Chapter Four

The Heroic Years of Mildura


To change the nature of art one must first change its institutions.⁹⁵

Introduction

The previous two chapters identified the necessary preconditions for the development of an autonomous field of artistic production in Australia. Specifically, with regard to sculpture in Australia, the 1967 Mildura Sculpture Prize represented a transition period in which new selection criteria with preferences for ‘new art’ emerged, predicated on the use of industrial materials and prefabricated techniques, and the selection of younger artists, many of whom were aligned to the new and expanding education sector. Definitions of ‘professional’ became contested; and the issue of professional development and tests to establish professional status became increasingly important to representative membership organisations such as AGAA (Art Galleries Association of Australia) and ASEA (Australian Society of Education through Art).

This chapter covers two key events: the Mildura Sculpture Triennial of 1970 and Sculpturscape 1973. The beginning of the new decade at Mildura heralded the event’s official format change from prize to invitational triennials. In fact, both Mildura triennial events became significant litmus tests for emerging policy support for experimental visual art within the federal government’s restructured Australian Council for the Arts. Three case-studies – Mildura Arts Centre and its triennial sculpture events, the director

⁹⁵ Mike Parr quoting Donald Brook, in Noel Sheridan (ed.), Noel Sheridan: On Reflection, op. cit., p. 112.
Tom McCullough and sculptor John Davis – will address the framework underpinning the development of an autonomous field of artistic production that becomes evident in the selection and presentation of the triennial events.

Christo’s participatory project of wrapping the coastline of Little Bay, Sydney, in 1969 was a timely and very public exemplar of Donald Brook’s assertion that ‘To change the nature of art one must first change its institutions.’ The realisation of this art project – its scale, ephemerality and spectacular location, the co-ordination of hundreds of volunteer assistants, mostly art and architecture students – transformed the understanding of what an artist and art could be. It transformed the work and the public experience of it into an event, to be experienced over time; the condition of ‘theatricality’ that Michael Fried had warned of in his controversial Artforum article ‘Art and objecthood’ in 1967.296 It also introduced the concept of photographic documentation as a work of art in itself.297

The years 1970 to 1973 were a period of accelerated change within Australia’s broader political and cultural domain. Important signposts included the election of the first federal Labor government in twenty-three years in December 1972, the elevation of the arts to the prime minister’s portfolio responsibilities and the announcement of a reconfigured Australian Council for the Arts with an enormously expanded budget and policy development responsibilities. The creation of the first state arts department, Arts Victoria, under the premier’s portfolio of responsibilities in 1973, with Eric Westbrook (former director of the NGV) as its executive director, was also a significant landmark in raising the political status and position of the arts in Victoria. Prime minister Whitlam’s use of an image of Blue Poles for his 1973 Christmas card was a demonstrably public, even defiant, proclamation of the changed status of the arts in relation to the political field of power, the very field whose economic and symbolic support made the development of an

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296 Fried, ‘Art and objecthood’, op. cit., pp. 21–2: ‘[T]he concepts of quality and value – and to the extent that they are central to art, the concept of art itself – are meaningful, or wholly meaningful, only within the individual arts. What lies between the arts is theater … faced with the need to defeat theater, it is above all to the condition of painting and sculpture … that the other contemporary modernist arts, most notably poetry and music, aspire.’

297 Framed photographic collages and small wrapped objects were shown at the Central Street Gallery in Sydney following the installation.
autonomous, alternative field of contemporary artistic practice possible in Australia. State
governments’ commitment to funding arts infrastructure saw the reopening of the
AGNSW in 1972 with modern extensions and the opening of the internationally

What became evident was a tension that manifested between an uncomprehending public,
sometimes referred to as 'philistine' and a contemporary art world increasingly
characterised as 'elite'. As Bourdieu observed, ‘the progress of the field … towards
autonomy is marked by … the disjunction between [the field’s] own principles of
evaluation and those [of] the general public.’ This tension between the public of
taxpayers and an increasingly separate world of art experts who competed for the right to
determine the allocation of money and prestige within that world was itself evidence of
the existence of an autonomous field.

However, by 1974 the impact of the global oil crisis upon Australia was already evident
in rapidly rising inflation and unemployment. It brought to an abrupt end 30 years of
post-war expansion. For the cultural and educational sectors, the recession of 1975
onwards would occur just as many of the expansionary policies and infrastructure
commitments, previously implemented, were reaching their full potential. It is against
this background – the final years of the post-war boom from 1970 to 1974 – that the
unfolding events in this chapter must be read.

The growing autonomy that Bourdieu refers to was evident in the importance given to the
redefinition of the professional roles of the Mildura Sculpture Triennial, McCullough, as
director, and Davis, as participant sculptor and teacher. The significance of definition and
who controls the process of definition was only important within the logic of an emerging
field of autonomous activity. The Mildura events of 1970 and 1973 and the developments
in McCullough’s career and Davis’s work and his teaching career reveal the influence of
these developments and their associated tensions.

4th Mildura Sculpture Triennial 1970

The sculpture prizes that had posed a threat to the 1967 Mildura Prize event were in abeyance; the Alcorso-Sekers scholarship prize had been rescinded and transformed into the Kaldor Art Projects (the first being Christo’s *Wrapped Coast* in November 1969) and the Transfield Prize (which ceased in 1971) would in 1973 transform itself into the Biennale of Sydney. Other sculpture prizes simply disappeared after a few years. However, the decline in the importance and prevalence of prizes was indicative of a more profound shift in the very definition of what constituted art, how it was taught, transmitted, critiqued, theorised, exhibited and supported.

Selection Process

The change in the institution of the Mildura Sculpture event from an open prize, in which the works were then pre-selected by state gallery staff, to an invitational triennial, based upon recommendations from a trusted list of McCullough’s professional advisors – state gallery officers, artists, teachers and private gallery directors – with the invitations issued directly by McCullough to the artists was emblematic of the radical rupture that this format change represented. The implicit pre-selection in this process is easily overlooked: one had already to be part of a network linked to McCullough’s professional advisors in order to be even considered for recommendation.

The redefinition of the Mildura Sculpture Triennial aimed to reposition the Mildura Arts Centre and the sculpture event in a unique national role. This was an audacious move for a regional arts centre. The invitational process brought the participants into direct contact with McCullough and the Arts Centre, rather than dealing through intermediaries, thus establishing new networks and strengthening existing ones. The triennial moved from being a passive mirror and recipient of what had been happening in the previous three years to becoming a more generative agent. The directing of all funds towards

\[\text{One of the other major metropolitan competitors was the Comalco Invitation Award for Sculpture in Aluminium, launched in 1967. It ceased in 1972.}\]
acquisitions rather than prizes ensured a greater recognition of the Mildura Arts Centre in developing Australia’s leading contemporary sculpture collection.\textsuperscript{300}

Some of McCullough’s key advisors were younger curators or sculptor-teachers rather than directors and deputy directors of state institutions. Some were also art reviewers for magazines and metropolitan daily papers, including Elwyn Dennis, curator of Sculpture at the NGV, Daniel Thomas, AGNSW curator and Donald Brook, who had recently been appointed as a senior lecturer in Sculpture and Art Theory at the newly opened Power Institute of Fine Art at the University of Sydney. The selected participants were decidedly younger than in previous years and there was a token international appearance with a Christo small wrapped parcel and photograph of the wrapped coast (lent by Central Street Gallery) and a Richard Stankiewicz work which had been made at the Transfield foundries during a visit to Australia (lent by Watters Gallery). It was evident that McCullough was now in contact with some of the alternative galleries where many younger artists were working in experimental formats and challenging traditional concepts of medium. The shift from state gallery pre-selection process to McCullough’s advisors created a further concentration of influence in those metropolitan centres in Australia with emerging, professionally linked education and cultural sectors: Adelaide, Sydney, Melbourne and across the Tasman in Auckland. Margaret Plant observed that this selection process was ‘insufficiently pluralistic. Older sculptors look distinctly edged out.’\textsuperscript{301} Clearly, a new set of selection criteria was in operation and the pre-selection process was itself the subject of this emerging autonomous field.

In his catalogue introduction, McCullough’s comment that ‘some sculptors produce works as virtually non-saleable experiments with a limited life expectancy’, revealed his awareness of a redefinition of sculptural practice resulting in works that were

\textsuperscript{300} Tom McCullough also noted that the Mildura Arts Centre developed a separate purchase fund for sculpture of $1000 per annum, which came into operation after the triennial, email to the author, 26 March 2008.

\textsuperscript{301} Margaret Plant, ‘Sculpture carnival’, \textit{The Australian}, 14 March 1970.
intentionally autonomous of the existing art market.\textsuperscript{302} The fact that works like these might be considered appropriate for patronage from an alternative source to the commercial market was raised in agenda papers of the CAAB of the Australian Council for the Arts, held on 9 March 1970, just after the openings of the sculpture triennial and the Adelaide Festival noted that the Board ‘has recently been concerned with moving into new areas of activity and encouraging their development’.\textsuperscript{303} However, more significantly in terms of the emergence of a shift in sculptural dispositions to those that favoured the elision of ‘professional’ with ‘experimental’ at the Mildura Sculpture Triennial, the Board noted the limited appeal of sculpture and the ‘avant-garde’ to the public.\textsuperscript{304} The Mildura Sculpture Triennial of 1970 with its new invitational format needs to be viewed against this background of emerging government intervention into the cultural and education sectors.

**The launch, the judges and the acquisitions**

In a new twist, competition pressure emanated from events such as the recurrent Adelaide Festival (which would celebrate its first decade in 1970) and the one-off *Wrapped Coast* spectacle in November 1969 (Figure 29). The need for the triennial Mildura event to be more than just an exhibition of sculpture, that its relevance depended on spectacle and even some notoriety in order to draw a significant response from participants and audience, was evident in many of the young artists selected and the works presented. This sense was picked up in the reviews. McCullough noted in his catalogue introduction: ‘Sculptures are noticeably larger in scale this year and most invitees have displayed the

\textsuperscript{304} A Visual and Plastic Arts Board agenda paper noted: ‘Until recently the attitude to the encouragement of artists has been that the market itself has operated as the most satisfactory supporter of the artists of ability, and that while it continued to function adequately in this way it was undesirable to interfere with the mechanism by introducing other forms of assistance to artists. However, it now appears that while this may be true with regard to painters, it may not have the same validity when applied to certain other branches of the visual arts such as sculpture and possibly to the truly “avant-garde” artists of any generation whose work rarely has much initial appeal except perhaps to a limited public.’ ‘Visual and Plastic Arts Board, 9 March Agenda Papers [circa 1970]’, op. cit., quoted on p. 3 of the Agenda Papers.
adventurous brilliance for which they were selected. Reviewers referred to the
carnival atmosphere, the ‘fun fair giddiness’ as well as the energy and liveliness of the
event and the range of works on display. The timing of the opening of the 1970
Mildura Sculpture Triennial, one week prior to the opening of the 6th Adelaide Festival
with the triennial open throughout the duration of the festival, indicated the response of
the MACAC to the perceived dominance of what had become Australia’s major
international arts festival.

The attendees at the opening cocktail party – three-quarters of the participant sculptors,
the high number of gallery directors and curators as well as commercial dealer
representatives and art critics – confirmed that the Mildura sculpture events, by 1970,
could claim the title as the premier, recurrent visual arts event in Australia. In network
terms, the 4th Mildura Sculpture Triennial established the regional arts centre of Mildura
as a dominant node in a nascent national visual arts network.

The judging panel for the 1970 Sculpture Triennial comprised Melbourne sculptor
Lenton Parr, Daniel Thomas and McCullough. Importantly, both Parr and Thomas were
well known to many artists, particularly younger ones, and familiar with the rapid
changes in the art scene in their respective cities. In an article entitled ‘Australian

307 McCullough’s handwritten list (of those who had responded affirmatively) for the official cocktail party
opening included the following: 45 sculptors, 40 Melbourne gallery society ladies, 12 art critics, 12
representatives of the Victorian Public Galleries Group, 7 representatives from the state galleries, 20
dealers, 15 sponsors’ representatives, 9 Mildura City Councillors, 13 representatives of the MACAC, 21
representatives from Wentworth and Mildura Shire Councils and 4 state and federal government
representatives. There were also 6 members from the Chaffey family and one representative from BP
Australia (the primary sponsor in 1967), Mildura Arts Centre archives, 4th Mildura Sculpture Triennial
1970 File.
308 The high level support by the NGV of the Mildura Arts Centre and its triennial sculpture event
represented an important transfer of institutional prestige from Australia’s pre-eminent gallery (recognised
for its recent active championing of contemporary art) to contemporary Australian sculpture, Mildura Arts
Centre and its director. The attendance of the director, Eric Westbrook, the recently appointed curator of
Sculpture (the first curatorial position for sculpture in an Australian gallery), Elwyn Dennis and other
gallery staff members along with the invitation to the NGV Trustee Col. Aubrey Gibson to launch the event
and, the new director of the National Gallery School, sculptor Lenton Parr, as one of the judges, is
testament to this assertion.
309 Daniel Thomas said that he always attended the biennial Adelaide Festival and was keen to see what
was happening in The Fringe events, interview with the author, 31 July 2006.
sculpture in the 1960s’, sculptor-critic Noel Hutchison, drawing directly from his experience of the Mildura Triennial, noted: ‘What was of great importance was that Parr had the intelligence to gather a staff that was at least as innovatory – if not more so – as himself. By 1970 the list of excellent young sculptors with ideas coming out of a number of Victorian colleges was impressive.’

Parr’s appointment as principal of the National Gallery School at the NGV was a major symbolic victory for those pushing for professional accreditation and increased status for artists, particularly sculptors, within the new tertiary system in Victoria. Read against this struggle for control between an old and a new regime in the burgeoning tertiary educational sector, Parr’s appointment as a judge, the first principal of an art school to be asked to decide on appropriate acquisitions for the Mildura collection, along with his co-judge curator Daniel Thomas, was a significant example of the circularity of the logic of ‘a closed field of competition for cultural legitimacy’.

Both judges had also been active in recommending sculptors for invitation.

