings … unless substantial aid from outside sources

536 McCullough was appointed to the Crafts Board of the Australia Council in 1975 and for a time was the chairman of the board’s exhibition committee.
is available for the building extensions.\textsuperscript{537} Given the reluctance indicated to finding the funding required for necessary maintenance, the budget forecasts of the costs involved in establishing the sculpture park would have raised real concerns about the future direction of the Arts Centre and its collection.

Although there were rumblings locally, McCullough still had the full support of MACAC including the backing of the two councillors appointed to the committee; the chairman, Cr Roy Burr and the Mayor of Mildura, Cr Lloyd Beasy. Cr Burr articulated his concern that the financial resources that a national event such as the Mildura Sculpture Triennials required, as well as the large regional area that the Mildura Arts Centre was servicing, should receive federal funding that adequately reflected the regional demands and national expectations of the Arts Centre. The regional effects of the world fuel crisis – high inflation, rising unemployment with low economic growth – would have been particularly evident in a community like Mildura and added urgency to the above concerns.

\textbf{McCullough and the 2\textsuperscript{nd} Biennale of Sydney}

Obviously, it [1975 Mildura Sculpture Triennial] was a model for my 1976 Biennale of Sydney.\textsuperscript{538}

McCullough’s role as director of the 2\textsuperscript{nd} Biennale of Sydney is included in this chapter because it reveals the influence that his working method, developed in Mildura, had on the embryonic organisation of the biennale.\textsuperscript{539} The inclusion is also important because the Australia Council’s role in identifying a successful model for future Biennales of Sydney had already been pioneered in Mildura. Clearly, the VAB regarded its funding

\textsuperscript{537} ‘Director’s Report on the need for increased storage space, work areas and office accommodation at Mildura Arts Centre – 6 August 75’, p. 1, Mildura Arts Centre archives, folder 1975 MACAC correspondence. The report also noted that the ‘Sculpture storage area has had to be supplemented by using a 55 x25 feet corrugated iron shed in a former power station site about 400 yards along Cureton Avenue.’

\textsuperscript{538} Transcript of interview of Thomas McCullough by Hazel de Berg, 2\textsuperscript{nd} December 1976, n.p., tape 973, National Library of Australia, Canberra.

\textsuperscript{539} ‘McCullough set a standard on which the Biennale of Sydney could build in subsequent years’. See Leon Paroissien, ‘The Biennale of Sydney: a partisan view of three decades’, \textit{Art and Australia}, vol. 41, no. 1, spring 2003, p. 62.
contributions to the Mildura Sculpture Triennials of 1973 and 1975 as visible national successes. Here was a director who was promoting a range of artists and experimental practices that challenged the definitions of sculpture; who had developed a model that was closer to the ‘kind of festivals that [international] biennials represented’. The Mildura Triennial model would enable the national arts funding body to realise one of its objectives of promoting contemporary Australian art practice internationally through the network of international biennales. However, of much greater significance was McCullough’s peer network of cultural contacts. What the VAB and the Australia Council’s International Division regarded as ‘innovative and experimental’ about the 6th Mildura Triennial in 1975, and that they were seeking to replicate in the 2nd Biennale of Sydney, was not so much the final exhibition as McCullough’s consultative networking approach to a peer-review selection process.

The instigator of the 1st Biennale of Sydney and primary funding source, Franco Belgiorno-Nettis, managing director of Transfield Pty Ltd, had a great interest in sculpture and also believed that a biennale in Sydney, based upon the Venice Biennale, would link Australia to the world. Leon Paroissien, appointed director of the VAB in 1974, had visited the 6th Mildura Sculpture Triennial with the board members and staff (Figure 67). Paroissien realised the value of the triennial model to the VAB as a vehicle to promote its international objectives and brokered an agreement with Belgiorno-Nettis, which would satisfy his interest in sculpture and desire to continue to support an international biennale in Sydney.

540 Leon Paroissien, email to the author, 12 September 2007.
541 Franco Belgiorno-Nettis established the Transfield Prize (at the time, the richest national prize for painting) in 1961. By 1967, the Transfield foundry, specialising in casting bronze sculpture, was established and the Prize for Sculpture was awarded that year to Norma Redpath. In 1971 Aleks Danko won the final Transfield Prize for Sculpture with his work, Carnival. By 1973, Belgiorno-Nettis was keen to ‘inject that flavour of international extravaganza, originality and explosive vision’ that he experienced at the Venice Biennale. ‘Such an event was exactly what Australia needed, a link to the world … I felt it was important to do something about opening up Australia.’ The first Biennale had not been very successful. A small exhibition of 37 participants organised mostly through government and diplomatic channels and coordinated by a Transfield employee, it was shown in the new Sydney Opera House and was part of the official opening. See Franco Belgiorno-Nettis, ‘Founding Governor’s Report’, Biennale of Sydney, http://www.biennaleofsydney.com.au/history/1973, viewed 20 August 2007.
There were serious doubts about the future of the biennale in Sydney, given the ambivalence of some members of the VAB, following the criticism of the first Biennale in 1973, and the reluctance of the trustees and some professional staff at the AGNSW to the idea and purpose of a recurrent event, and consequent funding allocation. The final hurdle that needed to be overcome was the acceptance by the AGNSW of an independent curator-director (employed jointly by the Australia Council and Transfield) operating within their institution. McCullough offered both the model and the expertise to realise this project.

It was important to secure the cooperation of the AGNSW as the venue for the proposed biennale. This would invest the biennale with significant cultural and symbolic capital, which would enhance biennale’s reputation. The benefit to the AGNSW of surrendering its curatorial autonomy was that it gained cultural prestige by its association with an international initiative funded by the Australia Council and a recognised corporate benefactor, Transfield. It is likely that the transfer of cultural prestige by the AGNSW to Transfield was seen as acceptable because of the anticipated reciprocal investment by Belgiorno-Nettis in the gallery through future biennales. For all three stakeholders (AGNSW, Australia Council and Transfield), the setting up of a biennale-type event, a structure that could be recognised overseas, signalled an awareness of an international professional field and the currency that was required to operate and trade within it. However, the location and scale of an independently directed biennale within the AGNSW represented a victory for the Australia Council in its validation of what were considered marginal experimental practices in Australia.

A draft copy of Grazia Gunn’s discussion paper submitted to the Visual Arts Board’s meeting of 18 June 1974 entitled, ‘Exhibitions and Related Activities’, raised the issue of the future of the Biennale of Sydney and recommended the following matters for consideration: ‘A smaller, less sensational type of exhibition is proposed and should be a developing situation always having a structure. It is planned that the next exhibition be held at the Art Gallery of New South Wales towards the end of 1975 … it may be desirable not to have Australian representatives and to see the programme as, one year international, the next Australian and so on … The Visual Arts Board should aim at a budget of at least $150,000 for the International programme.’ The paper discussed the formation of three committees: fund raising, administration and art, the last of which would comprise three members - ‘one from overseas, one from the Visual Arts Board, one from the Art Gallery of New South Wales’ - and continued with the recommendation of the appointment of an executive officer on a part-time consultative basis ‘with knowledge on visual arts and administration’. See McCullough archive PA 97/33 Box 6, SLV.
The 2\textsuperscript{nd} Biennale of Sydney (scheduled from 13 November to 19 December 1976) was effectively organised within ten months. In January 1976, McCullough was granted one year’s leave of absence from the Mildura Arts Centre and moved to Sydney with his family. As the director, he was required to coordinate the conflicting demands and requirements of an ensemble of organisations and individuals, without the backing of a professional secretariat. He worked with senior curator, Daniel Thomas and the curatorial and education staff at the AGNSW, and negotiated with the AGNSW trustees, the Biennale committee, the Australia Council (principally through their International Program and the VAB), and the Department of Foreign Affairs, as well as individual artists.\footnote{Committee for the 1976 Biennale of Sydney: Franco Belgiorno-Nettis, joint managing director, Transfield Pty. Ltd; Peter Laverty, director, AGNSW; Leon Paroissien, director, VAB and the International Program, Australia Council; Gil Docking, deputy director, AGNSW; Cdr. Anthony Winterbotham, executive assistant to the managing directors, Transfield Pty Ltd; Thomas G. McCullough, director of the Biennale of Sydney and Mildura Arts Centre. See \textit{Recent International Forms in Art: The 1976 Biennale of Sydney at the Art Gallery of New South Wales, 13 November – 19 December}, exhibition catalogue, AGNSW, Sydney, 1976.} It was a challenging ‘first’; a complex set of negotiations needed to be managed to achieve a successful outcome.

McCullough personally selected the ‘Pacific Rim’ participants from Japan, West Coast America, New Zealand and Australia.\footnote{Stelarc had provided McCullough with many artist contacts in Japan.} He liaised with John Stringer in New York for American East Coast selections, Gerald Forty, director of the Fine Arts Department of the British Council for British selections and Tommaso Trini, editor of \textit{Data Magazine}, for European selections.\footnote{By 1976, John Stringer had left his position as associate director, International Programs at the Museum of Modern Art and was appointed as an international advisor to the Australia Council, based in New York. He and Leon Paroissien met Tom McCullough in Los Angeles and gave him assistance during his West Coast trip. McCullough had met Gerald Forty on his first Gulbenkian Fellowship tour to Britain in 1970 and Forty had been responsible for organising the selection of English artists and the despatch of their works at Sculpturscape ’73. In interview, McCullough noted his indebtedness in Japan to the Australian artist Stelarc, who introduced him to artists and the critic James Love. He also acknowledged Japanese contacts provided by Terry Reid. Leon Paroissien approached Tommaso Trini in Milan on behalf of McCullough. See Paroissien, ‘The Biennale of Sydney: a partisan view of three decades’, op. cit., p. 62.} As well as drawing on the expertise of these advisors, this arrangement was necessary due to a tight timeframe and financial constraints.

The $100,000 funding for the biennale from the Australia Council, Department of Foreign Affairs and Transfield Pty Ltd was a small sum compared with, for example, the
Victorian Government’s contribution of $250,000 the previous year for the Arts Victoria 75 festival.\footnote{546} The NSW Government declined to contribute any funds towards the biennale ‘in this period of financial stringency’.\footnote{547}

The symbolic and economic value of selection criteria became critically important, and was frequently contested by a number of McCullough’s Mildura selectors. Of the twenty-two Australian and New Zealand artists who were selected to participate, only one, Stelarc, had not been a participant in any Mildura Sculpture Triennials.\footnote{548} Not only were local artists included in the biennale, they ‘were presented – perhaps for the first time in Australia – side by side with their international colleagues’.\footnote{549} Margaret Plant’s further observation that, ‘Such exhibitions [in centres like Sao Paulo and Kassel and the Sydney Biennale of 1976] enhance the originality of the provincial artist at the same time as they reveal the simultaneity of art activity’, echoed the concerns of McCullough’s advisory group of artists, particularly from Melbourne, that Australian artists and their works should not be presented as ancillary to an imposed international selection.\footnote{550} As part of his selection strategy, McCullough tested his ideas by consulting with his core triennial artists who suggested that ‘the exhibition evolve in the way that the Mildura exhibitions do … and that the areas be limited in the international selection so that a more thorough look at works in a couple of regions be made’.\footnote{551}

The resultant selection of the English, European and East Coast American contemporary sculptural or “sculpture-oriented” works by professionals in the field was seen as an

\footnote{546} According to McCullough the full $100,000 was not forthcoming because of government cutbacks. In a briefing note to Franco Belgiojorno-Nettis in October 1976, McCullough clarified that the total financial contribution was $95,000. See unpublished interview by Geoff de Groen with Tom McCullough, op. cit.
\footnote{547} Letter from NSW Government Minister for Culture, Sport and Recreation, Mr. L.J.F Barraclough to Mr Belgiojorno-Nettis, Managing Director, Transfield Industries, undated (receipt date stamped 20 January 1976), McCullough archive, PA 97/33, Box 6, SLV.
\footnote{548} The Australian participants included John Armstrong, Tony Coleing, Marleen Creaser, John Davis, Marr Grounds, Noel Hutchison, Les Kossatz, Kevin Mortensen, Clive Murray-White, Michael Nicholson, Ti Parks, John Penny, Terry Reid, Ron Robertson Swann, Stelarc, Noel Sheridan, Ken UNSWORTH and David Wilson. The NZ contingent included Jim Allen, John Lethbrigde, Terry Powell and Greer Twiss. The trans-Tasman participation of 22 artists represented 27.5 per cent of the total exhibitors of 80.
\footnote{550} ibid., p.82.
\footnote{551} Thomas McCullough, interview by Hazel de Berg, op. cit.
improvement on the previous Biennale (where works had been sourced through conservative diplomatic channels concerned with preserving national identities). A significant number of the selected overseas artists were under forty years of age and had been included in important international exhibitions of the late 1960s and early 1970s that institutionalised such avant-garde movements as minimalism, arte povera and mono-ha.

Selection criteria were the critical issue between the director and his Australian artist advisors. Emphasis moved from ‘examples of eminent artists’ works … rounded out with … related works by sculptors in Australia and New Zealand … [and] some examples of sculptural modes practised by our Pacific neighbours’ to a broad range of contemporary works selected by McCullough from the ‘Pacific Triangle’ countries, complemented by works selected by visual arts professionals from East Coast America, England and Europe.\(^{552}\) In the final list of eighty participants, just over two-thirds were from the ‘Pacific Triangle’ region. McCullough was also concerned that the selection was not a pastiche of the current pages of international art magazines such as *Art International*, *Artforum* or *Studio International*. He was keen to include emerging artists in his international selection that would reflect his artist advisors’ concept of ‘different alternatives’\(^ {553}\).

McCullough’s 2\(^{\text{nd}}\) Biennale of Sydney entitled ‘Recent International Forms in Art’, claimed to provide a survey of then current trends in ‘sculpture in its most widely inclusive sense’.\(^ {554}\) It was the first international contemporary art exhibition (not from one country nor favouring a particular ‘style’ or institutional collection), held in an Australian state art gallery, directed from Australia, which positioned Australian practitioners alongside their international peers. The fact that the title did not mention ‘sculpture’ specifically, but the more generic ‘forms’, indicated that the biennale’s real power lay in its contested control of the definition of what constitutes ‘art’. Although no

\(\begin{align*}
552\ &\text{‘Strategy for Exhibit Selection (Summary), rough exhibition notes by T. McCullough annotated, undated, n.p., McCullough archive, PA 97/33, Box 15, SLV.} \\
553\ &\text{John Davi, letter to Tom McCullough, 19 July 1976. McCullough archive, PA 97/33, Box 6, SLV.} \\
\end{align*}\)
explicit definition was attempted, the almost complete inclusion of Mildura participants as the Australian and NZ representatives endorsed the experimental and emerging philosophy that underpinned the Mildura Triennials and ensured that McCullough would be guided by the artists’ interests.

The core of the biennale exhibits was presented within the gallery spaces. Hailed as ‘the largest single exhibition yet shown in the gallery’, it occupied two floors.\(^555\) Two steel sculptures by David Wilson and Clive Murray-White were positioned outside in the gallery grounds. Adapting the 1975 Mildura Triennial concept of taking art into the community and developing a ‘City of Sculpture’, McCullough, in cooperation with commercial galleries, the Sculptors Society, art schools and universities, developed a series of fringe activities that extended the field of the biennale into the city of Sydney. A performance work over seven days by Stuart Brisley entitled *Standing, Lying, Walking and Talking*, in which he constructed a wooden cage around himself in Hyde Park, and Fujiko Nakaya’s *Fog Sculpture* in the Domain, were two participatory works located in busy public thoroughfares which engaged with people outside of the gallery and extended the biennale experience. The Sculpture Centre also organised studio visits and a walking tour pamphlet of the city of Sydney’s public sculptures. McCullough aimed ‘to amplify the Biennale of Sydney into quite a festival’.\(^556\)

With the assistance of the Australia Council and the Department of Foreign Affairs, six visiting artists and critics toured to Sydney, Melbourne and Adelaide, as well as the regional centres of Wagga Wagga and Mildura, giving lectures at art schools and alternative exhibition spaces.\(^557\) Because a number of his core group of artist advisors were both biennale participants and sculpture lecturers, McCullough was able to draw art school attendances from Sydney, Adelaide, Melbourne and Tasmania. Building upon the practice of student participation in the Mildura Triennials, students were assigned as


\(^{556}\) Interview of Thomas McCullough by Hazel de Berg, op. cit.