The judges had an acquisitions budget of $4000 and six works were purchased: Christo Javacheff, *Photograph of Wrapped Coast*, 1969; Noel Hutchison, *Thrust III, Here and There*, 1970; Nigel Lendon, *Untitled Systemic Structure 69-2*, 1969; Ken Reinhard, *Horizontal Hanging Picture*, 1967; Michael Young, *90 Degree Progression*, 1969 and Ron Robertson Swann, *Beethoven*, 1969 (Figure 36). The purchase of the photographic documentation of *Wrapped Coast* was an adventurous acquisition, given the otherwise

310 Hutchison, ‘Australian Sculpture in the 1960s’, op. cit., p. 9. In 1969, Parr was appointed with the responsibility of securing the accreditation of the National Gallery art school as a tertiary college under the VIC directives and as part of the overall development plan of the Victorian cultural centre, of which the new NGV building and the art school were a part. Parr’s appointment to this position was an important symbolic victory for sculpture in Victoria, as the National Gallery School was one of the leading Australian art academies where painting predominated. It was not a technical school under the control of the Department of Education. However, it would have to undergo significant transition and change before it could be accredited as a college under the new parallel tertiary regime and retain its status as the most prestigious art school in Melbourne. This situation presented a direct challenge to the status of the sculpture department at RMIT, then considered the most important, professional sculpture training program in Melbourne.

strong showing of object-based work acquired.\textsuperscript{312} The principal financial sponsors were the Mildura branch of the New Zealand Victoria Insurance Group, the Mildura Chamber of Commerce and the NGV trustee and collector Col. Aubrey Gibson.\textsuperscript{313}

The judging panel represented the necessary elision, for an emerging autonomous field, between the institutions of reproduction and certification (the new art training regime and the emerging university art history and theory departments), the exhibiting or validating institution (Mildura) and the institutions of consecration (curator and critic). The evaluative criteria applied in the invitation process and to the judging of acquisitions was ‘accorded by a peer group of privileged clients and competitors’ whose roles were to ‘recognise, in the double sense of identifying and consecrating, the legitimate members of the profession’.\textsuperscript{314} The six sculptors whose works were selected for acquisition were young, their works represented a range of current styles and, apart from Christo, ranged from virtually unknown to those who had exhibited in \textit{The Field} exhibition or who had recently won one of the prestigious national sculpture awards.\textsuperscript{315} The five Australian sculptors were also recent art school or university graduates and in some cases lecturers.

\textsuperscript{312} Documentation as artwork was still a very new concept in Australian art institutions and proposed acquisitions were usually met with considerable resistance. Apart from Elwyn Lynn’s acquisition of a photograph of \textit{Wrapped Coast} in 1969 for the JW Power Bequest (Power Institute, University of Sydney), this was probably one of the first acquisitions of documentation by a public gallery in Australia, a bold move for a regional collection.

\textsuperscript{313} Col. Aubrey Gibson was a prominent ‘patron of the arts’ and part of the Melbourne cultural power base linked closely to the state and federal liberal governments. Apart from his NGV trusteeship, which began with the appointment of Eric Westbrook as director in 1956, he was a founding member of the Australian Elizabethan Theatre Trust (AETT) and in 1970, its president. As his biography states: ‘This commitment entailed membership of the boards of the Australian Opera, the Australian Ballet and the Australian Council for the Arts’. Australian Dictionary of Biography, \texttt{http://www.adb.online}, viewed 8 November 2006. Gibson was in a position to convey the concerns of sculptors and their supporters, that there was a role for government support of experimental work that had no market, to the Australian Council for the arts, particularly its chairman, H.C. Coombs.

\textsuperscript{314} Bourdieu, \textit{The Field of Cultural Production}, op. cit., pp. 115, 251.

\textsuperscript{315} The six acquisitions were: Christo (aged 35 yrs), \textit{Photograph of Wrapped Coast}; Noel Hutchison (aged 30 yrs, post-graduate research student and art critic, Power Institute of Fine Arts, University of Sydney), \textit{Thrust III ‘here and There’}; Nigel Lendon (aged 26 yrs, recent sculpture graduate from South Australian School of Art, exhibited in \textit{The Field}), \textit{Untitled Systemic Structure 69-2}; Ron Robertson Swann (aged 29 yrs, recent graduate and sculpture lecturer at St Martins School of Art, London and since 1969 lecturer at National Art School, exhibited in \textit{The Field}, winner of the 1969 Comalco Invitational Sculpture Award), \textit{Beethoven}; Michael Young (aged 25 yrs, recent graduate Ballarat School of Mines and assistant exhibitions officer at NGV 1968–69, including installation of \textit{The Field}, winner of the 1968 Alcorso-Sekers and Flotta Lauro Prizes), \textit{90 Degree Progression}; Ken Reinhard (aged 34 yrs, recent graduate UNSW School of Industrial Design, exhibited in \textit{The Field}), \textit{Horizontal Hanging Picture}. 

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The impact of *The Field* in consecrating an institutionalised avant-garde was evident in the invitation to participate in the Mildura Sculpture Triennial and in the acquisitions for the Mildura Arts Centre collection.

**Participants**

Of the sixty-one invited artist participants, almost fifty per cent were under thirty years of age, with the youngest at twenty being Aleks Danko who was still completing his studies in sculpture at the SASA. The number of New Zealand participants rose to nine in 1970. Although the total number of participants was lower than in 1967, there was a total of 123 entries, the most so far in any of the events. Women’s participation dropped to its lowest point at ten per cent, (starting from a high thirty-one per cent in 1961), and would persist at these low levels throughout the 1973 and 1975 events, and only rising to seventeen per cent by 1978 as a result of pressure from women’s art groups.

The rapid expansion in institutional support for sculpture, particularly in education, would have a profound effect on the definition of sculpture itself. Noel Hutchison observed that at the beginning of the 1960s, in both Sydney and Melbourne, sculptors and the art schools where sculpture was taught were similarly under-recognised and under-resourced. However, by the end of 1969, the situation between the two states was radically different. The ‘revitalisation of art education in Victoria’ as undertaken by the VIC compared with the slow process by the Department of Education in NSW was the key. In Melbourne, sculpture was taught at several technical colleges and institutes as

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316 According to Graeme Sturgeon, ‘sixty-two percent were showing at Mildura for the first time … consistent with McCullough’s aim to revitalise the exhibition … [which provided] exposure to a dozen unknown sculptors who have since made substantial contributions to the growth and maturation of Australian sculpture’. He listed the sculptors as follows: Tony Bishop, Peter Cole, Tony Coleing, Aleksander Danko, Noel Hutchison, Les Kossatz, Kevin Mortensen, Clive Murray-White, Ti Parks, Ken Reinhard, Ron Robertson-Swann and Michael Young. See Sturgeon, *Sculpture at Mildura*, op. cit., p. 41.

317 It is interesting to note that the drop in women’s participation coincided with the increased importance and role of sculptor-teachers as selectors at the Mildura Triennials. Employment in the expanding colleges of advanced education art schools, particularly in Melbourne, favoured men.

318 By 1969, under the NSW Higher Education Act an Advanced Education Board and Higher Education Authority was established and the state government set up a committee of inquiry into art and design education. In 1970, the Gleeson Report recommended the establishment of ‘a corporate college of advanced education … for the purpose of providing tertiary education for persons preparing for
well as the National Gallery School at the NGV, from 1969. In Sydney, sculpture at the NAS was in a depressed state. In NSW, as Hutchison noted: ‘The necessity for a revolution in the entire theoretical and practical structure of art education has not been accepted.’ Adelaide had also witnessed progress in the development and expansion of SASA during the sixties decade, a development attributed by Hutchison to the stimulus provided by the biennial Adelaide Arts Festival and the establishment of a second university, Flinders, and Bedford Teachers College.

The invited participants for the 1970 Mildura triennial reveal a metropolitan focus: Sydney, Melbourne, Adelaide and Auckland. These were the centres of concentrated cultural and educational expansion during this period. What is most distinct is the high proportion of participants linked to educational establishments. Sculptor-teachers and recent graduates from five of Melbourne’s main art schools attended. The institutions represented included the National Gallery School, RMIT, Prahran Technical College, Caulfield Institute of Technology and the specialist teachers college, Melbourne State College. All the participants from South Australia were from SASA, whether current lecturers, recent graduates or current students. The predominance of participants linked to the education system confirmed what was by now accepted as common knowledge, as Elwyn Dennis observed in an article on Lenton Parr: ‘It is both constructive and valid that artists today accept the educational system as the appropriate substitute for the patron.’ As patronage for sculpture was very limited, this statement is significant in confirming that the principal economic basis, particularly for sculptors, was the expanding, autonomous tertiary education system.

http://www.usyd.edu.au/sca/about/welcome/sydney_college_arts.shtml, viewed 10 September 2008. By 1975, a School of Art was established within the Alexander Mackie CAE and in 1976 the Sydney College of Arts was set up. Accordingly, ‘with the creation of the Colleges of Advanced Education, the [National Art School] school was effectively broken up with Fine Art merging with other institutions to become Alexander Mackie School of Art, and eventually the College of Fine Art at the University of New South Wales. Design became the foundation school of what was to become the Sydney College of the Arts.’


The recommendations from Sydney, primarily made by Daniel Thomas and to a lesser extent, Donald Brook, both regular art critics for the major daily newspapers and a host of magazines, were less institutionally grouped. Daniel Thomas drew his recommendations from his rounds of the commercial galleries and the CAS Young Contemporaries exhibitions. In keeping with the triennial event needing to align itself more with a ‘festival’ experience, to be more than just a static, sculpture exhibition and to provide a challenge to established definitions of sculpture, Thomas recommended a number of artists who made inflatable installations, as well as potters and painters who were making the transition to sculpture. However, the contested theoretical ground between Ron Robertson Swann, a supporter of Caro and Greenberg who now taught sculpture at the NAS, and Donald Brook, at the Power Institute, identified two distinct, competing positions in Sydney.

Many of the participants camped either in a small building at the back of the gallery or at the Mildura Apex caravan park. As Noel Hutchison described it, ‘we met for the first time as a core group’. This core was made up of particular city groupings that would become important in the development of future triennials. From Adelaide, Tony Bishop, Bill Clements, Max Lyle and Bill Gregory, all teaching at SASA, while Sydney consisted of two camps loosely gathered around two institutions: the NAS (with Ron Robertson Swan, recently returned from almost a decade in the UK) and the University of Sydney, incorporating The Power Institute of Fine Arts (Noel Hutchison and Donald Brook) and the Sydney University Art Workshops, colloquially known at the Tin Sheds (with Bert Flugelman). The key New Zealand member was Jim Allen, who on return from his

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321 Noel Hutchison, interview with author, 25 June 2007. Friendships were formed, exhibition venues and gallery recommendations made. Hutchison purchased Aleks Danko’s Anxiety Switch, and when Danko first went to Sydney he stayed with Hutchison and was introduced to Frank Watters of Watters Gallery, who would become his representative gallery for many years. In 1971, Danko along with Nigel Lendon, Ti Parks, Tony Coleing and Tony Bishop, all of whom had participated in the 1970 Mildura Sculpture Triennial, were included in Harald Szeeman’s exhibition, I want to leave a nice well done child here, the 2nd Kaldor Art Project, held at the Bonython Art Galleries in Sydney and at the NGV. This exhibition of 22 young Australian artists also included John Armstrong, Ross Grounds and Alex Tzannes, who would be invited to exhibit in the 1973 Mildura Sculpturescape.
sabbatical year in 1968 instituted important innovations at Elam Art School, part of the University of Auckland.\textsuperscript{322}

Melbourne, which had by far the largest representation at the 1970 Triennial, included only two members of the original Centre 5 group, Inge King and Lenton Parr.\textsuperscript{323} The new Melbourne core was based around the bayside suburb of Hampton and included John Davis, Clive Murray-White, Ti Parks, Ken Scarlett (and could be extended to include Lenton Parr, who lived at Sandringham and Marc Clark at Beaumaris, both nearby bayside locales).\textsuperscript{324} Apart from Ti Parks, all were teaching in various technical schools and colleges.

Donald Brook brought a busload of his first year art history students with tutors Terry Smith and Rosemary Brooks. They camped for a week, conducted tutorials and held discussions with sculptors. Brook was keen to encourage discussion about ‘post-object art’ following his 1969 public lecture, ‘Flight from the object’. By 1970 the Mildura Sculpture Triennial had become a productive discursive space – apart from the campfire debates and discussion, and student essays, Hutchison's article in two parts, ‘Australian sculpture in the 1960s’, drew extensively on information exchanged at the triennial and was published in Terry Smith’s and Paul McGillick’s new art publication, \textit{Other Voices}.

\textsuperscript{322} Jim Allen, like Lenton Parr in Melbourne, was an important educator and practitioner in NZ; his influence would become more significant with the 1973 and 1975 Mildura Triennials. In 1976, while completing a year-long residency at the EAF in Adelaide he was offered, and accepted, the position of founding head of Sydney College of the Arts in 1977. Allen taught at the Elam School of Fine Arts at the University of Auckland from 1960 to 1976. 1968 was something of a turning point for him and his practice. He took a sabbatical sojourn in Europe, the UK and US and on his return was promoted to associate professor and head of Sculpture at Elam School. Auckland was an important centre for contemporary art in NZ at this time. The combination of energetic directors at the Auckland City Gallery, Paul Beadle, a sculptor, as professor of Fine Arts at the University of Auckland and Jim Allen as head of Sculpture, boded well for NZ experimental art practice and also for Mildura as a recipient of this NZ energy and connection.

\textsuperscript{323} There were 24 sculptors from Melbourne compared with 16 from NSW, ten from SA, nine from NZ and two from overseas.

\textsuperscript{324} Kevin Mortensen, although not Hampton based, was linked to this group through his association with Davis as they both trained together at RMIT and with Clive Murray-White and the important group exhibition of emerging young Melbourne sculptors (curated by Murray-White) \textit{24 Point Plug Show} at The Argus Gallery in May 1968. Patrick McCaughey nicknamed this group, which also included artists Fred Cress and Alun Leach Jones, as the Bayside or ‘Hampton Mafia’.
Elwyn Dennis and the editor of *Art and Australia*, Mervyn Horton, proposed the publication of a book on present day Australian sculpture.\(^{325}\)

The competition amongst the younger Melbourne sculptor-teachers, the grouping together of like-minded artists at particular colleges, their gatherings at new alternative exhibiting galleries such as the Argus Gallery, Pinacotheca and Tolarno, and their pursuit of solo exhibitions, created a highly pressurised and competitive environment – a microcosm of a nascent group identity that would emerge at the Mildura event in 1970. Unique in the Melbourne context was the sheer number of competing sculpture departments and the increased employment opportunities for sculptors as teachers. In a sense the level of competitive pressure amongst Melbourne sculptors, particularly those with teaching positions, encouraged the development of a shared professional identity. The complex dialectic in the struggle for control of the selection process between McCullough and what would become his ‘core’ group of sculpture-teacher supporters would become a hallmark for future triennials from 1973 to 1978.

**Selected artists and works**

Several works were indicative of the change in approach to the traditional concept of sculpture as a discrete object. Although not the first examples of installations in Australia, *New Zealand Environment No. 5* by Jim Allen and Tony Coleing’s *Spring Construction*, both in the gallery space, exemplified the participatory and multi-sensory aspects of this new practice.