\(^{557}\) The artists included Linda Benglis, Michael McMillan, Stuart Brisley and Fujiko Nakaya. The two art critics were Tommaso Trini (*Data*) and James Fitzsimmonds (*Art International*).
assistants to a number of artists and to teams working with curators and education staff of the AGNSW. For the selected art students, these responsibilities provided invaluable professional development opportunities and, more importantly, were credited towards their diplomas. 558

Opening one day and one year after the sacking of the Whitlam Labor Government, the biennale secured extensive press coverage because of the controversy generated by having the prime Minister Malcolm Fraser officially launch the event at the AGNSW. Although embarrassed by the mass walk-out and demonstration by artists at the opening, McCullough was not averse to using controversy as a means to engage interest; he had certainly used controversy to his advantage in the national promotion of the Mildura Sculpture Triennials.

Press coverage was extensive and generally positive. As McCullough had noted in a briefing to Franco Belgiorno-Nettis prior to the opening, ‘everyone in the art world seems to have heard of the biennale without much public promotion to date’. 559 The editorial in Art and Australia announced that: ‘there is no doubt that the Biennale was a sensational event in every aspect’. 560 McCullough received appreciative and enthusiastic letters from Linda Benglis, Michael McMillen and Fujiko Nakaya about their experience of the biennale, touring Australia, and the attentiveness and engagement of the staff of the AGNSW and the Australia Council.

Melbourne artist John Davis, although supportive of the biennale because it was ‘the first of its kind in the country’, was nevertheless critical of what he felt was the ‘thinness’ of much of the international component which he attributed to a dispersed selection across a

558 Letter from the publication Arts Melbourne & the Art Almanac (signed by Kiffy Rubbo and Meredith Rogers for the Arts Collective Melbourne) to Tom McCullough, 16 December 1976, proposing an extended review of the biennale including: ‘Analysis of the scheme using students to assist the artists. How successful was it? Isn’t this a breakthrough in Australia where students were given credit for a “non conventional” activity?’, McCullough archive, PA 97/33, Box 6, SLV.
559 Tom McCullough, ‘Notes for Mr Belgiorno-Nettis’, 18 October 1976, p. 1, McCullough archive, PA 97/33, Box 6, SLV.
larger world view rather than an in-depth regional focus.\textsuperscript{561} The most trenchant criticism came from some of the older members of the Sculptors’ Society and Associates and, more significantly for McCullough, from a number of sculptors associated with Ron Robertson Swann. Although Robertson Swann participated in the biennale, he supported Daniel Thomas’s view of the lack of presence of respected object sculptors.\textsuperscript{562} At issue, fundamentally, was the perceived hijacking of the definition of ‘sculpture’ and the consecration of a wide range of contemporary practices as ‘art’ under the rubric of ‘sculpture’. What was tolerable, even acceptable in Mildura, a peripheral location, was a very different matter when granted the status and prestige of being included in Australia’s first international biennale in a major metropolitan art gallery. The exclusion was perceived as a significant loss of power and prestige to this group, and the tension this created would reverberate in the 1978 Mildura Triennial. The evident shift of the power to confer status and recognition from the established route of prizes, sales and exhibitions to a peer-review system that favoured the emerging and experimental, would also have been perceived as a threat by those whose careers (such as curators) depended upon the established structure of recognition and promotion.

McCullough’s selection of many of his Mildura core advisors as the trans-Tasman representatives in the 2\textsuperscript{nd} Biennale of Sydney, not only validated the VAB’s focus on experimental and contemporary art practice but also increased the prestige of these artists and by extension, further validated their judgements and status as selectors of emerging artists. These were the sculptor-educators whose recommendations of their students, or recently graduated students, supported the ‘emerging artist’ niche that McCullough and the Mildura Sculpture Triennials from 1970 onwards were founded upon. What the VAB recognised in its visit to the 1975 Mildura Sculpture Triennial was not only ‘emerging’ contemporary artwork, but more importantly, a professional network of artist-educators, curators, critics, academics who had a vested interest in putting forward their recommendations to McCullough for inclusion in his ‘invitational’ triennials. For the

\textsuperscript{561} John Davis, letter to Tom McCullough, 13 December 1976, McCullough archive, PA 97/33, Box 6, SLV.
VAB to legitimately promote contemporary art practice, a particularly risky venture dealing in unproven and in many cases undiscovered artists, it would need a professional network to validate who was included; who, in fact, controlled the selection process.

The triennial as an adaptive model was the next challenge to the uniqueness of the Mildura Sculpture Triennials. The fact that McCullough could direct, consecutively, two similar types of events – 1975 Mildura Sculpture Triennial and 1976 Biennale of Sydney – is a further indicator of a convergence of a national field of professional practice that moves from the margins to the centre with great rapidity. However, the successful transfer of the Mildura template to the metropolitan centre ensured that McCullough had established a major competitor for funds and attention – one that, because of its location, already enjoyed greater symbolic and cultural capital.

**John Davis: 1975–1976**

Davis entered 1975 with exhibition commitments for the first six months in place, an expanding teaching load and responsibilities at Prahran CAE as well as being an active member of Melbourne University Ewing Gallery’s advisory collective. He had received a small grant from the VAB to assist in the hire of video playback equipment for his installation at the Mildura Triennial.

**Davis and the 6th Mildura Sculpture Triennial**

Davis’s work for Mildura, like many of his works since 1973, incorporated some elements from previous exhibitions. However, unlike the previous Sculpturscape works, *Place* did not engage with the rugged outdoor environment but was situated within the white-walled gallery and within a post-object discourse that emphasised the primacy of process and concept (Figure 73). The work consisted of four, grey painted masonite

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563 An important effect of the significant increase in funds available and distributed to the expanding institutional field of the visual arts, was ‘a more articulated structure at the field level’ resulting in a mimetic isomorphism, where ‘organisations copy each other’s structures and procedures’. See Alexander, *Museums and Money*, op. cit., pp. 112–13.
boards, 120 x 120 cm. Three of these boards were erected on the outskirts of the town at each of the main roads that entered Mildura from Melbourne, Adelaide and Sydney. In the gallery space, the fourth board leant against the white wall. The remaining exhibits in the gallery space included three photographs of each of the other boards, ten photographs of Davis tying nine lengths of string together (shot at Pinacotheca Gallery) and a video showing him plaiting nine lengths of string together. *Plaiting*, which took forty-five minutes, was shot at the Ewing Gallery and had been included in his 1974 Pinacotheca exhibition. In Noel Sheridan’s interview with Davis he referred to another ‘object’ in the room – string wound around paper poles and suggestive of ‘proof or reminder of the work which was done in the gallery’. 564 *Place* continued Davis’s formal investigation into the elemental concerns of sculpture: space, duration and material.

There was a didactic quality to the work, and its context dependency upon a white-walled gallery space with references in some of the elements to other metropolitan alternative gallery spaces, pointed to Davis’s alignment with an art practice that tested ideas and emulated a research model. Davis regarded *Place* as a work-in-progress which was aimed at addressing a very specific and informed audience (sculpture and art theory students, including a group from Prahran CAE that assisted him in the installation, and other sculptor-participants). It was a speculative and discursive work. Davis invited discussion that would contribute to and extend the meaning of *Place*.

There was another aspect of this informed audience that was important to Davis and his sculptor-educator colleagues. Many of the core group who met at the Mildura Sculpture Triennial of 1970 and had become McCullough’s selectors were now in positions of power and influence within the expanded tertiary education sector and also within the government funded arts sector. 565

564 ‘Notes on twelve exhibits by Noel Sheridan, M.A.’, op. cit., p. 5.  
565 Since Sculpturscape ’73, there had been major shifts and movements: from Sydney, Donald Brook was now Professor of Visual Arts at Flinders University, Bert Flugelman was lecturer in sculpture at SASA; Noel Sheridan was executive officer of Adelaide’s newly established EAF; Noel Hutchison was senior lecturer in charge of sculpture at the Tasmanian School of Art in Launceston; and Patrick McCaughey was Professor of Visual Arts at Monash University. Many other graduates were running regional and other funded galleries, which were also undergoing rapid development and change.
Within the generously funded college system, funding was available to pay for visiting lecturers as well as increased staff development opportunities. The 6th Mildura Sculpture Triennial in early 1975 offered the selected sculptors more professional opportunities to accrue status and increase income within this highly leveraged network of the visual arts profession. For Davis, the opportunities for visiting lectureships and exhibitions were negotiated at the triennial event in Mildura. A sculptor’s reputation was now not so determined by prizes, commissions, collector purchases and exhibitions at commercial galleries but rather by inclusion in invitational exhibitions, grants, university residencies, acquisition into public collections and teaching positions within the new college system. There was also a definite hierarchy beginning to develop that favoured VAB funded, non-commercial, ‘experimental and innovative’ initiatives.

**Professional development**

On his return to Melbourne from the triennial, Davis wrote a letter to the Prahran CAE staffing committee requesting that his position and salary be upgraded to senior lecturer. Although he stated that he was applying for the position of senior lecturer in Fine Art, he was arguing the case for the number of Fine Art senior lecturer positions to be expanded: ‘at the present time the School of Art and Design has three senior lecturers, and more specifically the Fine Art area has one’. He had the support of the dean of the School of Fine Art and Design and was aware of other institutes within the VIC that had designated senior lecturer positions to heads of departments. His application substantiated his claim of developing and expanding the sculpture department from a staff of two with nine students in 1973 to four staff and thirty-five students by the beginning of 1975. He also noted his extensive professional relationships with staff at other colleges and the number of guest lectureships he had undertaken at these various colleges; many of these relationships were forged at the Mildura Sculpture Triennial gatherings. The number of senior lecturer positions within the School of Art and Design at Prahran CAE was

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566 John Davis, letter to Staffing committee, Prahran CAE, 24 April 1975, Davis archive, correspondence.
increased: Davis was appointed as senior lecturer in sculpture.\textsuperscript{567} Not only was his own reputation as a sculptor and educator enhanced, but also that of the Prahran CAE Sculpture Department: increased reputation equated with increased resources.

The NGV’s contribution to the year-long Arts Victoria initiative of the new Ministry for the Arts was a series of project exhibitions entitled \textit{Artists’ Artists}. The curator was Graeme Sturgeon and following discussions (presumably with many of his artist contacts in Melbourne), it was decided that the selection would be based on recommendations by selected Victorian artists. The final selection included those artists most nominated by their peers. Davis was selected for both sculpture and drawing. It was evident that there was a difference of conception between the curator and the artist. Sturgeon in a letter to Davis in late April requested the \textit{Tree Piece} photographs from Sculpturscape ‘73 and the maquette for the Comalco commission exhibited in 1970. What Davis finally exhibited, \textit{On a proper delineation in a moment}, was a horizontal installation that included handmade paper, drawings, photographs, cardboard cylinders, string and other elements which referenced earlier works and continued his current exploration of space (containment) and materials (Figure 74). Davis’s estimation of the exhibition and the NGV probably reflected a widespread attitude amongst many of his Melbourne contemporaries: ‘\textit{Artists’ Artists} … fails terribly, which is indicative of everything they [NGV] attempt at the moment (a disaster area)’ – and was no doubt coloured by the removal of the planned \textit{Art and Language} event from the NGV to the Victorian College of the Arts (VCA) premises that was to be held during the MOMA international touring block-buster, \textit{Manet to Matisse}.\textsuperscript{568}

This general dissatisfaction with the attitude and management of the NGV towards contemporary artists and the evident competition for control between artists and curators reached a crisis point with a sit-in of 200 artists on 21 August 1975, following the

\textsuperscript{567} Fred Cress had retired from teaching to paint full time. Jeffrey Makin was appointed as senior lecturer in Fine Arts, as Head of Painting, and John Davis as senior lecturer in sculpture. What is not clear is whether Davis’s appointment was via an advertised and competitive process or whether the new position was created for him.

\textsuperscript{568} John Davis, letter to Robert Jacks, 7 June 1975, Robert Jacks archive.
removal of Domenico de Clario’s scatter piece in one of the Artists’ Artists series of exhibitions. The organisation for the sit-in was driven by the Ewing Gallery Advisory Committee, of which Davis was a member. Following the sit-in, Davis was appointed to an artists’ steering committee to draw up recommendations to press for improved representation of contemporary Australian art and artists by the NGV.

Between August and September, Davis was involved in three exhibitions: The Grid Show: a structured space at the Ewing Gallery and two solo exhibitions emanating from the Mildura exhibition and discussions (Figure 75). Patrick McCaughhey had invited Davis to show Place at the Monash University Gallery. Following discussions at Mildura, Davis refined the work and asked Noel Hutchison to write a catalogue essay. Hutchison’s Introduction is almost manifesto-like in its opening proclamation: ‘We have gained a position free from the domination of a commercially successful style, of the dictates of one fashionable set of criteria.’ The defensiveness and underlying anxiety is clearly Davis’s and it is possibly a response to competitive tensions at the 1975 Mildura Sculpture Triennial, particularly in relation to Peter Tyndall’s parodic work, Eulogy (Black). Tyndall regarded Davis’s Tree Piece at Sculpturscape ’73 as the posturing of a new school of sculpture, the ‘sticks and stones/pseudo ritual’ kind. Davis, through Hutchison’s writing, was attempting to substantiate that his use of systematic processes and organic materials was the result of his own internal enquiry and not a cultish adaptation of new international styles. The claim to be ‘free of the dominance of a commercially successful style’ was an act of misrecognition, which was fully revealed in the following statement in the Introduction:

569 His solo exhibition at the Contemporary Art Society in Adelaide, entitled Substance-cause-number-relation, drew on many of the works that had comprised his exhibition at Pinacoteca in 1974.
571 Sturgeon, Sculpture at Mildura, op. cit., back cover credit. Given that McCaughhey had offered Tyndall the first artist-in-residence at Monash in 1975, this invests the Introduction with an even more loaded significance.
In this one moment of relative wealth, relative lack of outside control and relative lack of public concern about his activities, the Australian artist is free and responsible to himself alone …

These exhibitions were about strategic positioning; Davis’s intention was clearly not merely to exhibit but also to seek to improve his status within what was manifestly an autonomous network of inextricably linked, and increasingly powerful, individuals and institutions.

However, the achievements of the past year were overshadowed by the dramatic events in November of the dismissal of the Whitlam Labor Government, followed by the overwhelming federal election victory of the Liberal-Country Party led by Malcolm Fraser and his call for accountability and a reduction in public spending. The effects of the rapidly declining economic situation were felt directly: “The Prahran College is like everybody else, on hard times, staff contracts not being renewed etc, student intake to be cut.”

By early 1976, Davis was successful in his application for a direct assistance grant to the VAB for $2690 that would contribute to the work he intended to make during his residency at Monash University’s Department of Visual Art. Combined with the VAB-funded six-monthly stipend of $3750 for the residency, his grant earnings for the first half-year were $6440, a substantial sum. Having hosted Tom McCullough while he was in Melbourne in January, Davis was also briefed by McCullough on his selection as the director for the 2nd Biennale of Sydney. Through Davis, the core group of Melbourne sculptor-advisors for the Mildura Triennials would maintain their advisory relationship with McCullough.

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573 McCaughey offered Davis the second artist-in-residence position starting in February 1976 at Monash University. Ironically, the first residency in 1975 was offered to Peter Tyndall. Donald Brook and Noel Sheridan invited Davis to participate in the EAF’s survey exhibition, Post-Object Art in Australia and New Zealand in May 1976.
574 John Davis, letter to Noel Hutchison, 16 November 1975, Noel Hutchison archive.
575 $6440 in 1976 was equivalent to $33,000 in 2008. Prahran CAE also paid him one day a week to research and develop a new museology diploma for the college.
**Figure 72:** top, John Davis in his studio, c.1974-75. Silver gelatin photograph, 40.5 x 30.4 cms. Photographer: Richard Beck.

**Figure 73:** bottom, John Davis, part of his installation *Place* 1975, video, plastic, photography, mixed media. Included within Place was a process entitled *Plaiting* which was shown on video and also in a series of 10 black and white photographs, on the wall. *Plaiting* was a record of Davis plaiting nine lengths of string together. See Scarlett, *The sculpture of John Davis*, p.82.
**Figure 74**: top, John Davis, *On the need for a proper delineation in a moment* 1975, 36 small photographs, rectangle of plastic sheeting on the floor, square shallow lead tray, two vertical cardboard cylinders covered with canvas, filled with sand and linked by two lines of string a small square latex form with four ceramic rods attached to the top, square bundle covered in canvas, a square of cast papier maché and a large stack of sheets of papier maché with drawing on top. Dimensions variable. This work was part of Graeme Sturgeon’s *Artists’ Artists* series of exhibitions at the NGV which were part of the Arts Victoria 75 celebrations.

**Figure 75**: bottom, John Davis, *Ewing Work* 1975, ceramic rods, latex sheet with eyelet holes, string, cardboard cylinder covered with canvas strips and ceramic rods tied with string. Dimensions variable. This work was exhibited at the Ewing Gallery in *The Grid Show: A Structured Space* from 11-22 August 1975.
Captions from the following page:

**Figure 76:** top, John Davis’s campsite at Hattah Lakes, May 1976.

**Figure 77:** middle, John Davis, installation using sticks on the ground at Hattah Lakes, May 1976.

**Figure 78:** bottom, John Davis, installation beside the Ovens River, Myrtleford using materials found at the site, September 1976.

This page:

**Figure 79:** John Davis, *Nomad* 1976. Grid of fibreglass and polyester resin rods, tied together with cotton, help by loops of latex, suspended by string from the ceiling. One sheet of latex with eyelet holes is suspended from the rods. A square of knitted string on floor with tied bundle of twigs. Three small structures on the floor, from left to right, are made from: fibreglass, carved wood and twigs. On the wall, twenty six black and white photographs of installations at Hattah Lakes. Grid dimensions: 183 x 250 x 30 cms. This work was exhibited in the 2nd Biennale of Sydney at the AGNSW, 13 November – 4 December, 1976.
The six-month residency at Monash University’s Department of Visual Arts began in February. As Scarlett observed: ‘the appointment which had been brought about by Patrick McCaughey’s admiration for recent work by John Davis, carried considerable prestige’. It was also, for McCaughey, a matter of accruing prestige and establishing a differentiated position within the competitive world of Melbourne fine arts academia and university galleries. The residency offered Davis an important freedom: ‘I just work through day after day non-stop uninterrupted on my thing.’ The time to think and sift through an accumulation of diverse influences, impressions and experiences was transformative. However, what remains significant is that the generative processes in two significant series of works were created outside Melbourne, in isolation, and introduced the element of memory as an important element in his work.

Davis’s work for the EAF survey exhibition *Post-object art in Australia and New Zealand* which opened in May 1976, comprised text and video. Entitled *Passage-Scan-You Yangs* it was an extension of the ideas present in *Place*; Davis described *Passage* as ‘a formalist work composed of sixty-two views of an area of the You Yangs, Victoria’. The area he chose to film was a windswept, featureless plain in which he had placed a white painted board, the introduced element, around which time and space would be tested in this series of video views. However, the high horizon line held throughout and the long slow horizontal panning highlighted the filmic medium’s ability to offer an interpretation of his experience of the particularity and endlessness of that landscape.

There were discussions within the Melbourne experimental art and film scenes generated by Arthur and Corrine Cantrill’s recent return from the United States and their explorations aimed at heightening an awareness of ‘Australian landscape and bush

576 Scarlett, *The Sculpture of John Davis*, op. cit., p. 65. McCaughey was part of the concurrent rapid, university expansion in departments of visual and fine arts in Melbourne. In 1972 Peter Tomory was appointed as foundation Professor of Art History at La Trobe University and McCaughey was appointed in 1974 as the foundation Professor of Visual Arts at Monash University. At the same time, Donald Brook was appointed foundation Professor of Visual Arts at Flinders University in Adelaide. During McCaughey’s term of appointment on the VAB (1973–74), he drafted the artist-in-residence policy, which was predicated upon raising the status of visual artists.

577 John Davis, letter to Frank Watters, 16 June 1976, Davis Archive.

578 Scarlett, op. cit., p. 83.
culture [and] … discovering a new relation to Australian landscape in their films’ in their pursuit of creating a new visual language.\textsuperscript{579} Their interest in the materiality of the ‘film form’, with the intention of making the viewer aware of the filmic processes, parallels the kind of expository approach to process that Davis and many artists were attempting under the broad category of ‘post-object’ art. They were part of a currency of ideas pursuing a reinterpretation of the Australian landscape and its unique ecology that appeared in writing, theatre, emerging ecological activism and the renaissance of the Australian film industry. It was in the air: there was a perceived need and, by implication, a receptivity for creating a new visual language to express this revitalised relationship.

However, it was during Davis’s five-day camping visit to Hattah Lakes (just south of Mildura, which he used to visit when he was living and teaching in Mildura in the early 1960s) in May, and his later visit to the Ovens River, Myrtleford, in September, working only with materials to hand, that he began to construct and document site-specific installations made from twigs, bark, broken tree branches, yellowed newspaper, river rocks, mud and bits of twine (Figure 76-78). In a kind of allegorical return to the riverbanks of his childhood, there was something prophetic and revelatory about this solitary period; it was as though, in the silence of Hattah, he was able finally to reconcile the powerful memories of lived experience with his almost didactic investigation of the processes and elements that constitute ‘sculpture’.

\textit{Nomad}, the major work completed on return to Monash, was an homage to his campsite and time spent making site-specific installations around the Hattah Lakes area (Figure 79).\textsuperscript{580} A grid matrix of slender fibreglass rods was suspended from the ceiling at eye level by knotted string and calico loops. A latex sheet, hung from one end of this

\textsuperscript{579} In 1975 Arthur Cantrill was appointed as lecturer in film studies at the Melbourne State College, where both Ken Scarlett and Clive Murray-White lectured in the sculpture department. See Samia Mikhail, ‘The experimental art of Arthur and Corrine Cantrill’, unpublished MA Thesis, Department of Cinema Studies, RMIT University, Melbourne, p. 108.

\textsuperscript{580} \textit{Nomad} was shown at the Monash University Gallery on completion of the residency and was Davis’s entry in the 2\textsuperscript{nd} Biennale of Sydney in November 1976, directed by Tom McCullough. Many of the smaller works such as \textit{Mat} and \textit{Bicycle} were exhibited in a group show at Watters Gallery in Sydney during the biennale.
suspended matrix and the knitted string rug on the floor beneath referenced his old canvas
tent and sleeping mat. The three small structures on the floor traced his own sculptural
development: from carved wood, to fibreglass mould to twig constructions. The twenty-
six black and white photographs on the wall documented the process of selecting the tree
site (a row of dead trees on a flat and desolate plain), collecting branches, twigs and twine
and constructing the series of installations around the dead tree’s girth. The title of the
work was deliberate, referencing Geoffrey Blainey’s recently published *Triumph of the
Nomads: a history of ancient Australia*, which at the time provided a controversial
reassessment of Australian Aboriginal history, pre-European settlement. Davis had
also read the Monash University historian Geoffrey Serle’s book on the cultural history
and development in the arts in Australia entitled *From deserts the prophets come: the
creative spirit in Australia 1788–1972* and was possibly introduced to him by McCaughey
during his residency at the university. The title of Serle’s book was taken from a line in
A.D. Hope’s poem ‘Australia’. The final two stanzas of the poem offer a particularly
pertinent insight into Davis’s intentions:

Yet there are some like me turn gladly home
From the lush jungle of modern thought, to find
The Arabian desert of the human mind,
Hoping, if still from the deserts the prophets come.

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581 Looking at the relationships between the dead tree’s upper branches and Davis’s constructions, there is
an equivalence with Sogetsu Ikebana, the radical modern form of traditional Japanese Ikebana, which
encouraged the use of any materials including styrofoam, found objects and bark. In an interview, C Elwyn
Dennis remembered discussing ikebana with Davis (although he couldn’t be specific about the date).
Sogetsu Ikebana was widely practised in Australia during the 1960s and 1970s, through the efforts of
Norman Sparnon, and made particular use of Australian flora.
Blainey’s history and Davis’s interest stemmed from the paradigm shifting discoveries of the extensive
Lake Mungo Aboriginal cremation sites excavated in 1968, which established this site as possibly the
earliest example of human burial in the world. From his time in Mildura, Davis was familiar with the great
dry Lake Mungo and the Walls of China. He and Ken Scarlett had taken their students from Caulfield
Institute of Technology there during their visit to the 1967 Mildura Sculpture Prize.
583 Geoffrey Serle, *From deserts the prophets come: the creative spirit in Australia 1788–1972*, Heineman,
584 Given that the Cantrills spent 15 months on an Australian National University Creative Fellowship
between 1970 and 1971, they would no doubt have had many discussions with the then dean of the Faculty
of the Arts at ANU, poet A.D. Hope.
Such savage and scarlet as no green hills dare
Springs in that waste, some spirit which escapes
The learned doubt, the chatter of cultured apes
Which is called civilisation over there.\textsuperscript{585}

Memory, the original meta-system of knowledge, was for Davis, the ‘Arabian desert of the human mind’ and it was activated in silence and solitude, removed from Melbourne and its ‘civilisation over there’ of the increasingly competitive professional art world. Like the classical system of artificial memory, Davis devised a system of symbols and relationships, using materials and space that were evocative of particular places (perceptual and physical) and presences. \textit{Nomad} was a pivotal work; it was both a register of his development and also signalled the mature direction of his future work. It marked a resolution between the contradictory sets of dispositions of his artistic habitus and his professional habitus. However, it also initiated a geographical separation in his professional status between his gallery representation as a sculptor and his professional educator reputation.

Towards the end of his residency, Davis wrote to Frank Watters seeking a more permanent representation with Watters Gallery in Sydney.\textsuperscript{586} No doubt, with the increasing communication between McCullough and Davis regarding the Biennale of Sydney later in the year, it was a strategic move to gain a more established presence in Sydney, which, as the headquarters of the Australia Council, was becoming a powerful national centre of cultural capital.

In his letter to Bruce Pollard, director of Pinacotheca, in which he formally announced his separation from the gallery’s representation, he revealed that he felt caught in a cycle of ‘having shows’ in Melbourne and wanted to spend more time working through his ideas in his studio practice.\textsuperscript{587} However, his letter to Frank Watters was more direct: ‘I don’t

\textsuperscript{585} A.D. Hope \textit{Australia}: \url{http://www.convictcreations.com/culture/poetry.htm?aus}, viewed 6 August 2009.
\textsuperscript{586} Davis had a solo exhibition at Watters Gallery in 1971, which had received good critical feedback, though few sales. Frank Watters regularly attended the Mildura Sculpture Triennials and many of the artists that he represented also attended the triennials, and it is most likely that Davis had met up with Watters at the 1975 event.
\textsuperscript{587} John Davis, letter to Bruce Pollard, 22 July 1976, Davis Estate, Box B Correspondence: Galleries.
find Melbourne a stimulating place to show my work … I would like to be associated more fully with a group of people whose interest is in art ideas and who are interested in different kinds of art and will discuss it.\textsuperscript{588} Davis would not find a Melbourne gallery to represent him till 1979.\textsuperscript{589} His reputation as a sculptor-educator was firmly established in Melbourne; his reputation as a professional practising contemporary sculptor would now shift from Melbourne to national and international projects and exhibitions based upon a network of contacts emanating from arts organisations and contacts made in Sydney and through McCullough and the Mildura Triennials.

At the end of July, Davis returned to teaching at Prahran CAE. Although his position was secure, correspondence between him and Noel Hutchison in Launceston indicated that competition for positions within the colleges had been intensified with the threats of rationalisations and amalgamations.\textsuperscript{590}

**Davis and the 2\textsuperscript{nd} Biennale of Sydney**

From June onwards there was increasing correspondence between McCullough and Davis, with Davis acting as the conduit between McCullough as director of the Biennale of Sydney and his usual core Melbourne group of sculptor-advisors for the Mildura Triennials. The Melbourne sculptors were particularly interested in an expanded ‘Pacific Triangle’ regional focus: West Coast America, Japan and Korea and Australia and New Zealand. Although the ‘Pacific Rim’ emphasis was consistent with the intention (if not the realisation) of the 1\textsuperscript{st} Biennale of Sydney in 1973, it was significant that it was these Melbourne sculptors who were advocating for increased regional representation at the expense of representation of eminent artists from the major centres of Western Europe and New York. There was, at the time, a palpable concern about not perpetuating the

\textsuperscript{588} John Davis, letter to Frank Watters, 16 June 1976, Davis Estate, Box B Correspondence: Galleries. He continued: ‘I have always been pleased with my conversations with people like Marr and Joan Grounds, Noel Hutchison, even Ron Robertson Swann, Peter Kennedy, Tim Burns, John Armstrong etc and I’ve been surprised and delighted to know that they seem to know what I’ve been doing … Sydney seems more open and alive. Only my friends around Hampton are in a similar positions plus Kiffy and Meredith [Ewing Gallery] and Grazia [Monash University Gallery].’

\textsuperscript{589} Davis held a solo exhibition at Pinacotheca in 1974.

\textsuperscript{590} John Davis, letter to Noel Hutchison, 13 April 1976. Noel Hutchison archive.
‘periphery – time lag’ view of Australian practice as the poor and belated relation of the dominant Euro-American block.

Davis was particularly concerned that McCullough’s concept of ‘stylistic cores’ providing ‘a strong thematic basis’ should not result in a ‘collection of current overseas styles [with] examples of reflected work from here. A show of different alternatives would be a real first in this country.’ The rising tension for control between McCullough and some of the Melbourne sculptors was increasingly evident in their exchanges. As much as the VAB regarded the Mildura Triennials as the model for the biennales, the core group of sculptors from the three principal metropolitan centres – Sydney, Melbourne and Adelaide – who had participated in Mildura since 1970 and 1973, certainly took a proprietorial view of this Biennale of Sydney.

The competition amongst the Mildura cadres was intense. When the final Australian and NZ selection was announced, no-one commented publicly that of the twenty-two selected, twenty-one were all directly associated with Mildura. That, it would seem, was ‘natural’ selection. Instead Davis made an undisguised political observation: ‘Tom McC [sic] certainly toughened up on the Australian area – no signs of flack down here yet altho’ I bet Sydney bubbled for a couple of days & Tom won’t be allowed in Adelaide at all.’ For Davis and his successful Mildura colleagues, their almost exclusive invitation to participate in what was a very significant exhibition in the Australian art world was clear evidence of the prestige and legitimacy that this emerging autonomous field (an alternative economy) had rapidly acquired. Issues of control continued; in an incident similar to the boycott threat at Sculpturscape ’73, Davis along with eleven of the

591 John Davis, letter to Tom McCullough, n.d. (but written in response to Davis’s letter of 19 July 1976), McCullough archive, PA 97/33, Box 6, SLV.
592 In a rather terse and detailed response to Davis’s querying of him about whether he had followed the recommendations by the Melbourne sculptors, McCullough observed: ‘Does this demonstrate how much that Melbourne conference with your colleagues has influenced the overall approach to Biennale planning? I am sure it will be a really good show for that influence and I hope that you’ll all accept some of the credit it if succeeds (no one really wants anything to do with a failure, of course).’ He signed the letter very formally ‘Thomas G. McCullough, Director’. See Tom McCullough, letter to John Davis, 19 July 1976, McCullough archive, PA97/33 Box 6, SLV.
593 John Davis, letter to Noel Hutchison, 16 November 1975, op. cit.
Australian artists, joined another 100 members of the art world in a walkout during the opening ceremony by the prime minister Malcolm Fraser. They joined a further 300 protesters outside the gallery in a noisy demonstration that garnered significant publicity for the biennale.