*New Zealand Environment No. 5* was a resolved and inspirational work, indicative of the temporal and spatial shifts within contemporary sculptural investigations (Figure 39). The installation was first exhibited in Auckland in 1969 as part of a series of five environmental installations called *Small Worlds* and, on its return from Mildura, was

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\(^{325}\) Both projects were short-lived. *Other Voices* ceased publication after only three issues and the proposed book did not eventuate. Elwyn Dennis did start a series of files on Australian sculptors while he was working the NGV, which were later transferred to Graeme Sturgeon when he decided to undertake a major book project on the development of Australian sculpture since 1788. The files are located in the Graeme Sturgeon Archives at the NGV Research Library.

Figure 37: bottom left, Les Kossatz, *Spent Heap/Segment* 1970, mild steel, dimensions variable.
Figure 38: top left, Tony Coleing, *Wind Construction* 1970, painted steel, 122 metres (h).

Figure 39: bottom, Jim Allen, *NZ Environment # 5* 1969, scrim, steel tube, greasy wool, saw dust, tow underfelt, nylon string, barbed wire, neon tube (green), 183 x 183 x 549 cms.
acquired by the Govett-Brewster Art Gallery in September 1970.\textsuperscript{326} New Zealand Environment No. 5 was a radical departure from the work Allen submitted for the 1967 Mildura Sculpture Prize which was acquired for the collection through funds provided by BP Australia Ltd.\textsuperscript{327} A participatory and multi-sensory environment – smell as well as texture and the visual and spatial senses were as much a part of the work – Allen created a ‘non-indigenous, European’ New Zealand environment using greasy wool, pine wood chips, hessian sacking and lurid green neon lighting.\textsuperscript{328}

The year 1970 was Tony Coleing’s first participation in Mildura and he presented two very different kinds of constructions: Spring Construction located in the gallery space and Wind Construction, the largest and most imposing work at the Sculpture Prize, located at the entrance to the gallery precinct. Spring Construction was a tactile installation that invited audience participation, children especially.\textsuperscript{329} More impressive was his monumental painted and rotating steel ‘flowers’ in a cyan blue steel tube. Claimed to be the largest ‘studio’ sculpture of its kind in Australia at that time, Wind Construction had been fabricated at the Transfield Foundry in Sydney in 1969 and seemed emblematic of the cultural oasis that the Mildura Sculpture Triennials had become (Figure 38). Although it had a relatively high price ($8000), it was certainly a very popular work during the opening weekend of the triennial and McCullough had received support from Eric Westbrook, Daniel Thomas and others, suggesting that the City Council consider it as an appropriate welcome symbol for the city of Mildura.


\textsuperscript{327} This new work drew its inspiration from the Brazilian artist Helio Oiticica's installation Tropicalia, Penetrables PN2 and PN3, reproduced in Kinetic Art: The Language of Movement, written by freelance English curator Guy Brett. While in London in 1968, Allen was also able to view some of Oiticica’s works (presumably at Brett’s apartment), that had been sent over to London for an exhibition at Signals Gallery which had closed and would now be part of a major installation at the Whitechapel Gallery in February 1969. Guy Brett & Luciano Figueiredo (eds), Oiticica in London, Tate Publishing, London, 2007, p. 11.

\textsuperscript{328} Blair French, ‘Jim Allen: From Elam to the Experimental Art Foundation’, op. cit.

\textsuperscript{329} In interview with Coleing, he indicated that this work was selected by Harald Szeeman in 1971 for his 2nd Kaldor Art Project exhibition, I want to leave a nice well done child here.
However, within two weeks of an anonymous gift of $100 being offered to start a purchase fund, the Letters to the Editor pages of the local paper were filled with letters from indignant ratepayers concerned about wasteful expenditure on ‘junk’. The management of the Arts Centre came under increased scrutiny. An article in the paper on 17 March 1970 reported a packed public gallery at the previous evening’s council meeting, attributing this to the ‘sculpture controversy’. \(^{330}\)

A kind of jokey, Dada approach prevailed in a number of works. However, underlying the visual punning was evidence of an approach to art making and its underlying concepts that was investigatory, participatory and challenging. Ti Parks’s \textit{Banner}, exhibited on the gallery lawns, was a more than three-metre high vaguely tent-like contraption, which continued his quirky Duchampian interest in dwelling structures and the use of mohair wool as a trace drawing element. Aleks Danko’s, \textit{Anxiety Switch No. 1}, the smallest work in the triennial and made to fit in the palm of one’s hand, was the antithesis of Coleing’s \textit{Wind Construction}. In an edition of seven, the bronze cast which cleverly oscillated between a likeness of two old fashioned light switches and of a pair of pert breasts and nipples, mounted in a velvet lined wooden box, drew on language and Duchamp for its punning title and imagery. \(^{331}\) Les Kossatz’s \textit{Spent Heap}, ‘a tier of discarded VFL beercans’ positioned in a corner of the pristine gallery space, echoed Barry Humphries’s earlier 1950s ratbag Dada-inspired satire of the suburbs and their tribal sporting rituals (Figure 37). \(^{332}\)

Systems, series and progressions abounded in many other sculptors’ works, indicative of an investigative approach to art making, employing Willoughby Sharp’s dictum, ‘The old


\(^{331}\) Duchamp’s collaged breast work, \textit{Prière de Toucher}, 1947 which also has a velvet backing was on the front cover of the exhibition catalogue, \textit{Le Surrealism 1947} organised by André Breton at the Maeght Gallery in Paris. Danko had seen the exhibition of 78 Duchamp works from the Mary Sisler Collection, which toured Australian state galleries between 1967 and 1968. Margaret Plant in her exhibition catalogue \textit{Irreverent Sculpture} discussed Danko’s oeuvre.

art was an object. The new art is a system. The artists selected and the works they presented explored the expanding field of sculptural practice in Australia. The prevalence of works that were ‘of a kind that is open, discursive, exploratory’ revealed the diversity of investigations into the concept of sculpture as idea, process and object.

**Tom McCullough 1970–1972**

**Professional Development**

As indicated in Chapter Three, by 1969 McCullough had established his credentials as both a regional gallery director and the director of a national triennial sculpture prize. The training and keeping of professional staff in the expanding state and regional gallery networks was now a key issue, as ‘a critical shortage of trained staff … has been aggravated by losses to art schools and universities’. The AGAA, of which McCullough was a member, was established in 1965 as a direct outcome of a UNESCO-funded conference on the professional development of museum and gallery staff held in 1963 at the NGV. The organisation’s aims were ‘to provide opportunities for the interchange of information and ideas between full-time professional gallery officers and to maintain and to improve the standards and welfare of the profession and of public art galleries in Australia’.

A pilot professional development scheme, an initiative of the AGAA, commenced in 1969 and offered a diploma course which covered art gallery and museum administration adapted from the British Museums Association model. This initiative signalled a

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333 Willoughby Sharp, ‘Luminism and Kineticism’ in Gregory Battcock (ed.), *Minimal Art*, E.P Dutton, New York, 1968, p. 318. A similar sentiment was expressed by Jack Burnham in his article, ‘Systems aesthetics’, *Artforum*, op. cit., p. 31: ‘[W]e are in a transition from an object-oriented to systems-oriented culture … change emanates not from things but the way things are done.’


336 ibid.

337 The principal tutors were Dr Ursula Hoff and Dr Eric Westbrook (both NGV), Hal Missingham (AGNSW) and Ron Appleyard (National Gallery of South Australia). In 1966 Dr Eric Westbrook was
commitment to developing career pathways for professional gallery staff, with improved standards of performance and recognised qualifications. Given the level of state and local government infrastructure investment in the Mildura Arts Centre, and the noted shortage in trained staff, McCullough was encouraged to undertake the course.

By 1969, only four of Victoria’s regional galleries had full-time directors: Mildura, Ballarat, Hamilton and Swan Hill.\textsuperscript{338} The majority of regional galleries (nearly all in Victoria) were run and controlled by volunteer committees of trustees, some with part-time seconded art teachers (from the Department of Education) who reported to the trustees. This period of rapid expansion and change created tensions between the new professional staff and the volunteer trustees. However, in 1969 McCullough had the backing of his advisory council and the professional support of the AGAA. The diploma course required that he spend time in Melbourne at the NGV and in Adelaide at the AGSA with Lou Klepac and Ron Appleyard.

He also had time to meet sculptors such as John Davis and the Hampton crowd (which kept him abreast of the challenges in the expanding art school system), as well as visit commercial galleries.\textsuperscript{339} As noted in the previous chapter, McCullough applied for and was awarded a prestigious Gulbenkian Fellowship to further his professional development overseas.

**McCullough and the 1970 Mildura Sculpture Triennial**

McCullough was sufficiently confident of his position, within Mildura and amongst his colleagues in the Australian art world, to propose a radical change in the nature of the

\textsuperscript{338} David Thomas, ‘Provincial art galleries in New South Wales and Victoria’, *Art and Australia*, vol. 6, no. 2, summer 1968, p. 121.

\textsuperscript{339} McCullough travelled to Sydney and Melbourne frequently to meet artists, attend conferences and see exhibitions. He recalled attending Donald Brook’s 2nd Power Lecture on Contemporary Art entitled ‘Flight from the object’ and seeing Christo’s *Wrapped Coast* installation. In a diary entry he noted that he was in Melbourne and Sydney on 10 and 11 September 1969 ‘for the 1970 Mildura Sculpture Triennial arrangements’. Tom McCullough, email to author, 26 March 2008.
events: from prizes to acquisitions for contemporary collection development, from organiser and venue manager to curator. McCullough observed:

I took full responsibility for what appeared on the lawns of Mildura Art Centre … In 1970 it was all there because I visited sculptors, or by recommendations from colleagues who I trust or who had told me about works or from photographs … they had sent me.  

The sculpture events were important to Mildura but even more important to McCullough and the Arts Centre in maintaining a national profile. Therefore it was important to keep them fresh and relevant, particularly to younger practitioners who required exhibiting opportunities and purchases of their works into reputable collections. Opportunities for sculptors and more experimental artists were relatively few in comparison to painters. There was a limited commissioning market for government and industry and even more limited commercial outlets for the number of burgeoning young artists: ‘I invited artists who were not known primarily as sculptors to exhibit at the 4th Mildura Sculpture Triennial. The show was acclaimed and provided a new impetus for sculpture in Australia …’ McCullough clearly saw himself as part of a generational shift of art museum professionals who were coming to prominence as the new agents of consecration. 

The one major public controversy that overshadowed the triennial was the public outcry against the proposed purchase of Tony Coleing’s Wind Construction. The Mildura Chamber of Commerce had been keen to commission or purchase a sculpture as an emblem of the Sunraysia District, for prominent public display in the township of Mildura. McCullough in a letter to Westbrook noted that:

[T]here is little chance of the purchase being made and I attribute this to the vicious campaign waged against the whole exhibition in general by the editor of our only local newspaper…It is a great pity that we shall probably now be unable to

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341 Tom McCullough, ‘Painted images or real objects, an illusion of discord’, unpublished notes following Perspecta ’83, May 1983, p. 1, McCullough archives, PA 97/33 Box 20, SLV.
342 Following only 18 months after the international launch of the new NGV building and the prominence given to The Field exhibition – initiated by two young curators, Brian Finemore and John Stringer, in consultation with a number of young artists including many returning expatriate artists associated with Central Street Gallery in Sydney, and championed by young art critic Patrick McCaughey – McCullough was modelling his professional career according to the example set by the NGV and its management.
take advantage of the genuine popularity which *Wind Construction* generated at the beginning of the exhibition and the whole idea of Deakin Avenue becoming a sculptural showplace will have to be abandoned by our Chamber of Commerce and City Council as a result.  

### Gulbenkian Fellowship

The Gulbenkian Fellowship awarded to McCullough was valued at £1000, the equivalent of $2135 in 1970 and was awarded through the AGAA to ‘young professional art gallery officers in Australia’ in recognition of the need to travel overseas ‘to further their general knowledge of the culture of the past, the contemporary overseas developments in the various fields of fine arts and particularly in museum architecture and presentation’.  

The fellowships were part of a program of professional development advocated by the AGAA in response to the shortage of trained staff. The push for qualifications and professional development was driven by the concentration of power and resources in the expanding tertiary education system with its preferred conditions of pay and status. In order for the expanding gallery sector to retain staff and encourage new appointees, it would need to improve the status and conditions of its gallery positions with recognised qualification and opportunities for professional development.

McCullough’s ambitious proposal included visiting ten countries in seven months. As he noted in a letter to Eric Westbrook, he would need to ‘seek grant-in-aid assistance from a variety of organisations such as the British Council and the French Cultural Ministry, to cover living expenses’ as the major part of his salary would ‘be required by my family in Australia’. Given the scarcity of these fellowships and seven months leave from his position, the implied support of the Mildura City Council and its arts advisory committee represented an important commitment to McCullough’s professional position. McCullough had a forward exhibition plan and the seconded education officer’s position

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was vital in the continued management and installation of the exhibition program at the Mildura Arts Centre while he was away.  

The seven-month study tour through Japan, Europe and the United States not only provided him with professional development opportunities and an international perspective but, equally importantly, provided thinking time for him to digest some of the implications of the Mildura Triennial, to develop plans for it and the Mildura Art Centre collection's future expansion and their national significance. The recognition that a new direction for many younger artists was in the production of, as he put it, ‘virtually non-saleable experiments with a limited life expectancy’, combined with the percolating implications of Christo’s monumental collaborative environmental project, would coalesce into a radical plan for the 1973 Sculpture Triennial.