In keeping with the transplantation of the Mildura model to Sydney, Davis brought several of his students from Prahran CAE to help in the installation of works at the biennale. Nomad was located in the end gallery at the basement level in the AGNSW (Figure 79). The curators responsible for this section were Daniel Thomas and Frances McCarthy; Robert Lindsay and Bernice Murphy worked on the front and mid galleries of the basement level. They worked with the artists on the plan and installation of each work. Although Davis had met some of these curators at previous Mildura Triennials, working directly with them during the installation of his new work offered him an important opportunity to extend his cultural network, particularly as he now did not have any representation in Melbourne. Given the tremendous flux and movement in the expanding and increasingly professionalised field, this would prove to be a valuable association for Davis.

**John Davis 1977–1978**

Davis had only one exhibition during 1977 at Watters Gallery in Sydney. The experience of working, solitary, in the landscape around Hattah Lakes in 1976 had ‘taught him to think very carefully’. The screeds of text in which he elaborated his investigation of dialectical relationships through material, space and time, which gave his works a theoretical underpinning, were superseded by the powerful and real experience of ‘place’,

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594 Of the 16 other artists in this gallery, 75% were from the Pacific Rim. Artists exhibited in the Basement Level/End Gallery were: U-Fan Lee (Korea/Japan and major figure in the Mono-ha group), John Davis (Australia), Terry Powell (New Zealand/Britain), Robert Smithson (USA East Coast; died 1973), John Penny (Australia), Insic Quac (Korea/Japan), Jock Reynolds (USA West Coast), Koji Enokura (Japan), Ti Parks (Australia/UK), Joseph Beuys (Germany), Jim Allen (New Zealand), Carl Plackman (UK), John Lethbridge (New Zealand), Tatsuo Kawaguchi (Japan), Michael Craig-Martin (UK), Yutaka Matsuzawa (Japan).

595 John Davis, Survey 1, transcript of video interview with Robert Lindsay, NGV, 1977–78.
specifically the indelible memory of the Mallee area of his childhood around the Murray River. Davis’s subject changed from being about art and theory, to a poetic, ambiguous sense of ‘place’. He moved from an explanatory approach that had characterised his work since 1973, which reflected the new professional definition of ‘research based’ work, to a more elusive, personal approach: ‘Successful works … extend my idea of what sculpture can be. I make art for myself – it is a contemplative, private activity.’

He had purchased a Ford Transit van and converted it into a camper for his working trips, a kind of travelling museum cum workshop full of twigs, bark, feathers and other found materials (Figure 81). He also began taking students on some of these trips to introduce them to working in the landscape with found materials. In a letter to Noel Hutchison in April 1977, he reported on the first student trip: ‘it went very well and good work evolved. Students very excited by the experience.’ The experience would prepare those students interested for the 1978 Mildura Triennial. For Davis, working with the students enabled him to clarify his own thoughts and understanding, while he prepared for his solo exhibition at Watters Gallery in July. About his process, Davis wrote:

The work seems to be coming ‘naturally’ and I’m not seeking any external solutions, pressures etc. The pressure is from the ‘inside’ and I feel quite free and at last beginning the ‘trip’.

It was six years since his last solo exhibition with Watters Gallery. Of the fifteen works for sale, nine sold and all twenty-four exchange works were mostly exchanges with fellow artists. Significantly, some purchases were made by institutions: the Australian National Gallery purchased Bicycle II 1976, Monash University purchased Lean-To 1977 and Patrick White and Marr Grounds, who purchased Journey II and Bicycle I respectively, donated their works to the AGNSW. The exhibition – entitled Location, Displacement, Transference – was a critical and financial success. It was barely a year since his solitary sojourn at Hattah Lakes, which had produced Nomad for the Biennale of Sydney. At forty years of age, Davis’s work exuded a maturity born of necessity.

596 ibid.
597 John Davis, letter to Noel Hutchison, 24 April 1977, Noel Hutchison archive.
598 ibid.
By late August, Davis informed Hutchison that he had been selected as one of the two Australian representatives for the 4th Indian Triennial and was also working with Robert Lindsay at the NGV on a survey exhibition, both exhibitions scheduled for early 1978. In January 1978, Davis was further notified of his selection as one of three Australian representatives at the prestigious Venice Biennale – the country’s first representation in twenty years. In all, 1978 was a crowning achievement for Davis with participation in the 4th Indian Triennial (10 February – 23 March), Survey 1 exhibition at the NGV (18 March – 23 April) which toured to AGNSW (13 May – 18 June), 7th Mildura Sculpture Triennial (25 March – 28 May), Venice Biennale (2 July – November), ACT 1 (4–12 November) in Canberra, with numerous lectures and visiting artist opportunities as a result of his international exposure.

The rapidity with which Davis’s new direction was recognised and the extent of that recognition needs to be examined. Although between 1976 and 1978 there was the underlying and ever-present pressure caused by the worldwide recession and, in Australia, the Fraser Government’s reduction in government spending, within the visual arts sector there were still opportunities due to the expanding institutional network. There were three significant directorial changes: in mid 1976, Eric Rowlinson from MOMA New York was appointed director of the NGV; in 1977 Melburnian James Mollison was confirmed as the director of the Australian National Gallery (which would open in 1982); and in 1978, Edmund Capon from the Victorian and Albert Museum in London was appointed director of the AGNSW. Movements of professional staff followed these new appointments.\(^{599}\)

\(^{599}\) During 1977, conflict regarding control of acquisition policy between the professional curatorial staff and trustees at the AGNSW reached crisis point. It was indicative of tensions throughout the whole sector, including in regional galleries, as the new professional ‘expert’ staff increasingly challenged the appointed trustees, often amateur enthusiasts with political and economic power. A number of the curators Davis associated with during his installation at the Biennale of Sydney at AGNSW, and who regularly attended the Mildura Triennials, made significant moves: Daniel Thomas was appointed curator of Australian Art at the ANG, Robert Lindsay was appointed to the newly created position of curator of Contemporary Australian Art at the NGV, Frances Lindsay was appointed to the newly opened gallery at the Victorian College of the Arts and Bernice Murphy was appointed as exhibition coordinator for the new professional entity, Australian Gallery Directors Council.
Also in 1976, Elwyn Lynn assumed the chair of the VAB, and within its various committees he was appointed chair of the Exhibitions Committee, responsible for selecting Australian participants for international exhibitions. As the curator of the Power Institute at Sydney University, Lynn had developed an extensive international network of artists, critics and curators, particularly in Europe. Tommaso Trini, who had made the European selections for the Biennale of Sydney and was subsequently brought out as a visiting critic by the VAB, was known to Lynn. Trini would prove useful to the VAB, particularly as he participated in 1977 in preparatory discussions with international critics and scholars regarding the direction and theme – *From Nature to Art, from Art to Nature* – for the 1978 Venice Biennale. In his essay, published in the Venice Biennale catalogue, Trini provided the rationale that would differentiate this biennale from previous ones; specifically it was:

… not burocratic [sic] but experimental, not a museum of standards but a laboratory full of experiments taking place … Today, the Venice Biennale really is a laboratory, compared to what it was in the past … It was therefore decided to hold an exhibition … which would illustrate some of the experimental art which has not been seen in Venice from 1972 to the present day, because of the well-known vicissitudes caused by the transformation and crisis of the Biennale.

The emphasis on ‘experimental … laboratory’ accorded with the VAB’s selection criteria preference for innovative and experimental. However, discussions about Australia’s re-engagement in the Venice Biennale after a twenty-year lapse were already underway by mid 1977 between Daniel Thomas and the Venice Biennale authorities. By September, Thomas had submitted a detailed proposal for two exhibitions: one focusing on Australian artists, pre-1960, whose work exemplified the theme; and the second an exhibition which comprised examples of contemporary Australian art arranged within five sub-themes – traditional media, installation and environments, new media, Aboriginal art and international avant-garde. Although welcomed by the biennale

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601 ibid.
602 ibid., pp. 55–56
authorities, with only a ten-month timeline these proposals posed a huge and expensive undertaking for the Australian organisers.

Trials and triumphs of 1978

The selection process was referred to the Exhibition Committee of the VAB, chaired by Lynn. No proposals were sought, however, by January 1978, three artists were notified: Robert Owen, Ken Unsworth and John Davis. All were sculptors and had been selected for McCullough’s 1976 Biennale of Sydney; all were lecturers in art within the new system of colleges of advanced education; all had solo exhibitions in 1977, of which the works selected for their Venice presentation formed the nucleus; and all had recently had works purchased for the Australian National Gallery collection, the most active, well funded and prestigious of the major institutions. Both Owen and Davis had received significant funding from the VAB in 1976 to produce new works which were presented in their solo exhibitions, thus their selection for the Venice Biennale could be seen as a further validation by the VAB of its grant programs as successful support for innovative and experimental work.

The selection process, the artists and the works presented were the antithesis of Australia’s last representation in 1958. Whereas Menzies and the CAAB had taken control of the selection process from the CAS, the Exhibition Committee of the VAB was a group of peer ‘experts’, selected on the basis of their peer-recognised qualifications, without political interference. Unlike the painters Arthur Streeton and Arthur Boyd, the three sculptors had almost no public profile; their selection was entirely dependent on a

603 ibid., p. 56.
604 Robert Owen had returned from living US and London in 1975 to take up a position at the newly created School of Art at the Alexander Mackie College of Advanced Education and Ken Unsworth was lecturer in sculpture at the School of Teacher Education at the Alexander Mackie College of Advanced Education, Sydney. John Davis was senior lecturer in sculpture at Prahran CAE, Melbourne. During 1977, Owen exhibited at Tolarno, Melbourne, Unsworth exhibited at ICA (Institute of Contemporary Art, the old One Central Street Gallery premises) and Davis at Watters Gallery, in Sydney. All three would exhibit at the 7th Mildura Sculpture Triennial in 1978, held prior to the Venice Biennale. Works acquired for the ANG collection during 1976–77 included: Robert Owen, Memory and Logic Unit: Phase zone 1-2, 1976 (and the working drawings for this series); Ken Unsworth, A different Drummer, 1976, Sculpture as ritual and burial place, 1975, Five secular settings for sculpture as ritual and burial place, 1975, Suspended Stone Wallpiece, 1976; John Davis, Bicycle II, 1976.
network of peers with preferences that favoured ‘not a museum of standards but a laboratory full of experiments’ that Tommaso Trini expressed.\(^{605}\)

The preference for sculptors continued the VAB’s interest in the medium of sculpture as an expansive umbrella under which new media and practices such as photography, video, performance, installation and theory were integrated into innovative practices and transferred into the new curricula in art schools. With a diminishing lead time remaining, and with the Australia Council under increased government scrutiny combined with the remembrance of the embarrassment of the Australian selection in 1958, it was essential that the VAB deliver a successful outcome that would garner significant international recognition and status for the artists and for Australia’s cultural identity.

The critical response to Davis’s *Survey I* exhibition at the NGV was mixed. His was the inaugural exhibition in a series of surveys of contemporary Australian artists curated by Robert Lindsay, whose position and program Davis had advocated as part of the Artists Steering Committee in 1975. Of the thirty-one works and two videos on display, five were from Davis’s recent working period. These works had only been shown in Sydney: *Nomad* at the Biennale of Sydney at the end of 1976 and the other four as part of the Watters Gallery exhibition in July 1977. One Melbourne reviewer was critical of Davis’s ‘progress (I will not say development) [which] is marked by a gentle shifting from one academically acceptable manner to another’. \(^{606}\) It typecast Davis as a typical member of the rapidly expanded teaching profession, rather than an artist; an issue that was particularly exacerbated in Melbourne because of the sheer number of and competition between, tertiary art schools within that city. Davis’s secure position as senior lecturer meant that he was not dependent upon the sale of his work for a living. Clearly, there were competing claims as to who had the authority to define and rank artists. \(^{607}\) The review also revealed issues surrounding the contested and shifting role of the premier art

\(^{605}\) Naylor, op. cit., p. 54.
\(^{607}\) Schwarz, *Culture and Power*, op. cit., p. 221.
gallery, from a storehouse of works that have proven, public worth to an exhibition venue for experimental works entirely dependent on ‘expert’ selection and recommendation.

On the other hand, the reviewer of the exhibition at the AGNSW recognised the later works as those of a ‘mature, self-realised artist’, thereby putting into context the previous works as a process of the artist finding his own voice.\textsuperscript{608} It was a direct response to the works unlike the Melbourne review. Davis considered himself a ‘regionalist’ – in his case the Pacific Rim and Asia – and accepted his status as an Australian artist as ‘neither “provincial” nor afraid of “real” competition, but rather “sophisticated enough” to understand that “real art” emerges not from the emulation of “international fashion” but from … his … response to his particular situation.’\textsuperscript{609} It could be claimed that Davis’s reputation and status as a contemporary sculptor had transferred from Melbourne focused networks in 1976 to Sydney networks centred on Watters Gallery, the VAB and the curatorial contacts at the AGNSW, through the conduit of McCullough.

Davis’s participation in the 7\textsuperscript{th} Mildura Sculpture Triennial – a week after his return from India, and the opening of Survey 1 at the NGV – marked a significant shift in his attitude towards Mildura. His role had changed to that of guide and supporter to his students; in a sense, he was handing on the baton. Davis submitted Solar Piece, a large format photograph of an installation he had made in the You Yangs in September 1977 with a group of students (Figure 80). His proposal stated that he was part of a group exhibition, which would be set up and managed by the students, who would come up and work with McCullough during the week prior to the triennial opening.

In a letter to McCullough, following the triennial, Davis was critical of the lack of intellectual rigour in many of the Australian works, particularly in comparison with the carefully selected participants from New Zealand.\textsuperscript{610} Clearly Davis favoured greater

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\textsuperscript{609} Donaldson, ‘Cultural legitimacy in the Australian art world’, op. cit., p. 289.
\textsuperscript{610} ‘Tyndall and some other Australians, such as John Penny and John Davis, were exhibitors who’ve written to me mentioning their disappointment that so many Australians’ works at Mildura seemed to lack
\end{flushright}
control of the selection criteria. Apart from the networking opportunities of the opening weekend, Mildura was now expend as a necessity for Davis by the new, more accessible and in most cases more prestigious metropolitan opportunities now on offer in Sydney, Adelaide, Canberra and Brisbane. He was also increasingly taking his students to work with him at various remote sites in Victoria; the experience of working within a range of natural environments was now a regular part of their curriculum. Further, the number of exhibiting opportunities for students and recent graduates provided by university and art school galleries, regional galleries and artist run spaces was on the increase. Many of these galleries replicated the art school, ‘experimental’ experience with programming of forums, seminars, discussions with visiting artists, critics and theorists, and an emphasis on new media, critical writing and thematic group shows. However, McCullough’s forced resignation in July from the Mildura Arts Centre drew severe criticism from many sculptors, including Davis. Discussions about bringing the triennial event to Melbourne began to gather momentum, particularly as it was viewed as a national visual arts event that could counteract the perceived cultural favouritism of Sydney which had both the Australia Council and the Biennale of Sydney.

The Australian participation at the 1978 Venice Biennale was a critical success, and a personal success for the three Australian sculptors. Ronald Millen in his review for *Art and Australia* acknowledged:

I humbly join my European colleagues in awarding the palm to the Australian pavilion and the three highly competent and technically equipped artists it presented … Over and beyond the new prestige, it was doubtless salutary also for the three Australians most intelligently selected to be shown. With artists of such integrity, apparent strength and maturity … it is to be hoped that if Australian art is now ready to take its place in the big international exhibitions it will be able to keep safe and fresh its own qualities…

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Figure 80: top, John Davis, Solar Piece 1977, installation near the You Yangs, using found rocks, sheet of steel. Dimensions: 87 x 217 x 115 cms.

Figure 81: bottom, dashboard of Davis’s Ford Transit van with installations made of found objects: bones, feathers, twigs, bark and string c.1977.
The installation *Continuum and Transference* by John Davis comprised five works: *Marker* (2 parts) 1977, *Ridge* 1977, *Tower* 1978, *Device* 1978 and *Flag* 1978, and was suitably located in a large white room with a high ceiling and diffused lighting (Figures 82 & 83). The image on the front cover of the catalogue, *Relocation-Beach Work 1978*, was one of Davis’s ephemeral installations on an Indian beach following his participation in the 4th Indian Triennial. The Venice Biennale installation was a kind of topographical memory map of the Murray River floodplains. Davis employed multiple viewpoints throughout the scattered works to convey the dual sense of the vastness of the Australian landscape and its fragile particularities; works such as *Tower* exuded the contradictory qualities of endurance and ephemerality.

Davis’s work attracted particular notice from many of the European and Japanese critics. Most took their cue, in terms of their responses to his work, from Elwyn Lynn’s catalogue essay, which linked the ‘primitiveness’ of Davis’s works to an affinity with Aboriginal rituals.\(^{612}\) Robert Hughes was more elusive in his use of the term ‘tracker’ which had Australian bush connotations as well as referring to a new European art movement, to which Davis’s work had obvious allusions.\(^{613}\) In his catalogue essay, Norbert Loeffler, although he also made links to Aboriginal art as an influence, located in Davis’s work an equivalence with the underlying theme in many of the Australian Nobel laureate Patrick White’s novels ‘where a solitary individual encounters the empty heartland of Australia [and] is cleansed of his past and spiritually reborn.’\(^{614}\) It was this intuitive observation that most closely represented the epiphany of place and memory at Hattah Lakes in 1976 that had continued to inform Davis’s work. For Davis, it was a

\(^{612}\) Although the issue of the use of art to support the promotion of a national identity is beyond the scope of thesis, the insistence on links to Aboriginal culture and rituals in both Lynn and Loeffler’s essays certainly begs the question in terms of the selection criteria of the VAB.

\(^{613}\) Ronald Millen provided a definition of Tracker Art: ‘ephemeral fragments of nature and human life, the past and present are given permanent existence in arrangements and ensembles rich in ecological, geographical and anthropological suggestions: an archaeology of the present.’ See Millen, ‘The Venice Biennale’, op. cit., p. 81.

vindication of his maturity and vision as an artist. As he confided in his diary entry on the reaction to his work on the first press day of the vernissage, Wednesday 28 June:

I think that my work was well received by the ‘art group’ even to the extent that Arturo Schwartz complimented the work extraordinarily well. It will be hard to settle back into ‘Melbourne art’. 615

Davis returned to Australia at the end of July; he had by then spent a total of almost four months overseas, in India and Europe, on prestigious, international VAB funded projects in which he had been selected to represent Australian art. On his return to Melbourne he became immediately embroiled in a debate over the control of selection, and of increasing the percentage of Australian and women artists’ representation for the next Biennale of Sydney in 1979. Discussions and meetings had already been taking place among groups of Sydney artists; however, from August onwards, a group of Melbourne artists, curators and historians initiated written discussion with the Biennale director Nick Waterlow and VAB director Leon Paroissien. 616 The group stated that they represented a broad cross-section of the Melbourne art community and requested that Waterlow come to Melbourne to meet and discuss their concerns directly. Davis in a personal letter to Waterlow reiterated that the group wanted to discuss ‘the selection procedures you are undertaking’. 617 Following a telephone discussion with Waterlow, the Melbourne group wrote a letter of protest outlining very specific concerns:

We are opposed to exhibitions that reinforce cultures from abroad at the expense of Australian talent and feel that this situation must be balanced by an equal representation of Australian artists with their European counterparts … Australian artists are to appear in an ancillary, complementary way to an exhibition that should be highlighting and not downgrading their talents … It may be necessary

615 John Davis, 1978 Diary entry, Davis Estate, B Box, Diaries. Arturo Schwarz was a significant Italian scholar, art historian, poet, writer and curator with one of the most extensive collections of Dada and Surrealist art. He lived in Milan, and until 1975 had run Gallery Schwarz. He would have known Tommaso Trini, who was also based in Milan and would have been familiar with the arte povera movement of the late 1960s.


617 John Davis, handwritten draft of a letter to Nick Waterlow, 16 August 1978, Davis Estate.
to call a public meeting of Melbourne artists to thoroughly discuss this situation and its implications for Australian artists.\footnote{618}{Sydney Biennale: White elephant or red herring’, op. cit.}

The fundamental issue of the representation of Australian artists echoed the same concerns that Davis and the Melbourne advisors had expressed to McCullough in both 1973 and 1976. However, increased selection pressure was caused by the ‘unprecedented expansion of the market [both commercial and the new, funded alternative economy under the umbrella of the Australia Council] … linked by a relationship of circular causality to the inflow of [young art school and university art graduates]’ which provided the personnel for the rapid expansion in exhibition opportunities, galleries, publications and administration. This factor combined with a worldwide recession and the new government’s stringent fiscal controls and demand for increased organisational transparency and efficiency, led to increased competition for diminishing resources.\footnote{619}{Bourdieu, The Rules of Art, op. cit., p. 54.}

Competition for control of the selection criteria by Australian artists and the director of the Biennale of Sydney and his board, increased. The exclusion of the critical elements of the Sydney and Melbourne artists’ demands from the selection indicated a shifting power balance in the peer network, and was indicative of the complex field of competition for the monopoly of artistic legitimation that now defined contemporary Australian art practice.\footnote{620}{ibid., p. 132.}

Davis, like his Mildura selector colleagues, no longer controlled the selection process nor did he have the power to influence the new director or his board and their network of contacts.

The diminution of status and relevance of the Mildura Sculpture Triennials to Davis personally was indicative of the increasing dominance and concentration of competing hierarchies of positions and institutions in the metropolitan centres.\footnote{621}{Davis, like many of his Melbourne colleagues, would have been aware of Westbrook’s (as director of the Victorian Arts Ministry) commissioning of a feasibility study into establishing a major arts festival in Melbourne. The study had premier Hamer’s support. ‘Victoria may get arts festival by 1979’, The Age, 16 November 1977, p. 2.} Sculpture was no longer the main game; the contested discourse of post-object art that had increasingly marked the invitational Mildura Triennials from 1970 to 1978 was no longer regarded as
relevant. Davis would have to compete for a position as a contemporary artist within a much more complex, differentiated and competitive environment.

**McCullough’s Mildura Swansong**

Returning to Mildura in January 1977 and the petty politics of the Mildura Arts Centre and the Council was not easy for McCullough. After having spent the past year travelling internationally, meeting artists, liaising with international peers such as John Stringer in New York and Tommaso Trini in Italy and having worked with the trustees, director and staff at the AGSNW, the Australia Council and Department of Foreign Affairs, it was a difficult transition. In fact, between 1975 and the beginning of 1977, McCullough had been involved primarily in national and international events, promoting contemporary art practice, not focused on the community of Mildura and its own cultural objectives.

Professionally, his participation on various national and state boards and committees of major arts funding bodies increased his status within the art world. Participation in these activities and a funded overseas research trip in 1977, regarded as important professional development opportunities, again required his further absence from Mildura.

This section of the chapter investigates the critical and very short period from McCullough’s return to Mildura at the beginning of 1977 to his resignation eighteen months later in July 1978. It tracks the devaluation of his cultural capital and status in relation to the local situation and the increasingly complex national and metropolitan concentration within the Australia visual art world. What becomes increasingly clear is the disjuncture between his professional habitus and his position as a regional gallery

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622 Nick Waterlow, ‘European Dialogue’, *European Dialogue: Biennale of Sydney 1979*, Biennale of Sydney, Sydney, 1979, n.p.: ‘The choice of Australian artists, aided by copious counselling … was largely determined by the observation that object versus post-object arguments are no longer relevant, that no particular style or medium dominates and that a variety of individuals … are articulating ‘essences’ that are essentially though not always obviously, indigenous.’

623 McCullough had been appointed to the Craft Board of the Australia Council and was the chairman of their Exhibitions Committee. During 1976, he was appointed to the executive of the Australian Galleries Directors Council as well as also on the organising committee of Arts Victoria 78: Craft, a further initiative of Eric Westbrook and his Victorian Arts Ministry.
director within a rapidly evolving set of new hierarchies. However, it is the velocity with which the various types of symbolic and economic capital shift and change in this volatile new art system, in response to changing government policies, that contribute to McCullough’s demise at Mildura.

**Changing professional relationships: national issues**

Between 1975 and 1978, there were significant conflicts and developments in the two major metropolitan art galleries – the AGNSW and NGV – that would have implications for McCullough. The NGV had provided McCullough with professional, curatorial and museum management mentoring in his early career, hence the resignation of NGV director Gordon Thomson in 1975, at the end of a very difficult year, removed a personal and professional connection to the NGV for McCullough. Thomson was a great supporter of Australian sculpture. He had been part of an important triumvirate which included Eric Westbrook and Victorian premiers Bolte and Hamer who had both taken a very active involvement in cultural policies and the arts portfolio. It was this powerful combination of political and cultural will that saw the development not only of the Victorian Arts Centre but also the regeneration and expansion of the regional galleries network in Victoria. By mid 1976, Eric Rowlinson, previously registrar at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, accepted the directorship of the NGV.

At the AGNSW, 1977 was a watershed year. The incumbent director, Peter Laverty (the last of the artist-directors), resigned and was replaced in 1978 with the art historian and Chinese art specialist from the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, Edmund Capon. Daniel Thomas, after a six-month sabbatical, was offered the position of senior curator of Australian Art at the Australian National Gallery (ANG). Frances McCarthy, his assistant curator and Robert Lindsay, education officer at the AGNSW, both moved to Melbourne.

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624 There had been artists’ protests concerning the removal of an *Art and Language* project at the time of the Museum of Modern Art’s blockbuster exhibition *Manet to Matisse*, followed by an artists’ sit-in of the gallery in protest at the treatment and removal of Domenico de Clario’s work (part of Graeme Sturgeon’s *Artists’ Artists* series of exhibitions), which led to the establishment of an artists’ steering committee and recommendations for greater engagement with contemporary Australian art practice. In October 1975, the curator of Australian Art, Brian Finemore, was brutally murdered.
to take up the positions respectively of director, Victorian College of Art Gallery and assistant curator of Australian Art at the NGV. Education officer Bernice Murphy moved to the Australian Gallery Directors’ Council in the position of exhibitions coordinator (overseas exhibitions). McCullough had worked closely with both Peter Laverty and his deputy Gil Docking (who had known McCullough and the Mildura Sculpture Triennials in his previous position as director of the Auckland City Gallery) as part of the biennale management committee in 1976. He had also established a working relationship with the professional staff of the AGNSW during the Biennale of Sydney, many of whom had left the gallery during 1977.625

In effect, with the retirement of Gordon Thomson from the NGV, the resignation of Peter Laverty from AGNSW and the appointment of Daniel Thomas to the fledgling ANG, a significant aspect of the relationship of the Mildura Triennials to the major metropolitan galleries had been diminished. Both Thomson and Thomas had been involved from the triennial’s inception. The new directors of both metropolitan galleries were overseas trained, with no prior knowledge of the Mildura Triennials. These changes in the relationships in the field, from personal contacts for McCullough to explicit positions of power relative to his position as now one of many regional gallery directors, were indicative of major shifts at all levels of the visual arts sector in Australia. A new generation of tertiary trained arts administrators and curators were taking positions in the expanding state, regional, art school, university and alternative gallery networks, national arts organisations such as the Australian Gallery Directors Council, as well as in funding bureaucracies such as the Australia Council and state arts ministries. The rapid expansion of art schools, both in numbers and within the tertiary education sector, increased the opportunities for artists, not just in employed positions but also in expanded career paths

625 ‘Conflict and confusion about the rights and powers of both Trustees and professional staff are causing problems in State art galleries around Australia. Nowhere is the conflict more apparent than in the Art Gallery of New South Wales, where a spate of resignations arising from discontent at the present running of the gallery is raising questions about the functions of State galleries … The gallery had doubled in size [since reopening in 1972] and had its first proper staff. They were young, drawn from Australia’s new art museum profession and were impressively weighted with degrees … under Laverty with his highly trained staff, the implication was that the board would have to acknowledge staff wishes on acquisitions.’ See Susanna Short, ‘Staff, trustees and conflict at state art galleries”, The National Times, 10–15 October 1977, p. 46.
within these institutions. The expansion of potential participants in the field, both in numbers of organisations and individuals, created the need for more professional structures and inter-organisational exchange. This in turn created the need for more rigorous selection criteria, hence increased competition for a diminishing number of positions relative to the increasing number of potential participants. Yet this increasing need for shared professional standards across positions in the field, paradoxically, created a pressure in each organisation to develop a specialised or unique niche relative to other similar organisations. McCullough had to redefine the triennial’s niche in response to increasing competition from other visual arts festival-type events (associated with tertiary art schools and universities) and more specifically, the Biennale of Sydney.

McCullough’s responses to these challenges were shaped by shifts within the visual arts field caused by funding cuts (to both arts and education) that collided with a vast increase in the number of participants and organisations that now defined the field, thereby creating a fraught and unpredictable arena of competition.

Cracks started to appear in the relationship between McCullough and some sculptor-selectors who, sensing that McCullough had gone too far in his pursuit of experimental forms, refused to exhibit in 1978. The most public example was a boycott by Ron Robertson Swann: ‘what happens at Mildura is more truly elitist than anything … the more regional you are, the more post-object you become’. This was clearly a reference to Professor Donald Brook at Flinders University, the Australian proponent of the term, ‘post-object art’ and the EAF, headed by Noel Sheridan, both based in Adelaide and great supporters of the McCullough and the Mildura Sculpture Triennials.

In the forums that McCullough initiated between various artists and students groups in Sydney, Melbourne and Adelaide as part of the preparation for the triennial, he offered a number options for expanding the net of the triennial gatherings. The proposal to include

craft was roundly dumped by the sculptor-selectors. Also a proposal to invite Aboriginal artists' participation was encouraged by a number of his sculptor advisors, but according to McCullough, the proposal met with resistance from the Aboriginal Arts Board.

In an exchange with students and faculty at the SASA, McCullough discussed the issue of not including new media as it was expensive and problematic for a regional gallery. The students were horrified at what they considered would be a retrograde step, given that they had been encouraged to pursue new theoretical and new media concerns. For them, Mildura represented an extension of their curriculum and the audience for their work was the other lecturers, graduates and students, as well as the critics and curators from the funded art spaces; definitely not the general public of Mildura.

Following his European trip in 1977 when he met and spent time with Joseph Beuys in Kassel, McCullough was still committed to the Mildura Triennials having a more international engagement. Like the 2nd Biennale of Sydney, he was keen to present Australian artists alongside their international peers. The VAB was keen to bring international contemporary artists to Australia, not just at biennale time, but also to involve them in what they regarded as sites of avant-garde activity.

The triennials also represented a regional approach, which McCullough registered as part of an international trend. In his preface to the 1978 catalogue:

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627 McCullough was on the Crafts Board of the Australia Council and on the Arts Victoria 78: Craft organising committee and had proposed thematic exhibition which addressed the artist/artisan debate to be Mildura’s contribution to the Victorian initiative.

628 Tom McCullough, “Seventh Sculpture Triennial Bulletin to Artists”, undated c.1978, McCullough archive, PA 97.33, Box 20, SLV.