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348 Tom McCullough, on the advice of Alan McCulloch, visited Expo ’70 in Osaka and the Hakone Open-Air Sculpture Park from 10–18 May. Japan’s Expo ’70 was the first international exposition to be held in Asia and many of the country exhibits celebrated technological advances. The renowned architect Robin Boyd designed the Australian pavilion, an elegant wave structure that included a chromosomal dome designed by Australian artist Stanislav Ostojakotkowski, whose chromosomal tower had been a highlight of the 1970 Adelaide Festival. The international Experiments in Art and Technology group, which promoted collaborations between artists and technology, were actively involved in Expo ’70. Organised through their Japan branch, Nakaya Fujiko created a fog sculpture that engulfed the technologically advanced Pepsi Pavilion. McCullough in an interview with Hazel de Berg, 2 December 1976, NLA, acknowledged that he had seen Nakaya’s fog sculpture at Expo 70. Nakaya’s fog sculpture in the Domain, Sydney, would become a signature work of the 2nd Biennale of Sydney in 1976, directed by Tom McCullough. The work was acquired by the ANG. Interestingly, his itinerary did not include the Tokyo Biennale 1970, Between Man and Matter, which opened at the Tokyo Metropolitan Art Gallery from 10–30 May 1970. This was a very important biennale; it followed on from the 1969 radical exhibitions in Europe and the US, namely Harald Szeeman’s When attitude becomes form (Works-Concepts-Processes-Situations-Informations) at the Kunsthalle in Bern, the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam’s Square pegs in round holes and the Whitney Museum of American Arts’s Anti-Illusion: Procedure/Material with many of the same participants that had exhibited in these exhibitions. The 1970 Tokyo Biennale provided a significant counterpoint to and critique of the modernist rhetoric of Expo ’70 and its theme of ‘Progress and Harmony of Humanity’.
Figure 40: Preparation for Sculpturscape ‘73. Two of the four views that comprised a printed information sheet sent out by Tom McCullough to invited sculptors in October 1972, to enable them to grasp his radical proposal for Sculpturscape ‘73 which he described as a kind of ‘post-Christo outstallation’.
**Fellowship outcomes for Mildura**

McCullough was interested in the latest developments in museum education and access, travelling exhibitions and touring networks, particularly in relation to sculpture. He visited a number of sculpture parks and later developed a feasibility study for a ‘cultural park’ on the banks of the Murray River in front of the Mildura Arts Centre. The proposed 20 acres of river frontage was a disused rubbish tip. The overall plan in the feasibility study was structured in a series of stages that could be implemented individually as finance became available. In May 1972, Mildura City Council granted permission for the Arts Centre to use the site for Sculpturscapes ‘73 (Figure 40).

The other major outcome of the Fellowship was his negotiation for an exhibition of Modern French Sculptures, that he would organise to tour nationally to all the state art galleries, with the Mildura Arts Centre as the launch gallery, the only regional venue for the tour. McCullough was consciously differentiating himself, as a director and the Mildura Arts Centre, from other regional galleries by creating a unique national position more aligned with the state art galleries, particularly the NGV.

McCullough's emergent professional habitus combined with his augmented social capital (extensive networks as a result of the triennial and his professional tour overseas) and cultural capital (in receipt of the AGAA professional development fellowship), ensured a significant rise in status of his own position and that of the Mildura Arts Centre. It was

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351 This was developed with the guidance of Reg Etherington, who continued to hold a position on the MACAC, and was the Mildura Arts Centre’s representative trustee on the VPGG and also held a position on the Building Committee of the Victorian Arts Centre.
352 As the press release for Sculpturscapes ‘73 announced: ‘In 1971, Mildura City Council decided that this site will eventually become a “cultural park” based upon a feasibility report which Thomas McCullough published, comprising native tree plantations, permanent sculpture pavilions and courts, lakes, amphitheatre, restaurant and sculpture playground. This development of Australia’s first open air museum for sculpture and related activities will integrate past, present, nature, culture and leisure into one flexible system’, press release, ‘Sculpturscapes ‘73’, Mildura Arts Centre, February 1973, NGA Research Library, Mildura Arts Centre box.
also intended to leverage further economic investment in the Mildura Arts Centre and its expansion plans.

**John Davis 1970–1972**

Of the 61 sculptors selected to participate, almost two-thirds of them were showing at the Fourth Mildura Sculpture Triennial for the first time. McCullough observed that: ‘for various reasons, the artists interested in sculpture are far more numerous than nine years ago’. Although a number of young painters began moving into sculpture, because there was less pressure and scrutiny to conform to particular late modernist styles, the under-recognised factor for the increased number of participants was the economic support offered by the expanding educational sector, increasingly acknowledged as ‘the appropriate substitute for the patron’ and particularly in Melbourne, the increasing numbers of students enrolling in art schools. However, in expanding the category of sculpture to include experimental, emerging and in many cases, unproven participants, the selection criteria were determined by the individuals McCullough asked to make recommendations. Thus the artists consulted, such as Davis, were given the ‘power to confer value on that which does not intrinsically possess it’, thereby reinforcing what they, the selectors, considered to be ‘legitimate members of [an emerging] profession[al] group’.

**Davis and the 1970 Mildura Sculpture Triennial**

What was significant about the gathering at Mildura in 1970 was the recognition amongst the sculptors, critics and curators of a shared professional identity, with the power to shape the nascent institutions of which they were a part. In 1970 the Mildura Triennial revealed itself as an important nodal nexus, a gathering point for a new status group – the

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visual arts profession. Davis, a lecturer and selector, and like a number of the younger Melbourne sculptors, the product of training at RMIT under the direction of Centre 5 members Vincas Jomants, Teisutis Zikaras and Lenton Parr, would have sensed the significance of this new professional recognition. Noel Hutchison’s clear recollection that Mildura 1970 was ‘where we all met as a core group’, captured the shared sense that the ‘power to define [the field’s] own criteria for the production and evaluation of its products’ lay within their grasp. Further, that as active participants in the unfolding and new tertiary art education field, their control of the reproduction and accreditation process innate to professional education enabled them to ‘change the nature of art by changing its institutions’ by a process of redefinition.

The 1970 Mildura Triennal was hugely productive for Davis and for his professional standing amongst his peers. His work was reproduced in the catalogue, he established friendships and professional links beyond the Melbourne art scene and was offered a solo exhibition at Watters Gallery in Sydney the following year; and he was also recognised as an important artist contact and selector for Tom McCullough in Melbourne. In terms of his approach to his work, it had been an immensely stimulating and challenging period of exchange that would reveal its influence in his works the following year.

Artwork and exhibitions

The year 1970 was significant for Davis. He was invited to participate in four sculpture exhibitions and awards, three of which were nationally focused: Mildura Sculpture Triennial, Captain Cook Bicentennial Sculpture Exhibition and the Comalco Invitation Award for Sculpture. The fourth was Melbourne-based Monash University’s Law School Sculpture Award Exhibition. Between 1970 and his departure overseas at the end of 1971, Davis’s works underwent a major transition; the number and quality of exhibitions

357 Max Weber defined a ‘status group’ as a ‘group that can be differentiated on the basis of non-economic qualities like honour, prestige and religion’. An occupational or formal educational status group defines itself by those it excludes. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Status_class, viewed 5 May 2009.
359 Mike Parr quoting Donald Brook in Sheridan, op.cit., p.112.
in which he participated increased significantly and extended to Sydney and Newcastle. The quality of the contacts and networks that Davis established at the 1970 Mildura Triennial were critical to this development.

Davis’s critically successful solo exhibition at Strines Gallery and his serial work in aluminium at the Mildura Sculpture Triennial contributed to his selection in the 3rd Comalco Invitation Award for Sculpture in Aluminium in September 1970. The selection process sought recommendations from ‘gallery directors, critics and others concerned professionally with the Arts in Australia’. From these invited contributions, six sculptors were chosen to produce maquettes for ‘specific architectural environments’, the aim of which was ‘to bring together entrants in the Award and members of the architectural profession, with the object of interesting the latter in arranging commissions of entries for the Award’. Professionally organised, the award ensured that each participant sculptor received $750 for a maquette and the winner would receive a further $3000 plus Comalco’s guarantee that it would ‘assist with the supply of all or part of the aluminium’ required if a sculptor’s work was commissioned by an architect.

The highly selective nature of the award and its professional promotion and presentation by Comalco at the NGV, further compounded the artistic field’s movement towards autonomy. Recognition as a professional sculptor had now become a recursive function of the field: in order to be selected, one had already to be recognised by the group as a member of that group.

361 Ibid.
362 The six invited sculptors for 1970 were: Tony Coleing, John Davis, Nigel Lendon, Max Lyle, Lenton Parr and Ken Reinhard. Parr had been one of the judges in selecting acquisitions for the 1970 Mildura Sculpture Triennial and the other five sculptors were all invited participants in Mildura. In comparison with the Mildura Sculpture Triennial’s total of $4000 for acquisitions, this award was a prestigious and highly lucrative event. The $4500 (6 x $750) paid to the selected sculptors totalled more than the Mildura’s sculpture acquisitions budget. Of the six invited sculptors, all had been involved with the 1970 invitational Mildura Sculpture Triennial, ibid.
Figure 41: John Davis, *Maquette for Comalco Invitation Award for Sculpture* 1970, cast aluminium, 109 x 76.2 x 24 cms. Photo: Mark Strizic.
Figure 42: previous page, John Davis, *Grass Process Work – Part I* 1971, reproduced images 2 and 3 from a series of 11 photographs documenting the process of the impact of plastic outlines on grass growth. As noted in Ken Scarlett, *The Sculpture of John Davis; Places and Location*, p.78: “Process evolved at the home of the artist between 12 March and 2 May 1971.” Photo: John Davis. This process work was the prototype for his later *Grass Process Works* at John Reed’s property, Heide, in November 1971.

Figure 43: above, John Davis, *Greene Street Piece* 1972, black and white photograph, part of a series of four, 47.5 x 32.5 cm. Collection NGV.
John Davis was doubly feted; he won the award for his serialised maquette in cast aluminium on the theme of ‘Energy’ and had his work commissioned for the foyer of the Hydro Electric Commission building in Hobart (Figure 41). The judges – Eric Westbrook, director of the NGV, Elwyn Lynn, artist, critic and curator of the Power Institute collection in Sydney and Melbourne architect Rod Macdonald - were unanimous in their decision. As the art reviewer for *The Bulletin*, Lynn commented that: ‘It [the winning Comalco work] is a development of his square pedestals with trifid heads seen this year at Mildura and Sydney’s State Office Block [Captain Cook Bicentennial Sculpture Exhibition].’

The prize enabled Davis to begin planning a one-year sabbatical overseas in 1972, aware as he was of the impact of such experiences on Fred Cress and his approach to teaching and on many of the sculptors he met at the Mildura Triennial, including New Zealand sculptor Jim Allen, whose innovative installation paid homage to Helio Oiticica’s work that he had seen in London.

Beneath the claim for a kind of syntactical progression in his working method was an implied unease that became fully manifest during the completion of two large projects in 1971. As Davis related to his colleague in Sydney, Noel Hutchison, the completion of the Comalco Prize commission raised serious issues for him:

> [L]ots of problems with so many different processes to go thro’[sic] – costing multiples, machinery, anodising, polishing, fabricating and finally assembling. Too many people makes for all sorts of added complications.

This frustration with the commission’s laboriousness, outsourcing and management was further compounded by a major piece that was completed for the Watters exhibition in May that had taken a year to complete. *100 multiples* extended the idea of the repeated form to a ten by ten grid of 100 spatulate forms measuring 2.5 metres square; a type of

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364 John Davis, letter to Noel Hutchison, undated but later inscribed 1971, in the possession of Noel Hutchison.
wall relief made from fibreglass and polyester resin and supported on white painted hardboard.

The inherent anxiety in his earlier artist’s statement was manifest in Davis’s realisation that the pursuit of ‘simplicity of content and sophistication of means’ had rendered his metier (an aspect of his artistic habitus) as alienated labour.\(^\text{365}\) As he later recounted his experience of this period:

> I was becoming heartily sick of working in materials such as fibreglass and metals where the process tended to be a long, drawn out affair and at the end of that process one was then concerned about the finish of the surface, and then the preservation of that finish.\(^\text{366}\)

Davis had substituted the iterative embodiment of creative processes for mind numbing, alienated, manual labour. In striving to maintain and improve his professional status as a sculptor-teacher in the competitive and rapidly changing education system, which was of necessity his only economic option as a practising sculptor, Davis had subjugated dispositions within his originary artistic habitus to the dispositions required of a professional tertiary teacher with attendant concerns about credentials, selection criteria, styles and definitions. The competition amongst the younger, radical Melbourne sculptors had created a level of anxiety where, as sculptor colleague Clive Murray-White observed, ‘the necessity to be up-to-date stylistically is also a bad pressure. Your work becomes redundant after one exhibition – three weeks is its total life span’.\(^\text{367}\)

Davis’s exhaustion became the inspiration for engagement with a set of processes dependent upon chance, duration and impermanence, the site and documentation. Later in the year, he created *Grass Process Works* at John Reed’s property Heide on the banks of the Yarra River (Figure 42). His invitation specified three viewing times over a month-long period and asked that viewers participate in recording the changes by taking photographs. The use of polythene sheeting with holes cut at regular intervals and plastic

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\(^{367}\) Terry Smith, interview with Clive Murray-White, 23 May 1971, quoted in *The Situation Now: object or post-object Art?*, op. cit., p. 28.
shower caps marked a clear move away from industrial, toxic materials requiring a high degree of finish. Chance, in the form of the river flooding, added another element to this work. In an interview with Graeme Sturgeon, Davis described this period:

I was interested in trying the element of chance within my work. Everything I had been doing, I had control over it and it was perfectly clear what my intentions were … So in order to break as radically as I could from this [situation], I set about using the structure that I had been establishing over the last couple of years, … a very systemic formation of the elements with the work by taking quite lean materials, in this case, polythene and grass.368

In reviewing Davis’s solo exhibition at Watters Gallery in May 1971, Donald Brook perceptively described Davis as an artist at a crossroads: ‘[L]ike so many other sculptors today, [he] is in his own example, a metaphor of transition from an art of objects to an art of processes.'369 It was an observation that succinctly addressed a new questioning phase in Davis’s practice.

At this time, the phenomenological writings of Robert Morris and the conceptual writings of Sol LeWitt, published in Artforum, were gaining currency amongst Australian sculptors. Morris’s three important essays – ‘Anti-form’ in 1968, ‘Notes on sculpture, Part 4: Beyond objects’ in 1969 and ‘Some notes on the phenomenology of making: The search for the motivated’ in 1970 – were reviewed by Margaret Plant in the last edition (October–December 1970) of the alternative art journal Other Voices, published by Terry Smith and Paul McGillick, the organisers of the exhibition, The Situation Now – object or post-object art?370 Given its strong sculpture theme, this final issue of Other Voices was circulated widely throughout the network of contacts made at the 1970 Mildura Triennial.371 The seven months between the publication of the journal and the interviews

368 John Davis, interview with Graeme Sturgeon, c.1975, Graeme Sturgeon papers Box 7, NGV Research Library.
371 This edition also included part one of Noel Hutchison’s extended essay on ‘Australian Sculpture in the 1960s’. The similarity in comments posited by Bruce Pollard and John Davis in their transcribed interviews
and discussions that formed the basis for the exhibition catalogue, *Situation Now*, which happened only a few days after the opening of Davis’s first solo exhibition with Watters Gallery in Sydney in May 1971, corresponded to this tentative shift in Davis’s work.\(^{372}\) Morris advocated works that were random, ephemeral, used non-traditional materials (such as latex, grass, dust, found materials) with bodily gesture and attitudes; an embodied perceptual shift that enacted the phenomenological sense of ‘being in the world’. While Morris’s ideas may not have been directly responsible for Davis’s shift, they offered a discursive potential to many artists disenchanted with the emphasis on style progression and formal concerns.