629 The EAF in Adelaide and the Sculpture Centre in Sydney had both been funded on this basis. Both these venues became important network nodes for McCullough. Terry Reid and his international mail-art exchange in Sydney and Noel Sheridan at the EAF were regular participants at the Mildura Triennials and associates of McCullough.
Mildura’s reputation for encouraging the experimental and emerging sculptors among its wide-ranging list of invitees has been applauded universally … This confidence must encourage unashamed regionalism as is characteristic of new art in California, England and some European countries at present.630

It was this approach that William Boyle, executive director of Visual Arts of the Canada Council and organiser of the 10th International Sculpture Conference in Toronto, found so valuable in the Mildura model when he visited the 1978 triennial. He actively encouraged McCullough to visit Canada to speak with various curators and members of the Canada Council.631

**Funding issues for McCullough**

McCullough was convinced that Mildura should pursue its objective to become a national sculpture centre with international links, through acquisitions, artist-in-residence programs and expanded triennials. He viewed the planned 1978 Mildura Triennial as a continuation of the 1976 Biennale of Sydney, and in early 1977 received a matching grant from the Victorian Ministry for the Arts to assist in the purchase of thirteen works by international participants from the Biennale of Sydney (valued at $22,000) for the Mildura collection.632

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631 McCullough had applied for and received $2000 from the VAB to attend the international conference but following the town clerk’s instructions from the Mildura City Council that it would not support his engagements outside Mildura, unless taken in his own time and involved no cost to Council, the funding was offered to Tony Bishop (one of McCullough’s core Adelaide sculptor-advisors). On his return to Canada, and learning of McCullough’s resignation, Boyle wrote that McCullough and his direction of the Mildura Sculpture Triennials had brought Australian art to international attention.

632 The Director’s Report to Mildura Arts Centre Advisory Council, *Mildura Arts Centre Annual Report 1976 – 1977*, Mildura Arts Centre, Mildura, 1977. This was the first time that a regional gallery had been assisted with an acquisitions grant from the state arts ministry. Interestingly, it coincided with the announcement that the popular VAB Australian contemporary art acquisition scheme, which had provided financial assistance to galleries to purchase contemporary Australian works, would be terminated. McCullough also received five gifted works from the Biennale of Sydney, bringing the total contribution to the Mildura collection to 18 works.
The riverfront cultural park, which the Mildura City Council had endorsed in principle in 1971, had not progressed any further since the 1975 committee’s plans and budget.\(^{633}\) A number of encroachments on the boundaries of the park had been allowed and, although the Mildura City Council continued to endorse the project, it was dependent upon significant government funding in order to realise the plans. Given the Mildura Art Centre’s tight financial constraints with regard to the forthcoming triennial, park development could not be considered a priority.

The refurbished storage facilities that had been costed and budgeted for in 1975, and had received matching infrastructure funding from the State Government, were still not completed on his return in 1977 and threatened to prevent a touring exhibition of sculpture from Thailand being shown at the Mildura Art Gallery. Further, as McCullough reported, the MACAC established a finance sub-committee ‘as general funding of the arts centre in 1976/77 has become increasingly difficult’, which brought the Arts Centre under closer scrutiny of the Mildura City Council and the rate-paying public.\(^{634}\)

Following the embarrassing turnaround by the VAB in relation to funding for the 1978 Mildura Triennial, McCullough worked to source or link to further grants to expand the triennial’s reach and his position nationally and internationally.\(^{635}\) He ensured that the Mildura Sculpture Triennial was included on the itineraries of VAB funded visiting international art associates, such as Rene Block, William Boyle and Werner Kruger. He also secured an exhibition research grant of $2500 from the Australian Gallery Directors’ Council to develop a touring exhibition of Joseph Beuys’s work in consultation with Rene Block.

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\(^{633}\) As McCullough revealed in this Director’s Report, ‘Unfortunately, the $10,000 planning budget provided by the Visual Arts Board in 1974 has achieved nothing but attractive landscape designs … and an edition of small explanatory publications, with estimates, which were sent to State and Federal government bodies’, ibid.

\(^{634}\) ibid.

\(^{635}\) The specifics of the VAB funding decision is covered in the following section on the 7th Mildura Sculpture Triennial.
Changing professional relationships: Local issues

McCullough was aware on his return from Sydney of a change in attitude by the council towards one of greater hostility. The confidence that had been built up over 11 years had gone.636

During his absence, McCullough had lost key staff: a part-time education officer and more significantly, the resignation of his curatorial assistant Geoff Tennant, both paid for by the Department of Education. By early 1977, the Education Department had not renewed its commitment to fund the 1.5 positions, even though Mildura Arts Centre was responsible for servicing an increasing larger regional area. A further blow to McCullough was the retirement in July 1977 of the town clerk, Bill Downie, who had been a great supporter. The new town clerk, Barry Hayes, definitely had the ear of the Council and ‘concerned’ citizens.

When McCullough, with VAB funding, took three weeks leave to visit the Biennale de Jeunes in Paris and Documenta in Kassel in 1977, reports in the local paper fuelled concerns about Mike Parr’s ‘bloodletting’ performance in Paris. Issues of control over artistic judgement came to head in November when a number of church leaders and two notable MACAC representatives, chairman Cr Roy Burr and deputy chairman Cr Lloyd Beasy opposed the staging of the nude play, Oh! Calcutta, which was booked to show at the Mildura Arts Centre in mid December. The two councillors issued a joint statement stating: ‘Let Adelaide keep this form of garbage … We don’t want Mildura to become a testing ground for deviate and permissive forms of so-called art.’637 For McCullough this was the first time that his judgement had been contradicted publicly and indicated a major challenge to his autonomy as centre manager. That the fight was taken directly to the media and not conducted within the MACAC is revealing of the level of hostility and dysfunction within the Art Centre’s Advisory Council. It already indicated where the battle lines would be drawn for the forthcoming triennial.

636 Short, ‘Sculpture as an event’, op. cit.
McCullough acknowledged his need for controversy in order to get greater coverage and engage public interest in the triennials. However, he had misjudged his most important local ally, the MACAC. Not only did he have two vocal objectors in the positions of chairman and deputy chairman, but his trusted friend and advisor Reg Etherington could no longer support McCullough’s position: ‘We had a good and long-lasting relationship until the final years when the Triennials became so controversial that the Council and I started to move in different paths. Reg, I thought, started to let me down at that stage and backed the City Council’s fear of the Triennials.’

The fight between McCullough and a group of councillors, namely Councillors Gambetta, Mills, Burr and Beasy, can be traced through the Sunraysia Daily news clippings (Figure 84). The mounting suspicion that unacceptable forms of contemporary art would be foisted on Mildura was behind the action of these councillors when they issued a warning to McCullough and artists just prior to the opening of the 7th Triennial, that there was to be ‘no blood letting, no pornography and no nudity’, with further threats that if this was transgressed it could mean the end of the triennials in Mildura. By early March 1978, the mounting public controversy had drawn the participating artists into the fray, in support of McCullough and against the conservative attitudes expressed by the Mildura City Council and MACAC. Nancy Borlase in her review noted that the Art Centre cost the ratepayers of Mildura ‘a cool $100,000 a year to maintain’ and continued with a measured observation:

> What does rankle are comments which are seen to ridicule the locals. Without community support, involving for one thing, the cooperation of council employees in countless ways, there would be no triennial, even with the funding that comes from the Visual Arts Board and the Victorian Ministry for the Arts.

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638 McCullough: ‘[I]n my reading of exhibitions around the world, anything that is at all controversial will get more press than something that is not controversial … let’s have a bit of controversy if it means public interest’. See McCullough’s interview with de Groen, op. cit.
639 McCullough, interview with the author, 30 March 2006.
641 Nancy Borlase, ‘One martyr, many views’, Sydney Morning Herald, 1 April 1978.
Separation of McCullough from Mildura

Paul McGillick’s review of the 7th Mildura Sculpture Triennial stands as a testimony to McCullough and the triennials.

It has been the curatorial vision of Tom McCullough – the event’s director since 1967 – which has made Mildura such a sensitive barometer of international trends in art. It has been McCullough, too, who has made the event such an absorbing recurring experiment in the possibilities of art in public places other than as precious objects in closely guarded museums.642

Whatever the views of the arts press and cognoscenti, McCullough had also lost critical support for his position. The non-attendance of premier Hamer at the opening of the triennial and director of the Ministry for the Arts, Westbrook at the 21st anniversary meeting of the RGAV were signals to those in the Mildura Council and community of McCullough’s alienation from important Victorian figures of power. He had also lost some significant protectors in the visual art world as well.

McCullough’s resignation on 5 July 1978 was forced, following the Council memo which stated that its new policy of ‘introspection’ meant that it would only support arts in Mildura and not the state or nation. McCullough’s position was no longer tenable. However, as McCullough himself acknowledged, one of the fundamental problems was the separation of ownership of the triennials from the Council:

I made a fundamental mistake because in getting huge sponsorship from the Visual Arts Board and the Ministry for the Arts, I was actually taking the responsibility and ownership of the Triennials away from Mildura City Council. That was the cradle where the Triennials were born and the local ownership was separated from the City in the late seventies.643

In a sense, McCullough had created two jobs with two different employers – the Mildura City Council and the funding bodies. The needs of both were antithetical. A chasm of incomprehension existed between the community’s expectation and perception of the triennials and McCullough who saw his role as ‘bringing … the exciting world of

643 McCullough, interview with the author, 30 March 2006.
However, as he himself acknowledged, ‘the Triennials ... were never mounted principally for the majority of people living in Mildura; they existed and expanded by virtue of the artists’ belief in the Mildura Triennials being a truly national art event’. From 1973 onwards, Mildura Arts Centre provided the site and staff while the project was principally financed by state and federal arts funding.

By 1978, the schizophrenia of the position that McCullough found himself in was not simply a personal dilemma. The autonomous field’s need for the Mildura Sculpture Triennials to pursue a unique niche – ‘emerging artists’ – was in conflict with McCullough’s need for support from the local community that paid for the Arts Centre. Furthermore, the successful transplant of the triennial model from the regional margins to the metropolitan centre of the AGNSW as the 2nd Biennale of Sydney in 1976, plus the VAB’s funding of alternative exhibition spaces in Sydney, Melbourne, Adelaide and Brisbane, provided competition as it refocused much of the professional network that had developed at the earlier Mildura Triennials. McCullough’s vision of a sprawling, emerging artist, invitational triennial was also beginning to conflict with many of his now established sculptor-advisors’ professional status that demanded greater control of selection; a process that would validate their elevated professional status and those they selected.

In a response to the town clerk just prior to his resignation, McCullough issued a veiled threat:

Government support will go to those who can provide evidence of effective organisation and sincere interest in national/state projects, so it is inevitable that a new venue will be eagerly sought and found for the next Australasian Sculpture Triennial. (e.g. La Trobe University’s Sculpture and Performance Festival, June 1978).

McCullough had always been aware that he and the Arts Centre occupied a position of high status in relation to state and federal government funding for a regional gallery because of the triennial national sculpture event, and that it was a position that had be protected. He, together with many of the members of the MACAC and the Mildura City Council, was also aware that their continued support of the sculpture events every three years was the necessary trade-off in order to maintain the centre’s privileged position. He was merely stating a fact that was well known and accepted. However it now appeared that the balance had been tipped and the trade-off was no longer acceptable.

7th Mildura Sculpture Triennial

One week before the opening of the 7th Mildura Sculpture Triennial, the largest and most successful biennial Adelaide Festival concluded. At a cost of $1.5 million, the festival had drawn 250,000 people to a whole range of events that ran over twenty-three days. Although predominantly a performing arts event, the Adelaide Festival had contributed to the city’s elevation to the ranks of a cultural metropolis alongside Sydney and Melbourne. Its audience was national and international, and comprised the Australian art world and paying enthusiasts. The stature of the Adelaide Festival combined with the success of the 2nd Biennale of Sydney signalled the increasing dominance of the metropolitan centres as major art centres, and hinted at a downgrading of Mildura from its aspirations as a national sculpture centre to a regional centre. Further, competition between the two principal Australian cities, Melbourne and Sydney, for the title of cultural capital was very real and growing in intensity given the location of the Australia Council in Sydney. The successful transplanting of the Mildura model into the AGNSW as the new Biennale of Sydney had caught the Melbourne cultural and political establishment off guard. In a sense, it was the support of the Mildura triennial initiative and the Mildura Arts Centre by this Melbourne establishment that had been a critical part of the sculpture triennial’s success. Hamer and Westbrook possibly viewed the Australia Council as stealing a march on their event. In August 1977, Westbrook commissioned a feasibility study for a major arts festival in Melbourne and the findings were discussed with Hamer in November. This proposal posed a significant threat to McCullough’s
aspirations for the future development of the sculpture park, collection and triennial in Mildura.  

There was only fifteen months separation between the end of the 2nd Biennale of Sydney and the beginning of the 7th Mildura Sculpture Triennial. However, within this relatively short interval, the developments within the Australian visual arts scene and within Mildura itself and the impact of external factors such as changes to government policy began to exacerbate growing tensions. There was a greater metropolitan convergence of art schools, alternative art spaces and university and college art galleries which were increasingly developing their own exhibition touring networks and exchange residencies for artists. Significant resources were increasingly directed towards institutional infrastructure, and with the government’s directive to bring the various artforms boards under the direct control of the Australia Council, artists’ control of the previously autonomous boards and their policy development was curtailed. To the selectors of the 7th Mildura Sculpture Triennial, the triennial represented one major event that was still effectively artist-controlled.

Prescient concerns about the relevance of the triennials to the Mildura community were raised in a discussion between Terry Reid and George Mannix in the *Mildura Broadcast Sculptors Bulletin*, a publication organised around a series of network exchanges and interviews prepared in the lead-up to the 1978 Triennial. Reid opened the discussion with the following observation:

[T]he Mildura Triennial because of its size, exposes an awkward relationship between contemporary art and artists and a small conservative agricultural community … the particulars of the community seem to be considered more as a physical location than as a social context … In most instances, participating artists have not dealt with the situation as a particular social interplay in which they may participate.  

Mannix, whose background was in community theatre, replied:

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The Mildura Triennial is a Flying Saucer which once every three years lands on some unaccountable and unexplained mission, departing into a vacuum of distance and silence, as mysterious and as alien as ever ... it is this image of the Triennial that must needs make it an unhappy transient in Mildura.649

Mannix’s observations were recorded on 25 January, prior to the City Council’s warning about unacceptable practices such as bloodletting, nudity and pornography. Reid’s opening discussion point with Mannix already indicated a level of awareness of the autonomous and problematic nature of the triennial and its organisation in relation to the community of Mildura.650 Removed from the relative safety of the metropolitan network of art schools, university and alternative galleries and professional organisations, the many conflicting and visceral tensions within the art world and between the art world and the Mildura community, would become manifest during the 7th Mildura Sculpture Triennial.

**Selection Process**

Feedback from artists to McCullough was very important in determining ways in which the Triennial formats could be improved. Issues such as the level of women’s participation, which had dropped from thirty-one per cent in 1961 to eleven per cent throughout most of the 1970s, and other issues such as the need for increased community involvement through community art events were raised. Interestingly, criticism of the broad selection process and the perceived lack of intellectual and conceptual rigour that this supported came from the established selector group, not from the arts bureaucracies. These sculptors, many of whom had been involved in Mildura since 1970 as emerging sculptors, were now senior lecturers within the tertiary art school systems, beneficiaries of Australia Council grants and residencies and were now included in significant state

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649 ibid. George Mannix had received a grant from the Theatre Board of the Australia Council in 1976 to travel throughout NSW ‘to generate and maintain youth drama groups in relatively isolated towns’. His experience confirmed that: ‘It was not in any way clear however how art could be successfully brought into the public domain. My own work had pointed out the difficulty of aesthetically motivating the rural community both directly…and indirectly.’ See ‘Flying saucer: Unexplained mission’, Mildura Broadcast: Sculptors Bulletin, Mildura Arts Centre, Mildura, 1978, n.p.