There was one small work Davis made in 1971; it was not exhibited in the Watters Gallery exhibition. *Tubes and Box* used low technology and cheap materials – raw wood and clay (Figure 59). The work revealed a re-engagement with the artistic process, his *metier*, with little concern for ‘finish’.\(^{373}\) Like *Grass Process Works*, *Tubes and Box* was the antithesis of the work Davis had been doing, and the materials he had been using, since 1968. His interest in seriality continued in this work but in a much humbler dimension: nine rather than one hundred. The work has a definite Zen aesthetic; from the simply proportioned wooden box, reminiscent of bento boxes, to the rough, handmade, low-fired and partially glazed ceramic tubes or ingots, as Davis later referred to them. Zen philosophy and its application to art, particularly through ceramics, was part of the zeitgeist of that time.

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\(^{372}\) Through Ti Parks, Davis was loosely associated with an alternative exhibiting space and collective of artists at Pinacotheca Gallery and its director Bruce Pollard. Pollard, Murray-White and Davis shared concerns regarding some analytical conceptual pronouncements and issues of formalist style progression. See Terry Smith & Tony McGillick, *The Situation Now: object or post-object art?*, Contemporary Arts Society of Australia (NSW), Sydney, 1971; and Charles Green, ‘Pinacotheca: A private art history’, *Art and Australia*, vol. 34, no. 4, winter 1997, pp. 484–9.

\(^{373}\) *Tubes and Box* was the embodiment of such Zen qualities as ‘limitlessness, unfinishedness and naturalness’. Toshimitsu Hasumi, *Zen in Japanese Art: a way of spiritual experience* (trans. from German by J. Petrie), Philosophical Library, New York, 1962, p. 65. Noel Hutchison in interview stressed the influence of Zen and other eastern philosophies on many artists during the early 1970s.
Whether Davis encountered this amongst the ceramicists who participated in the 1970 Mildura Sculpture Triennial or in discussion with other sculptors (such as Bill Clements who had studied under two major Japanese ceramicists between 1965–1967) or whether he attended the American raku firing specialist Paul Soldner’s workshop at the Monash University Summer School in early 1971, is not clear; however, the sensibility is present in this quiet work. For Davis, it was an embodiment of the processes of thinking and making. Like a touchstone, he would return to and rework it, finally exhibiting the completed process in 1974, renamed Redaction, in his one-man exhibition at Pinacotheca.

One senses in Davis an urgent need to find the freedom of discovery in his working method, and then to bring this realisation into an alignment that would not jeopardise his professional status. Neil Leach extends Bourdieu’s concept of habitus as a practical and dynamic sense embodied-in-action through exploring spatial practices as ‘repetitive gestures aimed at overcoming the alienation of all conceptual, abstract space’.

This statement seems to have particular resonance with the artistic habitus of a sculptor such as Davis. Returning to investigations into the process of making art became increasingly central to Davis’s practice.

**Professional recognition**

Davis was appointed in 1971 to the Diploma Course Policy Development Committee, part of the Victorian Institute of College’s (VIC) academic accreditation process. This committee provided advice and recommendations to the Fine Art and Industrial Design School Board (of which Lenton Parr was the chairperson), which was part of the VIC’s

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374 Neil Leach, ‘Belonging: Towards a theory of identification with space’, in Hillier & Rooksby (eds), *Habitus: A Sense of Place*, Ashgate, Hampshire, UK, p. 300. This can be corroborated in statements made by Davis and Bruce Pollard of Pinacotheca when interviewed by Terry Smith for the propositional exhibition, *The Situation Now: object or post-object art*? in 1971. In response to Smith’s question about conceptual art, Pollard responded: ‘[T]he American conceptual artists seem satisfied with systems … ignoring intuitive content. Except for Sol le Witt – his impulses are intuitive but the works as done are the most rigorous of all. The mystery is left in … The Analytic conceptualists have the notion that art has always had an idea content and that they are getting rid of everything but the idea.’ Davis voiced his concerns regarding conceptual art: ‘It seems a very literary form of art, an art of documentation, or total explanation. But the art thing is the unexplained, the mysterious. These artists take art out of experience, they don’t put it in. There are no questions left.’ See *The Situation Now*, op. cit., pp. 7, 28.
Academic Board of Studies. Davis’s appointment exemplified the logic of an emergent professional field (of restricted cultural production) to maintain its autonomy through control of the definition of what constituted professional practice and the mechanism for its evaluation.375

The effect of the new accreditation processes, and Davis’s and Parr’s participation in them, was to shift the power to define what was taught and its evaluation (in this case, art and more specifically sculpture) from external control of the Department of Education (and its promotion structure based on seniority) to the internal control of professionally recognised group of peers. The definition of sculpture and the criteria for its evaluation had now become a product of the field itself, within the new professional art school system and art discourse, as they separated from the monolithic structures of the state departments of education.376

Peer recognition of Davis’s qualifications and experience as a professional sculptor and teacher acknowledged his membership of the increasingly competitive and autonomous field of art education. Within this field, Davis had accrued significant symbolic power in relation to the Principal of Caulfield Technical College, Harold Farey. Farey, whose qualifications for the position were based upon promotion through seniority within the Department of Education, was now forced to recognise that in order to participate in this new field, he would need to update his qualifications at RMIT. By the end of 1971 Davis had been teaching at Caulfield Technical College for five years.

**Overseas in 1972**

Davis had been planning an overseas trip since late 1970. The funds remaining from the Comalco award were supplemented by grants of $1000 from the Ian Potter Foundation

375 As Bourdieu stated: “It is impossible to understand the peculiar characteristics of restricted culture without appreciating its profound dependence on the educational system, the indispensable means of its reproduction and growth”. See his The Field of Cultural Production, op. cit., p. 123.

376 ibid., p. 252.
and $600 from the Myer Foundation. His application for the highly competitive professional development funding offered by the VIC was unsuccessful.

A valuable Melbourne expatriate community in New York included John Stringer at Museum of Modern Art, artists Ian Burn, Mel Ramsden and Robert Jacks and the gallerist Max Hutchison. Patrick McCaughey, the ‘godfather’ of the Hampton Mafia, recently returned from a Harkness Scholarship in New York, provided contacts in that city. Elwyn Lynn provided contacts in Germany. Davis and his family departed shortly after Christmas in December 1971 for one year’s travelling. Although the proposed tour included Canada, the US, Britain and Europe with side visits to Mexico, Thailand and Bali, he intended to spend three months in New York city, five months travelling through Europe and two months in London.

Jim Doolin, an American painter who had lived and taught in Melbourne for three years between 1965 and 1967, who had been closely associated with Central Street Gallery in Sydney, Gallery A in Melbourne and had exhibited in The Field exhibition, was a helpful contact for Davis in Los Angeles as he was teaching at University of California at Los Angeles (UCLA). Doolin assisted Davis in getting appointments to meet lecturers at a number of art schools in Los Angeles including UCLA, University of California at Berkeley, Otis Art Institute and CAL Arts where he met John Baldessari and Alan Kaprow: a ‘most exciting experiment, under threat of closure … but enormous potential’. Davis was keen to compare curriculum and program developments with the rapidly evolving tertiary art school situation in Victoria.

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377 Robert Hughes, art critic for Time magazine, recently arrived in New York (1970), was originally from Sydney, via Italy and some years in London.
378 1972 saw the concurrence of the Venice Biennale and importantly, Documenta 5, under the entrepreneurial direction of Harald Szeeman, whom Davis had met at a meeting of artists associated with Pinacotheca in Melbourne in April 1971. Both Bruce Pollard and the NGV exhibition manager, Graeme Sturgeon (on a Gulbenkian Fellowship) were also travelling overseas in 1972. Sturgeon and Davis had trained together for their TSTC in the late 1950s and Sturgeon had taken over John Stringer’s position at the NGV when Stringer was appointed to MOMA in 1970. As part of his professional development, funded by the Gulbenkian Foundation and auspiced by the AGAA, Sturgeon would spend one month working as part of the installation team at Documenta. Szeeman had extended the invitation when in Melbourne in 1971.
379 John Davis, handwritten notes on art colleges, c. 1972, Davis Estate.
However, it was the extended stay in New York that was pivotal to his practice: ‘Three months in New York changed my life.’ Davis encountered the SoHo area during the particularly tumultuous and expansive period of the early 1970s. Artists claimed a level of control and autonomy with respect to institutions and institutional discourse: boycotting exhibitions, issuing manifestos, establishing alternative exhibiting venues, supporting the publication *Avalanche* in its claim to promote artists and their working processes through their own words (interviews), rather than through the market driven intermediaries of critics and gallery promotional literature, while at the same time demanding that MOMA incorporate regular exhibition programs for solo contemporary artists within their schedule. For Davis, this politicisation, this critiquing of the

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380 Scarlett, *The Sculpture of John Davis*, op. cit., p. 36. The Davis family had a small apartment near Washington Square, half way between SoHo and Grammercy Park; centrally located in relation to the burgeoning alternative art scene in New York, including some of the leading galleries that had very recently relocated to the SoHo area such as Max Hutchinson, Paula Cooper, Dwan (by 1972 it was John Weber Gallery) and Leo Castelli. Robert Jacks, who Davis would visit most days, had a loft studio/apartment in the same street as the recently opened alternative installation and performance space 112 Greene Street, and just around the corner on street level were the offices of the magazine *Avalanche*. Many artists had their studios in the SoHo and Bowery area. The physical proximity of studios, galleries and alternative spaces, publication networks like *Avalanche* and *Artworkers News*, bars and eateries such as *Max’s Kansas City* and *Food* (founded by Gordon Matta-Clark and other artists), contributed to an intense artistic community network. See Julie Reiss, *From Margin to Center: The Spaces of Installation Art*, MIT Press, Cambridge, Mass. and London, 1999, for a detailed discussion of these linkages.

381 Davis would have become aware of New York artists exerting the right to control the exhibition of their works, whether for political reasons or as a way of controlling the context within which the works were shown. Robert Morris ordered the closure of his solo exhibition at the Whitney Museum of American Art in 1970 after a month as part of the New York artists’ strike against war, racism and repression, organised in association with the Artworkers Coalition. Davis had purchased a copy of the *Guggenheim International 1971* catalogue. This exhibition was mired in controversy and acrimony over the withdrawal of Daniel Buren’s work. Carl Andre withdrew his work from the exhibition, bought 100 catalogues, signed and numbered them, and sold them from a SoHo shopfront. Tensions between artists and museums concerning boundaries of control and the uncollectability of installation works were exemplified in the 1971 closure of Robert Morris’s exhibition at the Tate Gallery in London because of public safety issues. Director Sir Norman Reid queried the role of museums in relation to these new works: ‘An increasing amount of art is being made outside of the familiar format of easel painting and studio sculpture and we have to ask ourselves whether the idea of a museum in a traditional sense is compatible with the new activities, spectacles, happenings, earth sculpture and the like which leave no record other than on tape or film. Many artists have declared that they are not interested in the survival of their work and almost with deliberation choose materials which are impermanent.’ See Lawrence Alloway & John Coplans, ‘Talking with William Rubin: “The museum concept is not infinitely expandable”’, *Artforum*, vol. 13, no. 2, October 1974, quoted in Reiss, *From Margin to Centre: The spaces of Installation*, op. cit., p. 106. These incidents were recent events and probably still very raw in spring 1972. Added to this tension, further statements of artistic autonomy from New York artists with regard to their inclusion in Harald Szeemann’s *Documenta 5* were published in *Artforum* and *Flash Art*. Given the closeness of the SoHo art world, it might be reasonable to surmise that the general tenor of Robert Morris’s open letter published in the May–June edition of *Flash Art* (hence probably written in March) may have been known and discussed within the SoHo network: ‘I do not want to have my work used to illustrate misguided sociological principles or outmoded art historical
established institutional networks and the subversive intent of alternative practices, discourses and networks established by artists, was a potent influence on his artistic habitus.

In spring 1972, Davis saw the major MOMA exhibitions of Matisse and Picasso, Richard Long’s Project exhibition at MOMA, a group show at John Weber Gallery which included Sol LeWitt’s drawings, and many more. Davis’s handwritten notes from the Whitney Museum catalogue, *Anti–Illusion: procedures/materials*, revealed his interest in Robert Morris’s writings on process, and further notes quote passages from Sol LeWitt’s ‘Paragraphs on conceptual art’ and ‘Sentences on conceptual art’, probably taken from magazine articles and interviews. His notebooks from this period record quotes from various writers and artists such as Arthur Koestler, Carl Jung and Marcel Duchamp.

The physical contact with works, the sheer volume and range of exhibitions in New York city, the daily, intense discussions with fellow artists, the availability of exhibition catalogues (many of which were in Robert Jacks’s SoHo studio), visiting, talking to artist-lecturers at art schools and the immediacy of the interview style and critical stance of *Avalanche* contributed to Davis’s experience of the lifestyle of being part of ‘a radical counter-public, namely the politicised, alternative-arts community centre in SoHo’.  

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http://www.thefreelibrary.com/In+on+the+ground+floor:+Avalanche+and+the+SoHo+art+scene,+1970- 

383 In his handwritten notes, Davis quotes from Arthur Koestler’s, *The Act of Creation*, Karl Jung’s *Man and his Symbols*, as well as quotes from Marcel Duchamp that may have been drawn from Arturo Schwarz’s catalogue raisonné *The complete works of Marcel Duchamp*.

384 Gwen Allen, ‘Against criticism: The artist interview in Avalanche magazine, 1970–76’, *Art Journal*, vol. 64, no. 3, autumn 2005, p. 51. Davis visited the following art schools in New York: Cooper Union, School of Visual Arts and Pratt Institute. Robert Jacks had catalogues of recent gallery and museum exhibitions, including curator Kynaston McShine’s *Information* at MOMA, which investigated post-object and boundary transgressions in recent art practice. As the MOMA archives website indicated: ‘In a memorandum to Arthur Drexler dated February 5 1970, Kynaston McShine described the exhibition: “As you know my exhibition ‘Information’ is primarily concerned with the strongest international art movement
SoHo’s autonomous artistic enclave was not only a discursive and practical laboratory, it was in Bourdieu’s observation a ‘society of artists … [whose] major function … [was] to be its own market’.  

In this milieu, with little money and no studio, Davis felt enormous pressure to make work himself, using found ‘poor’ materials: ‘I started using cardboard tubing that was just lying around in the streets, either setting it up in the street or in the tiny apartment.’

Davis also rediscovered drawing, which led to a series of notes on the structure of perspective (drawn from the long street views of tenements and warehouses in SoHo). A quote from Sol LeWitt’s ‘Sentences on conceptual art’ (probably drawn from the Anti-Illusion: Procedures/Materials catalogue) in the notebook attests to Davis’s intentions:

“If the artist carries through his idea and makes it into visible form, then all the stages in the process are of importance. The idea itself, even if made visual, is as much a work of art as any finished product. All the intervening steps – scribbles, sketches, drawings, failed work, models, studies, thoughts, conversations – are of interest. Those that show the thought processes of the artist are sometimes more interesting than the final product.”

A paraphrased quote from Arthur Koestler’s The Act of Creation written in Davis’s notebook provides further insight into his thinking: ‘There is a tribe which hunts horses and when they return from the hunting nobody asks them how many horses they have caught, but how much space they occupy.’ As Davis explained in an interview with Graeme Sturgeon, ‘Now as a sculptor that excited me considerably because it was another way of looking at numbers and systems … to put the emphasis on the space was a very interesting way of approaching the problem of containing the horses.’

His drawings elucidated incremental grid progressions based on sets of three, incorporating or ‘style’ of the moment which is ‘conceptual art,’ ‘art povera,’ ‘earthworks,’ ‘systems,’ ‘process art,’ etc. in its broadest definition. The exhibition will demonstrate the non-object quality of this work and the fact that it transcends the traditional categories of painting, sculpture, photography, film, drawing, prints, etc.”


387 Le Witt, cited in Davis notebook, 1972, Davis Estate.
388 Koestler, cited in Davis notebook, 1972, Davis Estate
389 John Davis, interview with Graeme Sturgeon, 1975, Graeme Sturgeon papers Box 7, NGV Research Library.
tonal variations of the graphite, as well as a series of drawings of cardboard tubes in a linear perspective ratio which he termed ‘reductive system’. Another set of drawings extended this particular spatial sequence and incorporated tonal gradations from black (completely covered tube drawing) to its opposite, a tube shape defined by its negative space. The spatial dialectic incorporating presence and absence was a contemporary concern of artists such as Robert Smithson, and his concept of site and non-site, rendering the awareness of space itself a potential subject of sculpture.

Davis set up three of the newsprint-covered and pencilled cardboard tubes on the cobblestone road in Greene Street, just outside Robert Jacks’s studio and had Jacks’s wife, Kerry, photograph the installation paying particular attention to the linear perspectival placement of the tubes in relation to each other and to the regimented tenements lining the long narrow street. The significance of this work, entitled Greene Street Piece, was not the tubes as objects, but the space that was activated by their placement as position markers within it (Figure 43). Davis was becoming aware that it was now possible to describe sculpture in ways other than objects and processes, that representing or describing space itself could be, at a meta-level, sculpture. As Jennifer Licht elaborated in her catalogue essay for the MOMA exhibition Spaces (30 December 1969 – 1 March 1970), a catalogue that Davis would most likely have seen and read at Robert Jacks’s studio:

[Space] was now being considered as an active ingredient, not simply to be represented but to be shaped and characterised by the artist and capable of involving and merging the viewer and art in a situation of greater scope and scale. In effect, one now enters the interior space of the work of art … The human presence and perception of the spatial context have become materials of art.\(^{390}\)

One senses that this realisation for Davis literally offered him room to move; a physical and conceptual engagement with a larger field of possibilities.

The Davis family left New York in early May, travelling to Canada, Ireland and, via Kombi campervan, through Europe for five and a half months before renting an

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apartment in London for two months, from mid October, until their departure just before Christmas 1972. In June they spent over two days at Harald Szeeman’s Documenta 5 in Kassel, Germany, where they met Graeme Sturgeon (exhibition manager at the NGV), who as part of his Gulbenkian Fellowship, had assisted in the installation of the exhibition and assisted the Californian conceptual artist John Baldessari. Although Davis lamented in a letter back to Noel Hutchison in Sydney: ‘Where does all this place Australian artists? Kassel 5 points up the great diversity of work being done and the lack of information available in Australia about what’s going on’, his assessment of his own work in relation to the diversity presented at Documenta was more resolved:

After all this viewing I feel much better about my own thoughts I’d evolved over the past year and it only remains to toughen up and attack problems more intensely and [sic] exhaustingly.

Unlike the intense experience that was SoHo, Davis did not have the same introductions into the British avant-garde art scene, nor a network of Australian expatriates to discuss ideas with in London. Although he visited four art schools with sculpture workshops, the most prestigious at St Martins School of Arts, Hornsey College of Arts, the Royal College of Arts and Chelsea School of Arts, his notes were less detailed in terms of curriculum comparisons and commentary than those from his visits to schools in Los Angeles and New York.

Davis saw a major Barnett Newman retrospective at the Tate Gallery and, possibly more importantly, although he missed the Nigel Greenwood Gallery exhibition The Book as Art: 1960–1972, he was shown the exhibits in the gallery stockroom. It was Sol Le Witt’s Four Basic Kinds of Straight Lines, published in 1969, that elicited diagrammatic instructions in his notebook for a set of 12 x 12 inch drawn graphite squares, filled with combinations of straight lines: a methodical and somewhat obsessive process.

391 Davis had met and talked with John Baldessari at CAL Arts in Los Angeles earlier in 1972.
392 John Davis, letter to Noel Hutchison, 9 November 1972, Noel Hutchison archive (first quote); John Davis, letter to Robert Jacks, 16 July 1972, Robert Jacks archive.
393 Davis was clearly working through calculations to see what actual space a completed series of drawings would occupy. Based on his notes, he calculated that in order to cover all possible permutations of 6 x 6 inch graphite square with 1/8 inch spacing between the straight lines, that 48 squares were required to complete the series and this would total ‘24 feet plus spacing in length’, artist notebook, Davis Estate.
LeWitt’s obsessive drawing of every permutation of straight lines within sets of squares seemed to reinforce Davis’s need for ‘repetitive gestures aimed at overcoming the alienation of all conceptual, abstract space’ as a way of working through his ideas, while he was travelling. 394 Robert Smithson often used geological and mapping terminology to describe his process. For Davis, the integration of space, duration and process as components of his working method, created a kind of isomorphic mapping between his experience and the representation of that experience in his work.

Background to 1973–1974

By 1972, the once seemingly invincible federal Liberal-Country Party Coalition Government, beset by internal rivalries and leadership contests, was buffeted by the impact of global crises and increasingly perceived as tired and out-of-touch with the Australian populace. 395 The post-war baby boom generation was coming of voting age and had made their initial presence felt in the 1969 federal election with increased support for the Labor Party under its new leader, Gough Whitlam. 396 Labor won its first federal election in twenty-three years on 5 December 1972 with an ambitious program of legislative and policy reform principally aimed at promoting ‘equality of opportunity’ for all Australians including the introduction of universal health care, investment in education from pre-school to tertiary level, curriculum development, the abolition of student fees at universities, colleges of advanced education and technical colleges, the

395 The political and economic scene in Australia between 1971 and 1974 was overshadowed by a series of international crises: the devaluation of most major currencies with the demise of the Bretton Woods Accord, rising inflation and unemployment which led to a global stock market crash from January 1973 to December 1974, itself exacerbated by the OPEC oil shock of late 1973. By 1972, Australia was experiencing rising inflation and high unemployment levels, the highly speculative mining boom had faded, the devaluation of the dollar was causing balance of trade issues leading to claims that Australia was experiencing one of the lowest growth rates in the developed world. Transcript of Leader of Labor Party, the Hon. E. G. Whitlam’s policy speech, ‘It’s time for leadership’, 13 November 1972, n.p. http://australianpolitics.com/elections/1972/72-11-13_it%27s-time.shtml, viewed 15 March 2009.
396 By 1972 during the lead-up to the federal election later in the year, the concurrence of the McMahon Liberal-Country Party government’s infighting, indecision and paternalism with Labor’s televisuial election advertisement ‘It’s time’, featuring an upbeat and catchy soundtrack, sung by a young woman who was backed by a chorus of well known actors, musicians and celebrities, all wearing ‘It’s time’ badges, provided stark evidence of a major generational shift underway.
promise to provide aboriginal land rights, environmental conservation, urban and regional infrastructure development and the arts. Of much symbolic importance to this young generation of new voters and their parents was the promise to immediately abolish conscription. There was a definite sense of empowerment of a new urban, educated and younger generation of Australians, who had shaken off the post-war shackles and were eager to participate in determining Australia’s future.

By August 1972 the long reigning, autocratic Victorian premier Henry Bolte retired, handing the leadership of the governing Liberal-Country Party to his more urbane successor, Rupert Hamer. Hamer’s tenure as the Victorian premier was founded on environmental and cultural concerns. Hamer established a Ministry for the Arts under his portfolio and in 1973 appointed Eric Westbrook as its inaugural director. Westbrook’s new position and his department was symptomatic of an expanding professional and bureaucratised managerial class within the cultural sector, driven by the rapidly developing and complex network of services and organisations that would characterise the next decade in Australia and provide employment to the increased number of tertiary trained arts graduates.

On Australia Day 1973, prime minister Whitlam announced a new interim Australian Council for the Arts made up of twenty-four members, a number of whom were prominent artists. Apart from announcing the new Council’s principal objectives as the pursuit of excellence and broader participation in the arts, he indicated that it would exhibit a clear preference for a ‘balanced but strong programme of encouragement for experiment and development’ based upon ‘rapid expansion in the arts over the last few years’. The Council would be served by seven artform boards – theatre, visual and plastic arts, music, literature, crafts, film and television and Aboriginal arts – with control of their own budget allocations, policy development and staffing requirements. Whitlams’s commitment to the Council’s independence of government, ‘arms-length’ in

397 Westbrook was one of the principal instigators of Victoria’s cultural infrastructure expansion under Bolte.
its decision-making, his commitment to ‘experiment and development’ and to relatively autonomous artform boards, was founded on the basis of peer-review mechanisms for consultation, selection and policy development.\textsuperscript{399} The establishment of the Visual Arts Board (VAB) in effect created a nation-wide ‘need’ and network for a peer-review process to distribute money and status.

In the visual arts in Australia, 1974 was characterised by a massive and unprecedented injection of funds in the form of VAB grants, directly to artists. Many of the sculptors who benefited from this first funding round had part-time teaching positions. Backed by the Labor Government’s commitment to access of opportunity, this increased financial security and status offered through the education system gave rise to a sense that it was possible to live a sustainable life as an artist in Australia. The Opposition’s resistance to Labor’s new policies led to a double dissolution of federal parliament just seventeen months into Labor’s elected term. In May 1974, Labor was re-elected with a safe majority, possibly with the assistance of a new generation, as the voting age had been reduced to eighteen years of age (many of whom were the beneficiaries of Labor’s education and arts policies). Labor’s commitment to the arts, particularly its financial backing, was regarded by the Australian art world as heralding in a cultural renaissance. For the younger generation of artists and art students (primarily metropolitan centred) whose votes in 1972 and 1974 had contributed to two electoral wins, Labor was clearly identified as the party that best represented a sustainable field of arts practice in Australia.

Meanwhile in February 1973, the Sunraysia district, like much of Victoria, central-western NSW and South Australia, was emerging from a severe drought. The new Federal Labor Government had made water conservation and regional development a policy objective. The socio-political landscape, as much as the ecological and economic landscape of the region, was in a state of flux. Against this volatile backdrop, the saltbush river flats (that held the dream of becoming Australia’s first open-air sculpture park)

\textsuperscript{399} ibid.
would be transformed into the next Mildura triennial event, Sculpturscape ’73. The professional dispositions of sculptor-educators like John Davis and art gallery directors like Tom McCullough, which helped to define their positions within the newly emergent field of visual arts production can be mapped upon the parched playing field that was Sculpturscape ’73.

**Sculpturscape ’73**

The fifth Mildura Sculpture Triennial was scheduled to open on 7 April 1973. An especially celebratory event, with no Adelaide Festival that year, it was the largest, major arts gathering to occur soon after the triumphant announcement of the new Australian Council for the Arts and the Labor Party electoral victory. It also attracted added curiosity given the threatened sculptors’ boycott.\(^{400}\) The event was launched by the new premier of Victoria, Rupert Hamer and included a record number of sculptors, students, supportive locals, members of the VAB, and other members of the mushrooming Australian visual arts world. The following prescient observation indicated the general awareness of an emergent new autonomous field, by those present at the opening:

> Artists, critics, commercial or museum interests, exhibition organisers and the public, who come together with works of art and a particular site to form an entirely new entity. Such an entity has a specific nature and set of characteristics that is the sum of its parts, and at the same time more than the sum of its parts, because a new meaning has been engendered.\(^{401}\)

‘Autonomy’ was also a word that had a common currency amongst this gathering. Artists of all persuasions were advocating that the individual boards of the new arts council retain essential autonomy from the overarching Council and that the numbers of practising artists be increased to ensure their control of the agenda. Autonomy was increasingly being sought by the professional staffs of the various regional galleries in

\(^{400}\) The reasons for the threatened boycott will be explored in detail in the studies of the director Tom McCullough and sculptor John Davis in this chapter.

\(^{401}\) Margaret Huxley, ‘Trends in Australian sculpture as revealed by the Mildura Triennial’, op. cit., p. 2.
Victoria from their publicly appointed, volunteer boards of trustees.\textsuperscript{402} The control sought by the sculptors during the threatened boycott prior to the opening of Sculptur'scape '73 was a further example of the exercise of artistic autonomy. Enshrining cultural policy as a central plank of the government’s legislative reform ensured a level of autonomy from the market. Cultural policy was elevated both in terms of money and power through the new arts council and its alignment with new education policies. A complex institutional network had emerged, with greatly enhanced symbolic and economic power.

Sculptur'scape '73 saw individuals, groups and institutional representatives (public and private), negotiating and competing (in fact, trading their various forms of capital) for preferential positions within this dynamic field of artistic production.

**Selection process and the contest for control**

The invitational format, which had been so successful in 1970, continued with McCullough’s list based upon recommendations from a selected group of advisors. However, his insistence that the only exhibiting space available was the challenging environment of the river floodplain below the Arts Centre, and not the formal, consecrated boundaries of the gallery space and manicured lawns, added an unexamined element of self-selection to the process. This doubled the effect of selectivity applied by McCullough and his advisors.