650 Following the 1975 Mildura Sculpture Triennial, Terry Reid lived in Mildura for 18 months and organised a community oriented, fluxus Mask exhibition at the Mildura Arts Centre during the period when McCullough was in Sydney. Unlike other sculptor-participants and selectors, this period afforded Reid insights into the local community and nature of the Arts Centre’s relationship with them.
gallery and contemporary art space exhibitions. They were concerned to maintain their increasing professional status. However, McCullough stressed ‘that higher selectivity for the sake of quality would not compensate for the loss of stimulus which Mildura’s openness has provided’ and the increase and exposure that the triennials offered new, younger artists was maintained as a defining element. 

Although Victorian participation was still the largest component, constituting forty-eight per cent of the total of 125 participants, changes in the selectors and the selection process were reflected in the participants and their works. Whereas since 1973 the Victorian participation had shown significantly larger percentages of emerging sculptors exhibiting compared to all age ranges than had other regions, by 1978 the Victorian percentage of fifty-one per cent of participants under thirty years old was the same percentage for the rest of states of their total participation numbers. However, the rate of participation over the whole field who were born in 1945 or after (therefore thirty-three years old or less) rose to almost seventy-seven per cent of the total. By 1978, all states and territories had made the transition to art schools as part of the parallel tertiary CAE system. Overwhelmingly, more than three-quarters of all the participants were the products of post-1965 education policy changes. Rather than a national survey of the state of sculptural practice in Australia, the 1978 Mildura Sculpture Triennial was a survey of emerging art practices in Australia, which were the direct product of the new, autonomous, tertiary art education system. It was in the nature of this evolving professional field, as with any profession, ‘to maintain control over the mechanism designed to ensure their reproduction’. The Mildura event was an important extension of this autonomous functioning of the art education system.

In NSW there were now three new art schools with college status: Sydney College of the Arts and Alexander Mackie School of Art, both in Sydney, and Canberra School of Art. These new colleges offered expanded employment opportunities for sculpture graduates,

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651 Tom McCullough, ‘Notes from a discussion with 12 South Australian Sculptors and Students – Saturday 6th August, 1977’, McCullough archive, PA 97/33 Box 20, SLV.
and significantly offered promotions for a number of McCullough’s core selectors. However, these new entities emerged at a time of crisis, where major cultural and educational figures were accused of calling for ‘an elitist policy in art education’ in response to funding cuts and a shortage of good teachers. Dr Philip Law, vice president of the VIC, called for limits to be imposed on the number of students doing fine arts, craft and performing arts through the application of stricter selection criteria. Chairman of the Australia Council, Professor Geoffrey Blainey, concurred, adding, ‘Artistic standards should be high, not to turn artists and performers into an elite, but because the audience deserves the best [my italics].’ Calls for funding allocations (in both education and the arts) to be more demand or audience oriented challenged the autonomy of the emerging alternative art economy.

**Funding Issues**

The Education Department’s decision not to renew its commitment to the Mildura Arts Centre to provide 1.5 seconded teacher positions significantly reduced the Mildura Arts Centre’s professional staffing even though it was responsible for servicing an increasingly larger regional area. Although this reduction was part of a general cutback by the department in response to its own funding pressures, it would exacerbate the tensions experienced during the delivery of the 1978 Mildura Sculpture Triennial, the largest event staged and managed by the Arts Centre.

In April 1977, the MACAC approved the proposal to stage the 7th Mildura Sculpture Triennial, however, its finance sub-committee asked the Mildura City Council to make a budget appropriation specifically to fund a $12,000 shortfall in the centre’s funding for the planned event. Rather than fund the shortfall, however, the City Council granted a bridging loan, which the Mildura Arts Centre would have to repay from attendance fees.

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653 As Jim Allen had recently been appointed as director of the new Sydney College of the Arts, McCullough flew to NZ to discuss plans for the triennial with artists and curators, and invited the young curator and artist Nicholas Spill to co-ordinate the NZ contingent.


655 ibid.
This arrangement would bring the Arts Centre under much closer scrutiny of the Mildura City Council, and to the attention of the rate-paying public.

Images have been removed due to copyright reasons

**Figure 84**: top left, Headline, *Sunraysia Daily*, 1 March 1978.

**Figure 85**: top right, Peter Tyndall, *Shooting Gallery / Ritual Significance* or *State Your Aim / Set your sights/ Make your mark*, 1978, installation and performance. Canvas backdrop, targets, slug gun and information stands. Dimensions: 240-300 (h) x 390 x 300 cms.
Figure 86: left, George Christofakis, *Structure III* 1977, timber, netting, rope and rocks, 450 x 120 x 120 cms. Collection Mildura Arts Centre.

Figure 87: right, Adrian Mauriks, *Through Square* 1977, painted mild steel, 154 x 320 x 200 cms.
Figure 88: top, Isabel Davis, *Kitchen Creation* 1977, wood, Perspex, fabric and household residue, 22 x 46 x 26 cms. Collection Mildura Arts Centre.

Figure 89: bottom, Tony Coleing installing *Happy Christmas* 1978, mixed media, dimensions variable on the lawn outside the Mildura Arts Centre.
Figure 90: Ken Unsworth, site preparation for installation, *Shark* 1978, earth, gravel and slate. Circumference 965 cms, height 47 cms. The slate ‘fins’ had not yet been inserted when this photograph was taken.
In late July, Mildura was dealt a severe blow with the announcement that the VAB, ‘which had contributed $16,000 to the last triennial, had advised that there was no money available’; the headline in the Sunraysia Daily spelled out the reality: ‘Plans for the 1978 Sculpture Triennial could be scrapped.’ McCullough protested that Mildura be recognised as the sculpture centre of Australia and met with the VAB to convince them of the need to financially support the continuance of the triennial. By September 1977, McCullough had secured a conditional commitment of $23,000 from the VAB: $15,000 for administrative costs, $5000 for a proposed visiting overseas artist and $3000 for his European research trip in preparation for the 1978 triennial.

The grant was conditional upon the Mildura Arts Centre and the community being able to raise $8000 for the purchase of works from the triennial. The total funding contributed by the VAB and the Victorian Ministry for the Arts amounted to $37,500. The $12,000 loan put up by the Mildura City Council was necessary in order for the Mildura Arts Centre to qualify for matching funds from the arts bureaucracies. Thus as McCullough pointed out, the loan of $12,000 plus the $8000 required for purchase funds would have to be raised through the Mildura Arts Centre, in effect making it a significant sponsor of the event to the value of $20,000. The final funding for the event totalled $41,500 and was provided by the VAB, Victorian Ministry for the Arts, Queen Elizabeth II Arts Council in New Zealand and the Sidney Myer Foundation. Although successful in gaining funding for the 7th Triennial, the initial refusal by the VAB was no accident and indicated that the Mildura Sculpture Triennials and Mildura Arts Centre’s aspiration to be a national sculpture centre were lesser priorities than the development of metropolitan events such as the Biennale of Sydney and the Adelaide Festival of the Arts, which could certainly claim larger audience participation levels.

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657 McCullough noted as part of his recommendations to MACAC that he be granted leave for the overseas research trip because: ‘The occasional need for overseas professional study and renewed contact is no longer considered unusual for art gallery personnel in Australia. The main problem is the getting of the finance and permission from employers.’ See submission to MACAC, 7 September 1977, Mildura Arts Centre archives, File 1978 Triennial, Mildura.
658 Tom McCullough, ‘The Sculpture Triennial at Mildura Arts Centre: Support and crisis’, 13 November 1979, McCullough archive, PA97/33, Box 29, SLV.
**Selected works and the exhibition**

McCullough’s swansong was the largest yet: 125 artists presented 163 works and for fifty-four per cent of the participants, this was their first showing at Mildura. 1978 also had the largest contingent from New Zealand and discussions circulated on extending the Australasian focus in future. Peter Tyndall spent the full eight weeks, every day, acting as the *Shooting Gallery* attendant at his exhibit; in effect, a de facto artist-in-residence (Figure 85). There was a significant women’s presence, although nowhere near the thirty-one per cent participation rate in 1961. The premise of Mildura as an ‘experimental laboratory’ encouraging a workshop attitude, was enacted in a large area of the Sculpturscape section marked out for spontaneous installations by students and others. This premise was carried further with more exhibiting areas spreading into the Mildura township, occupying vacant buildings, some scheduled for demolition.

Socially and politically informed performance pieces aimed at direct engagement or confrontation with Mildura residents were another larger feature of this triennial, including the Lazlo Toth Art Vandals from Adelaide who attempted to disrupt the opening event. The twelve New Zealand sculptors brought into sharp relief the difference between high selectivity in their case and the art school embracing openness of the Australian selection. As McCullough recalled, ‘cerebral Australians like Peter Tyndall … and some other Australians, such as John Penny and John Davis, [have] written to me mentioning their disappointment that so many Australians’ work at Mildura seemed to lack sufficient intellectual rigour.’ However, New Zealander David Mealing, who created some of the most socially challenging performances, made some brutally honest observations about the condition of contemporary practice and its relation to audience:

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659 ‘Artists gets a verbal blast’, *Sunraysia Daily*, 27 May 1978; Cr Beasy (deputy chairman of the Mildura Art Centre Advisory Council) was quoted as saying: ‘The Shooting Gallery operated by My Tyndale (sic) at the triennial received 10 percent of the special fund purchase.’ Peter Tyndall was awarded $800 from the acquisitions budget of $8000 for his marathon installation/performance work.

660 Tom McCullough, ‘NZ Sculptors in Mildura’, op. cit., p. 3.
It is not so much the public that is alienated from the language and concerns of the artist, as the artist who is desperately alienated from the public. This is the true root of the current crisis in art. It’s a crisis of function: who is art for, whose interest does it serve? The most depressing thing about Mildura is that it shows that a large number of Australian/New Zealand artists … do not feel the need to confront these problems and survive these doubts … That’s how it was at Mildura where art was really eating its own tail … for just outside that space is a world that tells a very different story.661

The three sculptors selected to represent Australia at the Venice Biennale were included. John Davis and Robert Owen exhibited photographs while Unsworth responded to the Sculpturscape area with two earthworks, *Open Cut* and *Shark*, requiring his attendance in Mildura during the set-up week to organise their construction (Figure 90). Elwyn Lynn’s review captures the sense of both works:

*Shark* was a spiral mound of earth with ‘shark’ fins of slate set in the troughs; in the late afternoon they emanated black menace; at noon, these land-sharks, as is their wont, were well-nigh invisible; *Open Cut* was both more subtle and more formidable; with a four-foot deep, circular dam, its bottom coated with cracked, dried mud and penetrated by four tilted slabs of concrete, it caught the sun at all times of the day like a sun-dial conceived by a Stonehenge mason.662

During the final two weeks of the triennial, Klaus Rinke, a German performance artist (recommended to McCullough by the 1977 Documenta director Dr Manfred Shneckenberger) was based in Mildura as a VAB funded, artist-in-residence. His performance, *Manipulations*, was the grand finale in the final weekend of performances and events (Figure 9).663 Rinke’s performance required him to be strapped into a harness, suspended by guy ropes from the auditorium ceiling with ropes attached to his legs and arms that could be manipulated by the audience. His vulnerability to the whims of the audience served as a neat metaphor for McCullough and the Mildura Triennials and the contested relationship between artist and audience.

663 Klaus Rinke also created a work that he donated to the Mildura Arts Centre collection. The untitled work is reproduced in *Exhibition Exposition*.
Acquisitions

With the $8000 raised from entrance fees, fourteen works by twelve artists were purchased for the Mildura Arts Centre collection from the 1978 Triennial. In March 1977, McCullough with MACAC approval purchased thirteen international works from the Biennale of Sydney, valued at $22,000. Added to this were five donated works from the biennale. These works were funded on a dollar-for-dollar grant from the Victorian Ministry for the Arts. By 1978, the Mildura Arts Centre had assembled an impressive and unique collection of contemporary Australian sculpture, and some valuable contemporary international works; in Australia, it constituted a unique survey of the period from the 1960s and 1970s of the upheavals in sculpture and the emergence of new kinds of art practice. The investment of $30,000 between 1977 and 1978 in the Arts Centre’s sculpture collection was significant and provided a poignant backdrop to the escalating tensions surrounding the future of triennials in Mildura.

21st Anniversary RGAV meeting

In February 1978, the RGAV announced that Mildura Arts Centre would host the association’s 21st annual conference on 29 and 30 April, timed to coincide with the 7th Mildura Sculpture Triennial. In 1957, Mildura Art Gallery had been the host for the first meeting of six Victorian regional galleries, under its former guise as the PGAV, instigated by Eric Westbrook, then director of the NGV. There were now sixteen regional galleries in Victoria.

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664 See Sturgeon, Sculpture at Mildura, op. cit., p.105, for a complete list of the purchases.
665 The acquired works from the 2nd Biennale of Sydney were: Robert Arneson (US), Search for significant subject matter; Nigel Hall (UK), Cross; Julian Hawkes (UK), Kami; Tony Ingram (UK), Landscape Fold; Tatsuo Kawaguchi (Japan), Red light and Blue light; Robert Kinmont (US), Lesson No.9 and Artist’s Table; Gloria Kisch (US), Gateway Piece; Carl Plackman (UK), Your voice must be heard/herd; James Pomeroy (US), Fear Elites; Terry Powell (NZ/UK), Untitled; William Wiley (US), Lay Plaza de Ordinairevent. Tabled in ‘Report to the RGAV Annual Meeting 1977 by the Director of Mildura Arts Centre’, Art Acquisitions Appendix. McCullough archive PA 97/33, Box 11, SLV.
666 Mitsuo Kano (Japan), Grapeshots (book): concerning positional ubiquity; Keiji Usami (Japan), Profile; U-Fan Lee (Japan/Korea), no title registered; Tony Coleing (Australia), Bus Stop; Stuart Brisley (UK), Hyde Park Installation. Tabled in ‘Report to the RGAV Annual Meeting 1977’, ibid.
667 By current calculations, $30,000 in 1978 is equivalent to $125,500 in 2008.
As the director of Victoria’s Ministry for the Arts and convenor of the Arts Victoria 78: Craft initiative, Westbrook’s non-attendance at the important 21st RGAV conference (he was listed as a keynote speaker), contributed to rising local doubts about the political and cultural prestige of the triennials to the Mildura community. His close association to the Bolte and Hamer governments and also long history of support for and involvement in the Mildura Arts Centre and its sculpture triennials had conferred McCullough and the triennials with significant cultural legitimacy. His decision not to attend, however inadvertent, would remove a level of professional protection that his association afforded McCullough and the triennials in the local community.

It was a challenging conference with major changes recommended in the association’s constitution, which were symptomatic of the impacts of external pressures and internal conflict upon the whole visual art field. The executive body was expanded to include two gallery director positions, effectively ceding greater financial and management control of regional galleries to the professional directors and further, it was agreed that gallery directors would have voting rights in future general meetings. With Reg Etherington appointed as the government nominee on the executive committee, the irony would not have been lost on McCullough and others, of how this new willingness by the organisation to acknowledge its professional officers and allow them greater autonomy exposed the recent deep conflicts between the Mildura Arts Centre director, his advisory council (MACAC) and Mildura City Council over control of the centre and its programs.