There was a quantitative jump in the number of exhibitors and works at Sculptur'scape '73: a total of eighty-five artists showing 130 works, of which 70 per cent of the participating sculptors were aged between twenty-five and thirty-five years of age. There was also an uncatalogued section for student works. However, a closer investigation of the participants, where they came from and their ages and experience is more revealing. Of the eighty-five participants, Victoria represented one-third; however, of the thirty-six

\textsuperscript{402}At the 1972 Regional Galleries Association of Victoria (the renamed PGAV) annual meeting held in Geelong, the gallery directors established a sub-committee (of which Tom McCullough was appointed secretary), of directors and managers in order to discuss professional matters, such as touring exhibitions, separate from the formal trustee meeting. McCullough, written correspondence with author, 11 December 2007.
participants born after 1945 (who qualify as baby boomers), half were from Victoria. The baby-boomer generation was a particularly significant cluster as this group would have graduated from university or technical college during the period that great changes were beginning to be initiated in the tertiary education systems, when the issue of improving education and training as well as raising the status and salaries of art teachers and artists was in its ascendency, and when the matter of government support for the arts was gaining traction. The specificity of the high rate of Victorian participation within this age group is of real interest. It cannot just be accounted for because of the relative proximity of Melbourne to Mildura. What is more revealing is that by 1973, of the twenty-six institutions charged with teaching art at a tertiary level nationally, twelve were in Victoria, and the majority of those were in Melbourne.\textsuperscript{403} This represented a major investment by both state and federal governments concentrated in one state – the state that by 1973 had fully implemented the transfer of approved technical art colleges to the college of advanced education system of the VIC. The largest state, by population, NSW, had only six colleges by comparison and had not begun the transfer of art schools from technical colleges to the new parallel CAE system. Victorian participation was skewed towards young recent graduates where, for many, representation at Sculpture\textsuperscript{a}scape ‘73 was their first professional exhibition. If some of these young graduates were already teachers or wanting to pursue teaching, exhibitions were a necessary part of what constituted professional practice. What was more significant, participation at Sculpture\textsuperscript{a}scape ’73 was based on an informal, though nonetheless recognised peer-review process because of McCullough’s advisors’ recommendations.

The heavy skewing of the Victorian numbers towards people born after 1945 is almost a complete reversal of the participation figures from NSW and New Zealand.\textsuperscript{404} The relative lack of presence of established sculptors, and particularly sculptor-educators

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\textsuperscript{403} Margaret Wookey, ‘Tertiary art education: a survey of some aspects of Tertiary Art and Design Education and Specialist Art Teacher Education in Australia 1974’, Visual Arts Board, Australian Council for the Arts, Sydney, 1974, p. 2. Of the 26 institutions, the allocation by state were: Victoria 12, New South Wales 6, Queensland 3, Tasmania 2, South Australia 1 and Western Australia 1. The National Art School at Canberra was counted in the NSW figures.

\textsuperscript{404} Participation by state: Victoria: pre-1945, 9; post-1945, 20; NSW: pre-1945, 17; post-1945, 9; South Australia: pre-1945, 6; post-1945, 6; NZ: pre-1945 10; post-1945, 4.
\end{flushright}
(such as Centre 5) compared with the other state-based participants, is worth noting. What is striking about the Victorian contingent is the homogeneity of age and experience. Leaving aside the physical aspect of Sculpturscape itself acting as a barrier to participation by certain sculptors (even if invited), most of Victoria’s twenty-nine participants were recent graduates of an art school system that was undergoing rapid growth from the mid 1960s and many were now art teachers in the new tertiary system of colleges of advanced education. Apart from Marc Clark, Ti Parks and Ken Scarlett, what is absent is anyone trained before 1965. This indicates a radical rupture in the education system and the consequent interplay of very different sets of dispositions acting as selection pressures for the Victorian selectors and participants.

It is clear that the shift in the definition of ‘professional’ and ‘sculptor’ from someone who exhibited in the commercial gallery system and sold their work or accepted commissions to someone who was appropriately qualified and recognised as such by the new education system was evidence of a major shift in the power balance. Power is capital and the exercise of it contributed to shaping a new direction for the institution of the Mildura triennials. The selection further confirmed the elision between ‘experimental’ and ‘new art’ and the burgeoning tertiary education sector. The Victorian selection pattern was a portent of developments that would take place throughout the 1970s as each state transferred the teaching of art from departments of education and technical training to the various state entities responsible for the new tertiary colleges of advanced education.

The Labor Government’s new cultural policy, which was linked to and underpinned by a financial and policy commitment to expanding educational opportunities, particularly in the tertiary sector, was possibly an unrecognised influence in the selections. Clearly, the educated and informed emerging generation were producing the ‘new art’. The emphasis on student participation – whether from art schools, high schools and universities – as assistants and visitors lent further weight to this claim, creating a new audience who would be trained to recognise these new artistic manifestations.
Many of the selectors were also participants. These included, from SASA, Bill Clements, Bill Gregory, Owen Broughton and Tony Bishop; from Sydney, those grouped around Ron Robertson Swann and Ian McKay at the East Sydney Technical College (National Art School) and those in Glebe centred on the University of Sydney, including Noel Hutchison, Noel Sheridan and Donald Brook and, from the University’s Department of Architecture, Mike Nicholson and Marr Grounds. In Melbourne, some of the participating selectors were based around the Hampton area: Clive Murray-White, Ken Scarlett, John Davis; all were teaching. McCullough still relied on recommendations from Daniel Thomas, Patrick McCaughey and Lenton Parr.

Many of the sculptors brought their students with them: Ross Grounds brought students from Diamond Creek Technical School, Ron Robertson Swann and Ian McKay brought sculpture students from East Sydney Technical College, Ken Scarlett brought students from Melbourne Teachers College, Robert Parr brought students from the Canberra Art School and Owen Broughton, Bill Clements and Bert Flugelman brought students from SASA.

**Selected works**

Donald Brook’s review of the triennial addressed a new mood in Australian art practice:

> The most striking thing about the 1973 triennial is the victory of what people are already starting to call, “the new art”. The “old art” of sculpture was an art of more or less portable objects that could be seen at once, understood without research, bought, carried away … and stored … The new art is not primarily the manifestation of a positive doctrine … It is rather a range of objects, activities and ideas formed in general by negating or inverting one or more of the features of the traditionally established paradigm of art.[my italics]⁴⁰⁵

The diversity of contemporary approaches embraced environmental, earthworks, process and ritual, conceptual, film and documentation and some early feminist works. The greatest challenge as outlined by McCullough was the terrain, the powerful presence of the place itself. Hutchison observed the overwhelming dominance of the landscape in

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comparison to the sculpture works: ‘size was not much of an aid in countering the effects of the harshness and scale of the site’. Sculpturscape ‘73 posed a formidable challenge to the mainly urban-based artists and students.

The year 1973 saw films being included as artworks for the first time, exploring processes of duration rather than scale. They were scheduled in the small theatre at the Centre. Daniel Thomas had observed in 1970 that some of the most interesting, experimental artwork was being produced, not by artists and students at art school but by architecture students. Five members of the Department of Architecture at the University Sydney participated in 1973: Marr Grounds, senior lecturer; Imants Tillers, part-time tutor in Design; Aleks Danko, part-time tutor in the Department; Alex Tzannes was completing his honours year and Michael Nicholson (junior) was in his third year of architecture. Nicholson senior, who had previously shown in the 1967 Mildura Sculpture Prize, was also a part-time lecturer at the Department of Building and Architecture at the University of New South Wales and would later, in 1974, take up a temporary lectureship in the history of architecture at the Power Institute. Domenico de Clario had also studied architecture for two years at Melbourne University between 1966 and 1967 and had won an Italian Government Scholarship, allowing him to study painting and printmaking in Milan and Urbino. He returned to Melbourne in 1969, having been directly exposed to the arte povera movement; by the time of Sculpturscape ’73, he was a lecturer at the School of Art, Preston Institute of Technology. What these artists brought with them was their exposure to systems theory based upon recursive processes that enabled them to define their relationship with their environment. Hans Haacke’s comment that ‘a sculpture that physically reacts to its environment is no longer to be regarded as an

406 Noel Hutchison, ‘Sculpturscape ’73’, *Art and Australia*, vol. 11, no. 1, spring 1973, p. 78.
407 Tillers particularly credits the influence of *General Systems Theory* by the biologist von Bertalanffy. These architectural students and lecturers would have been familiar with the EAT group (Experiments in Art and Technology) and the writings of Jack Burnham through magazine articles (especially in *Artforum* and *Studio International*) and exhibition catalogues. Burnham had written an article for *Artforum’s* September 1969 edition entitled ‘Real-time systems’ and in a later article in *Leonardo* commented: ‘Computer developments have made real-time, real situation modelling advantageous for ecology, business and urban planning … many artists have chosen to work with the real world, including the art system, so that a monitored or documented situation becomes their art.’ See his ‘Comments on Mallary’s note’, *Leonardo*, vol. 3, 1970, p. 265.
object … It thus merges with the environment in a relationship that is better understood as a ‘system’ of interdependent processes’, embraced the response of these artists to the challenge offered by the environment at Sculpturscape.408

Donald Brook and Marr Grounds had trained as artists through the university systems in Britain and the United States respectively; their arrival in NSW coincided with an increasing pressure for the professional training of artists to be taken out of the technical college system with its emphasis on practical skill sets and placed within an autonomous tertiary system. The establishment of the Sydney University Art Workshops (colloquially referred to as the Tin Sheds) was a joint initiative of Brook and Grounds to try and incorporate an experimental kind of art research enterprise within the Power Institute, in sly defiance of Bernard Smith.409 Although in principle open to any member or student from any faculty, with respect to Sculpturscape ’73, it was the link with architecture students and lecturers that was significant. Thus, the links between the Tin Sheds and Mildura and between the University of Sydney and Adelaide institutions were established as early as 1970.410

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410 The expanding universities became important employers for artists. Aleks Danco, on completion of his Diploma of Fine Arts in Sculpture in 1971 at SASA, came to Sydney. Danco was offered a part-time tutoring position in the Department of Architecture at the University of Sydney between 1972 and 1973, working alongside Imants Tillers and Marr Grounds; at the Tin Sheds with Joan Grounds, Bert Flugelman, Noel Sheridan and Tim Burns; and associating with Donald Brooks and David Saunders from the Power Institute of Fine Arts; many of these people participated in Sculpturscape ’73 at Mildura. The drift south to Adelaide began with Bert Flugelman in early 1973 when he accepted a position to teach sculpture at SASA. By 1974, Donald Brook and David Saunders had been offered professorships in their respective fields, Brooks being offered the Foundation Chair of Visual Arts at Flinders University in Adelaide. Based on his experience of the difficulties of setting up an experimental ‘laboratory’ within a University system, Brook formed a group of like-minded individuals in the Adelaide art scene and established an independent space, the Experimental Art Foundation, which came into existence at the end of 1974. Noel Sheridan, then teaching at the Tin Sheds and also at the National Art School (East Sydney Technical College) was invited to become the foundation’s director in early 1975. In their new configurations, they gathered at the 6th Mildura Sculpture Triennial in March 1975.
As noted above, theoretical incursions from disciplines outside art history were evident in 1973. Marr Grounds’s interest in environmental theory, flowcharts and modelling systems, part of the curriculum he taught at the Department of Architecture, was evident in the diagrams for his artworks and in the work of his associates who attended Sculpturscape ’73. Donald Brook began to develop his concept of ‘post-object art’ in 1969 with ‘Flight from the object’, the second Power Institute public lecture. ‘Post-object’ as a term appeared in Jack Burnham’s writings in the late 1960s; it was also used by Donald Kashan in his article, ‘The seventies: post-object art’.

This followed an article by Donald Brook, also in the September 1970 issue of Studio International, referencing the impact of Christo and Wrapped Coast on the Australian art scene in 1969: ‘The post-object era was both initiated and internationally sponsored by around 1970 – already locally anticipated, but not yet locally identified or understood.’

In writing the catalogue essay for a post-object art exhibition at the Experimental Art Foundation in 1976, he described his position as starting from a ‘point from which many Australian post-object artists have started: a point of deep disenchantment with the art they have inherited – with its forms, its techniques, its attitudes, its surrounding institutions and its meaning. The disenchantment was not with its style.’

His concluding paragraph began manifesto-like: ‘We take it to be the proper role of art – a role that Post-object art already begins to adopt – to provide experimental models or metaphors of possible forms of life.

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that are public in principle and subject to ongoing criticism."\textsuperscript{414} For many artists, Sculpturscape ’73 offered an experimental field to test these possibilities.

Many of the works in the Sculpturscape area exhibited qualities that were the antithesis of object-based art as outlined in Donald Brook’s article ‘Post-object art’ published just before the launch of Sculpturscape ’73.\textsuperscript{415} They were ephemeral, materially ‘poor’ (making use of found, industrial or naturally occurring materials) and lacked the artisanal skills of moulding, casting and carving usually attributed to sculptors. Many of the works tended to be dispersed and open-ended as opposed to the discrete, closed and compact works of traditional sculpture. Although, this ‘new art’ required the active participation and engagement of the viewer, offering new meanings through new contexts, more specifically, it required a particular kind of educated audience that was inseparably linked to the artists and the new definitional preferences of what art could be.

The Sculpturscape site was marginal public land; a disused rubbish tip, scarified after severe drought, that was used by the local youth for private trysts and drinking parties. The Council’s acceptance of the feasibility study to produce a sophisticated, landscaped sculpture site with facilities such as boardwalks, regenerated native plantings, a restaurant, amphitheatre and picnic areas provided the basis for McCullough to secure local support and state government funding to begin the first stage of reclaiming this neglected area and aligning it with the cultural centre of Mildura. Many artists responded enthusiastically to the challenge: ‘It must have been the environment. I created another one [work] as a result of being there’ and ‘that site, what it can do and what it can make sculptors do, is its most important aspect’.\textsuperscript{416}

However, a number of works suffered from the harsh environmental thematic of the ‘post-Christo landscape’ that was Sculpturscape.\textsuperscript{417} The display of small object-based

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{414} ibid, p.14
\textsuperscript{416} Quotes from John Armstrong and Ken Unsworth respectively in Huxley, ‘Trends in Australian Sculpture as revealed by the Mildura Sculpture Triennial’, \textit{op.cit.}, appendix I.
\textsuperscript{417} Tom McCullough, letter to Donald Brook, 22 September 1972, Donald Brook archive.}
works in flapping orange marquees destroyed the integrity of a number of works. Neither
the gallery nor its lawns, the consecrated art precinct as far as some artists and many
locals were concerned, were offered for display. This ‘experiment … to move a serious,
selective exhibition completely away from a museum-bound atmosphere’, to create a new
context for sculpture, had been McCullough’s intention.\footnote{418}

**Audience: public or professional**

For a particularly vocal group of locals, the use of the site for experimental, ephemeral
work – ‘a concentration camp filled with unspeakable junk’ produced by ‘long haired
gits’ – confirmed their complete rejection of the cultural park concept and led to a heated
Council debate about the future of sculpture triennials in Mildura.\footnote{419} Although the
triennials of 1975 and 1978 would make available the gallery, lawns and Sculpturscape
area as well as specific sites in the town for exhibits, the challenge of the site as a ‘new
context’ for art-making and exhibiting was a defining moment for the Mildura Sculpture
Triennials.