**Audiences and the local response**

The dispute over who was the audience for the triennials and therefore who determined what was ‘appropriately qualified’ to be exhibited was brought to a head by the City Council edict that no ‘nudity, pornography, obscenity of bloodletting’ would be

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668 Westbrook’s commissioning of a report into the feasibility of a major recurrent Victorian arts festival, and Hamer’s obvious interest in the proposal, would have also been causes for concern within MACAC and the Mildura City Council. See ‘Victoria may get arts festival by 1979’, *The Age*, 16 November 1977, p. 2.

tolerated.\textsuperscript{670} Although perceived as a crude, parochial attempt to censor artists, the issue it raised was emblematic of larger metropolitan debates issuing from questions of sustainability raised by the controversial Industries Assistance Commission report.\textsuperscript{671}

Apart from the specific religious censorship issues within a certain section of the Mildura community that contributed to the MACAC edict, it was also a response to mounting indignation on the part of a number of city councillors to past hurts. The artists’ threat to boycott Sculpturscape ’73 and the VAB’s initial refusal to fund the 7\textsuperscript{th} Mildura Sculpture Triennial had increased tensions amongst those who felt that the community’s underwriting of the Mildura Art Centre’s ongoing operations, and the expectation that it would continue to deliver services to a wide regional (and in the case of the triennials, national) area, was not being sufficiently recognised.

However, tensions spilled over within the core sculptor-selectors themselves. Ron Robertson Swann, a supporter and participant since 1970, publicly boycotted the event and called into question the selection process and the education and funding systems that favoured ‘experimental’ art, stating:

These kids [are] coming out of art school thinking [that] making statements about art is the same as making it. They think being more outrageous is to do with being more real. The sort of art I, and Čaro make, they often tag ‘elitist’. But what happens at Mildura is more truly elitist than anything … The more regional you are, the more post-object you become.\textsuperscript{672}

Robertson Swann’s comments, combined with the VAB’s turnaround decision and rumours that many of the original core group of sculptor-selectors were ‘running out of

\textsuperscript{670} Short, ‘Sculpture as an event’, op. cit. Short continued: “The instructions call for ‘less social comment sculpture; more work of design and substance … Since McCullough directed the last Biennal [sic] of Sydney, there has been a fear of radical art as well’. The Sunraysia Daily led with a full-page headline: ‘Art Council to censor exhibits’, 9 March 1978. See Figure 84.

\textsuperscript{671} Tony Thomas, ‘Bringing the arts down to earth: IAC report hits “Coterie culture” subsidies’, The Age, 12 October 1976, p. 6: “[The IAC] substitutes a doctrine of democracy in the arts for the present elitist approach … That great public benefits flow from the … arts appeared to be an unquestioned article of faith …’ The IAC wants … ‘the resources … determined by community preferences not by decisions by some official board or clique with the power to disburse tax funds to its preferred arts and artists …’ On the Australia Council, the IAC says … ‘the domination of the boards of Council by artistic personnel means that, in the main, the interests of artists tend to prevail and these may not coincide with the interests of the community.’

\textsuperscript{672} Ron Robertson Swann quoted in Short, ‘Sculpture as an event’, \textit{National Times}, op.cit.
energy and/or commitment’, indicated that there was no longer universal support within the art world for the Mildura event and that its prestige was under threat.\footnote{David Dolan, ‘Mildura – revisited’, \textit{The Advertiser}, 27 May 1978, p. 20. Full quote: ‘It is suggested that over the last decade the triennials have relied heavily on the support of a core of sculptors who are running out of energy and/or commitment. This theory is linked to the idea that art events such as Mildura’s have a naturally limited lifespan – or organic-cum-cyclical concept, and highly questionable.’ This review was written at the conclusion of the 7\textsuperscript{th} Mildura Sculpture Triennial.} This would have fuelled the doubters’ concerns within the MACAC and the city council.

The issue of audience emerged as a contested arena during McCullough’s discussions with various core sculptors and their colleagues and students when he visited metropolitan centres and art schools during preparation for the triennial. The contest between those established sculptors who advocated from more stringent selection processes and ‘quality control’ versus those who advocated increased participation from recent graduates and students were, however, united within the shared definition of an internal audience, the visual art world itself. The difference between these two positions was one of relative prestige within this autonomous field, a debate that was now possible because of the highly competitive, hierarchical network of institutional positions and opportunities available within the metropolitan centres. However, both positions assumed that the final control rested with the artists who constituted the ‘educated and informed’ audience.

There were other voices, a number within those selected to participate, who considered that the definition of audience should encompass the community of Mildura.\footnote{A number of letters from participating artists such as Bonita Ely, Nicholas Spill and others, reprinted in the post-exhibition catalogue \textit{Exhibition Exposition}, made similar observations about more direct involvement with the local community.} Terry Reid observed that for many of the participants, ‘the particulars of the [Mildura] community seem to be considered more as a physical location than as a social context’.\footnote{Terry Reid, ‘Flying Saucer: unexplained mission’, \textit{Radio Ozone}, Sunnyland Press, Redcliffs, Vic., 1978, n.p.} George Mannix’s response, drawing on his knowledge of the findings of the IAC in relation to performing arts, proposed an innovative interpretation to the report’s
admonition that the arts should ‘educate, innovate and disseminate’, in the hope of encouraging a dialogue between artists and community. Mannix suggested that:

Perhaps we could usefully invert both the problem and the solution. The programme of ‘education, innovation and dissemination’ could be applied to the artist, rather than the public. The artist could well be educated to the needs of the community, their situations, aspirations, preferences and requirements. This might then enable him to innovate in such a way as to better relate to the community as he sees it. This process would depend on the artist’s contact with the community at various levels, away from the rarefied world of art schools and art circles. This would form the process, where the artist would disseminate both his work and himself.  

Mannix’s inverted logic was anathema to the peer selection processes that were the basis of the collaborative relationship between McCullough and his core sculptor-educator advisors. The selection process that underwrote the triennial events since 1970 had come into being during the major expansion of the new tertiary education system between 1967 and 1976. It was during this period of change that many of McCullough’s core advisors had entered this system as young graduate teachers.

Their dispositions towards autonomy reflected the new position of art schools within the rapidly expanding advanced education system. This autonomous disposition was further validated by the Whitlam Government’s commitment to education as a primary support for the development of an informed and educated audience for the arts and its establishment of the Australia Council as a funding and policy setting agency, operating at arms-length from government on the principle of peer review.  

The growing tensions between the triennial participants, the Mildura Arts Centre staff and the Mildura community and City Council reflected the fractiousness within the larger Australian art world and the tertiary education system, with the added frisson of specifically local issues. Many in the Mildura community were great supporters of the triennials, however, the cumulative pressure of national and local issues ensured that by March 1978, certain ‘concerned citizens’ within the community had the ear of the council.

676 George Mannix quoted, ibid.
and particularly had influence with two deeply religious city councillors who were respectively chairman and deputy chairman of the MACAC. As Phil Dadson, one of the regular New Zealand participants understatedly observed: ‘the Centre has a buzz and a better head of steam than most city galleries … the town’s like a country cat hosting city fleas, somewhat scratchy.’ 678

The issue of audience played itself out through the reviews and commentary in the metropolitan press and the local paper. Art reviewers for the major metropolitan newspapers, national weekly editions such as the National Times and magazines such as Quadrant and Art and Australia were all from within the field itself. Many were Mildura regulars and the majority of the reviews were supportive of the expansive 7th Mildura Sculpture Triennial.

The Sunraysia Daily however, chronicled a series of confrontations between prominent councillors and artists and also published several highly critical commentaries. Although attendances had been very good (16,000) the MACAC chairman, Cr Roy Burr in an article claimed that: ‘[although] the artists themselves enjoyed the exhibition and the art world fraternity had classed it as a success … the community of Mildura has demonstrated clearly it is not prepared to accept the bulk of the works exhibited this year.’ 679 At an ordinary council meeting on 11 May, a motion was carried that expressed the council’s disappointment in the quality of the acquisitions made at the triennial. Although the IAC report was not adopted as policy by the Fraser Government, nevertheless, its expressed sentiment that ‘the domination of the boards of Council by artistic personnel means that, in the main, the interests of artists tend to prevail and these may not coincide with the interests of the community’ appeared to have some resonance outside of the autonomous art world, and in Mildura. 680

680 Tony Thomas, ‘Bringing the arts down to earth’, op. cit., p. 6.
Denouement

The May edition of *Quadrant* magazine published two extensive positive reviews of the 1978 Mildura Sculpture Triennial by Sydney art critics Paul McGillick and Elwyn Lynn. The tone of both articles, particularly McGillick’s, was aimed at seeking continued official endorsement for McCullough and the Mildura Triennials. McGillick’s review offered a potted history of the triennials and amounted to a justification of their significance as ‘the only model in Australia for both the art event of the future and the museum of the future’.

Whether conscious or not, there is a particular irony in his observation of Mildura as the model art event and museum for the future. The horse had already bolted as far as the principal funding agencies – the Australia Council and the Victorian Ministry for the Arts – were concerned. The Mildura model had already been transferred to the Biennale of Sydney and would be further adapted in the Australian Sculpture Triennials in Melbourne from 1981 to 1993. The metropolitan centres could argue a better case for supplying an educated and informed audience than the fractious regional town of Mildura.

Part of the VAB funding allocation for the triennial was used to produce a documentary with interviews conducted during the event and a black and white post-event publication entitled *Exhibition Exposition* offering a brief chronology of the months of preparation and set-up entailed in mounting the triennial and included personal evaluations, news clippings and photographs. McCullough had resigned his position before the publication could be distributed. It also contained two images of what appeared to be a couple simulating sex, both wearing t-shirts captioned with, ‘Art in the service of Capitalism’ and ‘Capitalism in the service of Art’ – the ‘capitalist’ woman was on top! This was the excuse the Council was looking for – a direct contravention of their moral edict.

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681 Publication in the journal, *Quadrant*, was a strategic move clearly aimed at the Fraser Government and its appointee as chair of the Australia Council, Professor Geoffrey Blainey, as a counter to unflattering reports of the triennial from Mildura. The magazine had definite liberal conservative leanings. Critic and curator of the Power Institute, Elwyn Lynn, had also been appointed as the magazine’s editor. Blainey was clearly supportive of the government’s increasing audience-demand focus for funding the arts.


683 Although printed before McCullough’s resignation and eventual departure from Mildura, the book was not distributed and remained in Council storage until January 1979 when it was burned.
However, the publication of Peter Tyndall’s sixteen-page letter of detailed refutations of claims made by certain councillors against artists and the triennial probably contributed to their decision to burn it. *Exhibition Exposition* presented certain City Councillors as redneck, philistine bullies. This was the infamous book that was burned by the Mildura City Council in late January 1979 and created a small storm of indignation. Headlines screamed: ‘Nazi book burning’, which elicited a response from one of the councillors:

 Council cannot be accused of acting irrationally … We have been very patient on this matter and it is now time to show strength. Mildura has had enough publicity on scruffy sculpture for a while.\(^{684}\)

For the time being, the fate of future Mildura Sculpture Triennials as far as the MACAC and the Mildura City Council were concerned, would appear to have been determined.

**Conclusion**

The dramatic changes in fortunes of the Mildura Sculpture Triennials and McCullough between 1975 and 1978 were as much a response to external political and economic pressures caused by changing government policies and the autonomous field’s own internal responses to these pressures. In a sense, the more scarce the funding support became (both in art and education), the more rigorous the selection criteria, which of course meant an increased rate of exclusion and a more clearly defined and differentiated hierarchical order of preferences.

The demise of the Mildura Sculpture Triennials as a principal national event was signalled by the successful transfer of its model to the Biennale of Sydney and its

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\(^{684}\) George Tilley, ‘Council burns Tom’s work of art’ undated *Sunraysia Daily* news clipping in McCullough archive, PA 97/33 Box 1, SLV. In 1978, the metropolitan city councils of both Melbourne and Sydney were not behaving much better than their Mildura counterparts in terms of their responses to two important public sculpture commissions in major destination locations: Civic Square in Melbourne and Martin Place in Sydney. Interestingly, the list of selected sculptors in both instances was very similar, with strong links to the Mildura Sculpture Triennials. Ron Robertson Swann won the Melbourne competition with his bright yellow painted steel work, *Vault*. There was a vociferous campaign led by certain city councillors in the popular press. The work was quickly nicknamed *The Yellow Peril*. In Sydney, Bert Flugelman’s mirror-polished, stacked, steel cubes entitled *Pyramid Tower* was dubbed the *Silver Shish Kebab*, with a similar ruckus caused by disaffected city councillors in the local press.
organising committee, based in Sydney and centred on the Australia Council, AGNSW and Transfield Pty Ltd. Hence, the fact that the VAB decided in July 1977, six months after the successful conclusion of the Biennale of Sydney, not to fund the Mildura Sculpture Triennial, and that this decision was made at the same time that Eric Westbrook and the Victorian Ministry for the Arts funded a feasibility study for a proposed major Melbourne arts festival (with the intention of it commencing in 1979), was not incidental. In the reordering of priorities caused by a scarcity of funds, increased government scrutiny and changing policies, the Mildura Sculpture Triennials were displaced in favour of a concentration of resources and competition between the major metropolitan centres of Sydney and Melbourne.

Even though the VAB reversed its original decision and did fund the 7th Mildura Sculpture Triennial, the transfer of the Mildura model to Sydney, a model that had been financially and culturally nurtured and supported by the Melbourne political and cultural establishment particularly the NGV, severed the protective connection of that power base from McCullough and the Sculpture Triennials. Even before the particular disputes with conservative elements within the Mildura City Council and Mildura community, the significance of Mildura Arts Centre and its sculpture triennials had shifted down several registers in relation to their previous esteemed national position within the increasingly competitive visual arts field.

For McCullough, the fall from grace from the director of Australia’s major international biennial event in 1976, with the backing of the Australia Council, Department of Foreign Affairs, AGNSW and Transfield Pty Ltd, to his ignominious forced resignation by a cohort of conservative, local government councillors in 1978 was rapid and devastating. It was emblematic of larger issues reflected in the national press, in George Mannix’s writings and in the very unpopular report by the Industries Assistance Commission of the contested definition of ‘audience’; an ‘elite’ of the educated and informed or, the larger tax-paying public. McCullough’s professional habitus as an arts administrator, with dispositions that were oriented towards the autonomy of artists and art practices, was clearly unsuited to the new reordered reality of his position as a regional arts centre.
director, in relation to the increasingly dominant position of metropolitan institutions and agents within the visual arts field.

Davis on the other hand was exemplary of the trajectory that determined one’s rise in status within the new definition of professional artist and of the opportunities available within this new field, through the auspices of VAB. The 1975 Mildura Sculpture Triennial for him was an opportunity to leverage support for improved status in the metropolitan centres. The strength of his contacts made through Mildura – McCullough, McCaughey, Brook and Sheridan – ensured his participation in significant events and programs in 1976. In essence, the contacts and projects that emanated from his participation in the 1975 Mildura Sculpture Triennial essentially created the necessity for him to ‘graduate’ from the nurturing network that was Mildura for McCullough’s core advisors.

Importantly, it was the funded, six-month residency at Monash University with time alone to work on his own projects that was to prove so valuable. His time at Hattah Lakes, where he produced several installations that informed his work Nomad, shown at the Biennale of Sydney, bore the inspiration of childhood memories of that beloved place and also marked the significance of all his attendances at the Mildura sculpture events, particularly the first in 1961, which was the inspiration for him to conceive of the possibility of becoming a professional sculptor. What was remarkable was the rapidity of the transfer of these new works from the relative obscurity of Hattah Lakes and his studio to major exhibitions and events in Sydney, Melbourne, Venice and New Delhi. More significantly, it was the selection of these ephemeral sticks and stones and their placement within the most prestigious of institutional environments that marked a major shift in the institutional values accorded to sculpture. However, on his return to Australia from Venice, he recognised that the control of selection criteria that had remained firmly within the sculptors’ control in Mildura and with McCullough and the

685 Although Davis’s Installation with sticks on the ground at Hattah Lakes, May 1976, predated Richard Long’s Brokenwood Circle installation at the NGV in 1977, Long’s work certainly added legitimacy to the presence of ephemeral works as installations within the NGV. In a sense Long’s work could be seen to have laid the groundwork for such works being accepted within the major consecrating institution.
2nd Biennale of Sydney had shifted; that period of control had come to an end and a new set of competing positions was in the ascendance.