The context-dependency – whether environmental, social, political or process – and
viewer participation and experience required in the creation of meaning for these new
works, was much in evidence. Participation extended to the process of installation
followed by discussion and critique of works by many artists and students. Importantly,
for many students this constituted a process of professional development as they
associated with other students, artist-teachers, art historians and theorists. For some of the
general public, this ‘new kind of confrontation’ with contemporary sculptural practice
was beyond comprehension.\footnote{420} They were resistant to this new art and its complicity with


\footnote{420}{Tom McCullough, Introduction, *Sculpturscape ’73: The Mildura Sculpture Triennial*, exhibition
catalogue, Mildura Arts Centre, Mildura, 1973, n.p. This simple black and white catalogue came out at the
time of the opening of the 5th Triennial. It differs from the part-colour catalogue, *Sculpturscape ’73: An Exhibition in Mildura, Australia*, Mildura Arts Centre, Mildura, Vic., 1975, produced with Australia Council funds, which was launched at the 1975 Mildura Sculpture Triennial.}
the ordinary, dispersed and discarded. A lot of money had been spent developing the Mildura Arts Centre with paid professional staff. They wanted to be elevated with durable, discrete sculptures of quality and felt palpably excluded, ‘conned’ even, by these incomprehensible works.\footnote{There was much coverage and exchange of opinions in several issues of Studio International magazine in 1972 as a result of the Peter Stuyvesant Foundation support for 16 British object sculptors to produce and install works in public spaces throughout Britain, to mixed receptions by the public. Two works both located in Cambridge were subject to particular public outrage and vandalism. Although the project’s intention, and thus the intended brief to sculptors, was ‘to explore the potential of relating sculpture to what has become a largely ignored context – i.e. an urban situation and its \textit{public}', the disparity between public and sculptor was evident. See Jeremy Rees & Tony Stokes, ‘Public Sculpture?', \textit{Studio International} vol. 185, no. 952, February 1973, p. 47. The attitudes expressed by some sculptors indicated that the public were either not considered as part of a dialogue or they were the problem: ‘The problem of public sculpture is largely with the public – not with sculpture’ and ‘I didn’t really consider the nature of the opportunity as being other than a chance to extend my own experience of sculpture.’ Lawrence Alloway’s response: ‘In all these statements very simple views of autonomy of the artist and the work are maintained which, so far as public sculpture is concerned, is like talking Welsh on prime time.’ See Lawrence Alloway, ‘The public sculpture problem’, \textit{Studio International}, vol. 184, no. 948, October 1972, pp. 123–124; also Jeremy Rees, ‘Public Sculpture’, \textit{Studio International}, vol. 184, no. 946, July–August 1972, pp. 10–40. The British public response mirrored similar feelings of alienation in Mildura.} Clearly the audience was not the disenfranchised regional public. Specifically, the artists were responding to the conceptual and physical challenge of Sculpturscape with works aimed at a metropolitan, art-informed audience. With the election of the Whitlam Labor Government just four months earlier, and the consequent boost of confidence to the art world and the Australian Council for the Arts, combined with the national interest generated by the threatened boycott against the French nuclear tests, the Triennial provided a celebratory gathering point for the Australian visual arts world. Functioning like a ‘salon’, Sculpturscape ’73 enabled ‘genuine articulations between the fields’ of political power, education and art that would ‘help to determine the direction of the generosities of state patronage’ that became fully manifest in 1973.\footnote{Bourdieu, \textit{The Rules of Art}, op. cit., pp. 51, 48.}

Much had happened since the 1970 Triennial. The AGNSW reopened at the end of 1972 after a major refurbishment and the Sydney Opera House was scheduled for opening later in 1973 with the first Biennale of Sydney to open with it. Both the NGV and AGNSW senior curators were planning contemporary exhibitions and the VAB was preparing to
select artists to represent Australia at the Sao Paulo Biennale, also later in 1973. For the participating sculptors, this audience, this professional grouping, presented an important opportunity for professional development and networking at the gathering at Sculpturscape.

**Acquisitions and Grants to artists**

The purchase panel for the Mildura Arts Centre collection for 1973 comprised John Bailey, director of the AGSA and VAB chairman, Professor Patrick Mc Caulhey, Head of Visual Arts, Monash University and VAB member, and McCullough. The works purchased, contrary to the range of works on display, were object-based, even if pushing the boundaries of that distinction. They included: Tony Bishop, *Arcadia*; Maureen Creaser, *Chest of Drawers*; John Davis, *Unrolled Piece*; Maree Horner, *Probe*; Ian McKay, *Cascade*; Kevin Mortensen, *Objects in a Landscape*; Clive Murray-White, *J.E.N* (Figures 45, 55, 58).

Continuing the largesse with four $500 grants, McCullough reported, ‘Non-permanent works awarded VAB grants by the Purchase Panel’ were awarded to Peter Cole, *Pool*; Domenico de Clario, *Untitled*; Ross Grounds, *Environmental Shaft*; and Michael W. Nicholson, *Saxhorn Variations*, a participatory event (Figures 51 & 54). The significant and generous funding allocations from the Australia Council were in stark contrast to previous triennials where funds for prizes and acquisitions were raised through local donations and some corporate sponsorship. Fund allocations for acquisitions were further highlighted during Sculpturscape ’73, when the Mildura Arts Centre became ‘the recipient of a $120,000 memorial bequest … to be spent on purchasing painting and

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423 Daniel Thomas and Frances McCarthy curated *Recent Australian Art*, 18 October to 18 November 1973, at AGNSW; and Brian Finemore and Graeme Sturgeon curated *Object and Idea: new work by [six] Australian artists* at the NGV.

sculpture’. Five works from the triennial were purchased, bringing the total amount of funds provided to purchase works that year to $15,000.425

There were problems: Tim Burns’s Minefield was banned as the artist managed to injure himself on one of his mines. A report in The National Times also noted that John Bailey, throwing a rock into the installation to see if it would explode one of the mines and was caught by a workman.426 The Council ordered that all remaining mines be exploded so as not to cause any public harm; apparently Burns’s response was: ‘I’ve created the problem for you to solve.’427 Peter Cole’s Pool was closed by the Department of Agriculture because it contravened quarantine regulations by not having the correct phylloxera-free soil clearance certificate, and rumours surrounded Dave Morrissey’s A small irrigation area after he was suspected of growing marihuana (Figures 54 & 52). Aleks Danko’s multi-media performance-improvisation, Bosanko Danko Friends in Fete, at the Art Centre Theatre, which included video-taped reactions of the city’s response to art, met with hostility. Oranges, originally intended as a symbol of goodwill and peaceful, participatory community art activity, were hurled back on stage.428

425 The five works purchased from the bequest funds were by Owen Broughton, Marc Clark, John Gardner, Vlase Nikoleski and Bernard Sahm. See Huxley, ‘Trends in Australian sculpture as revealed by the Mildura Sculpture Triennial’, op. cit., p. 20. The total expenditure on acquisitions of $15,000 at current value is equivalent to $107,300. This represented a considerable expenditure on contemporary Australian art, let alone sculpture, for any publicly funded institution at that time.
427 ibid. However for Burns, the destruction of the minefield by Council workers was not a failure. He had proved his point: any physical engagement with the work would result in its eventual destruction.
Images have been removed due to copyright reasons
From previous page:

**Figure 44**: top, John Armstrong, *Big Rack* 1972, creosoted hardwood, varnished toilet seats, hardware, 213.5 x 457.5 x 122 cms.

**Figure 45**: middle, Tony Bishop, *Arcadia* 1972, aluminium and steel, 3 units of 183, 91.5 x 91.5 cms. Collection Mildura Arts Centre. In the background, Chris Carney, *4 plus 4, Time Piece* 1973, ciment fondu and welded steel, 396.5 x 91.5 x 91.5 cms each unit.

**Figure 46**: bottom, Marc Clark, *Portal* 1973, painted steel, 327.86 x 274.5 x 183 cms. Visible in the background is Eva Pachuka’s, *Horn* 1973, fibreglass, 335.5 x 213.5 (diameter) cms.

This page:

**Figure 47**: Kaye Dineen, *Untitled* 1973, fibreglass, flock, tulle and sequins, 305 x 151.5 cms main sculpture with scattered pieces of variable dimensions.

**Figure 48**: Marlene Creaser, *Transparent Plastic* 1973, plastic tubing and rope, 244 x 228.2 (diameter) cms.
Figure 49: top, Bert Flugelman, *Australian Cottage* 1973, reinforcing mesh, 152 x 915 x 915 cms.

Figure 50: middle, Noelene Lucas, *Untitled* 1973, angle iron, plastic, satin and mixed media, 305 x 305 x 183 cms.

Figure 51: bottom, Ross Grounds, installation shot, *Untitled* [later accounts refer to this as *Environmental Well*] 1973, wood, galvanised iron, hessian bags filled with sand, wire, rope, mesh and creatures [doves]. Depth: 610 cms, diameter: 244 cms. Photo: Ken Scarlett.
Figures 52a and 52b: top, David Morrisey, ‘J962’ 1973, galvanised iron and wood. Dimensions according to the catalogue entry: “8 to 16 cubic metres”.

Figure 53: bottom, Ken Unsworth, installation shot, Concrete Slab Construction 1973, compacted earth, reinforced concrete, 350.29 x 701.5 x 289.29 cms.
Figure 54: top, Peter Cole, *Pool* 1973, light blue tiles, stainless steel tubing, water, water filter system, chlorine tablets, grass, cyclone wire fencing and sprinklers, 200.78 x 366 x 391.40 cms.

Figure 55: bottom, Ian McKay, *Cascade* 1973, painted steel, 315.16 x 112.64 x 315.16 cms. Collection Mildura Arts Centre.
Figure 56: top, John Davis, *Tree Piece* 1973, installation using a group of six trees on site, papier mache, green baling twine, polythene sheeting with pockets filled with grass clippings, latex sheet, small sticks, canvas, dimensions variable.

Figure 57: bottom, John Davis setting up *Unrolled Piece* at Sculpturscape ’73.
Figure 58: left, John Davis, *Unrolled* 1973, canvas with pockets, 49 ceramic rods partly glazed with opaque white. Canvas: 1525 cm (l), each ceramic rod 40 cm (l). Collection Mildura Arts Centre.

Figure 59: right, John Davis, *Tubes and Box* 1971 later renamed *Redaction*, wood, low fired ceramic with white glaze, latex. Box: 10 x 58 x 38 cm, Ceramic rods: 4cm (d) x 35 cm(l). Collection Kevin Mortensen.
Funding in 1973

The level of political support and funding for cultural activities in 1973, federally and in the states of Victoria and South Australia particularly, was to have a huge impact on the realisation of Sculpturscape ’73. 429 Premier Rupert Hamer established the Victorian Ministry for the Arts in 1973 under the directorship of Eric Westbrook. Gordon Thomson replaced Westbrook as the director of the NGV. Under the new Federal Labor Government, the Australian Council for the Arts was given a huge funding injection. The new members of the VAB included AGSA director John Bailey as its chairman, Patrick McCaughey and others. Like the two most senior art bureaucrats in Victoria, Westbrook and Thompson, all were cognisant and supportive of the Mildura Sculpture Triennials as major national events that encouraged young artists and experimental practices. This was the type of activity and innovation that required government patronage. McCullough was a respected regional gallery director, well known to both agencies and very adept at raising sponsorship to support developments in the sculpture triennial programs.

As Patrick McCaughey noted in his review of Sculpturscape ’73:

perhaps the most momentous aspect of the whole exhibition was the development of a new relation between State and Federal authorities over assistance for such a venture. To a generous grant of $15,000 from the State Government … the Australian Council of the Arts gave $10,000 for awards and for a full documentation of this major event in Australian art. 430

Premier Hamer, enthusing at the opening of Sculpturscape ’73, announced that ‘it was time for governments to give assistance to artists and that Australians were ready for such support and would endorse higher grants’. 431 In his reminiscence of Sculpturscape ’73, McCullough summed up the euphoria of the opening event: ‘The Murray River reflected

429 ‘While it did not fund artists directly, the Bolte government [had] assembled a public structure which would support the experimental and avant-garde activity of the years that followed.’ Christopher Heathcote, A Quiet Revolution: The rise of Australian Art 1946–1968, Text Publishing, Melbourne, 1995, p. 50.
an enormous full moon that encouraged talk of a renaissance in sculpture under the new Australia Council’s patronage.\textsuperscript{432}

Concerns were raised by several ratepayers at what was perceived to be City Council’s underwriting of the costs of mounting the triennial. However, Cr Burr reported that ‘earthworks and other jobs done with council equipment on the site of Sculpturscape ’73 was paid for through the government grant and had not cost the council anything’.\textsuperscript{433} The costs were to be defrayed through the generous $10,000 grant awarded by the VAB and announced at the opening of the Triennial on 7 April.

Sculpturscape ’73 was a critical and political success. However, there was residual anger from the Mildura City Council towards the Melbourne and Sydney sculptors whose threatened boycott of the triennial had resulted in the French exhibition being postponed until after it finished. There were also further outries from some Mildura ratepayers and City Councillors. In response to a comment that the Sculpturscape ’73 was a ‘concentration camp filled with unspeakable junk’, and that ‘these long-haired gits had a degrading effect on this city’, McCullough retorted that ‘Sculpture will be the biggest event in Mildura’s history – apart from the arrival of the Chaffey Brothers.’\textsuperscript{434} Mildura City Councillor Syd Mills, who had weighed into the purchases from the 1967 Mildura Prize (‘monstrous’ was his comment), was adamant about his distaste of Sculpturscape ’73: ‘I could never be persuaded to call it art.’\textsuperscript{435}

Not only had the Mildura Sculpture Triennial become a major beneficiary of an arts funding renaissance, it boasted an increased sculptor and student participation, and also benefited from increased national media visibility and visitor rates. The funding renaissance also signalled a major shift of the responsibility for financially supporting the

\textsuperscript{434} Gilchrist, ‘Art basks uneasily in Mildura’s sunshine’, op. cit., p. 26, and Noel Hutchison, ‘Sculpturscape’73’, \textit{Art and Australia}, op. cit., p. 76.
\textsuperscript{435} Gilchrist, ibid.
triennials away from the local city council and local businesses to state and federal government agencies. In earlier triennials, prize money and backing was usually sourced from local companies, such as Mildara Wines in 1961 to 1967 and in 1967 BP Australia provided significant sponsorship for acquisitions. Although freight forwarding continued to be supported by a number of companies, the emphasis from 1973 onwards on site-specific works and the creation of a section of the site devoted to student and spontaneous installation responses, in effect devalued the freight contribution. Thus the funding renaissance contributed to the decline of local ownership of and investment in the triennial.

**John Davis 1973–1974**

The Davis family returned to Melbourne in late December 1972 to a dramatically altered federal and state political and cultural landscape. As active members of the Labor Party, Davis and his wife felt vindicated that art and artists now occupied, as never before in Australia, ‘a central place’ in the nation’s political and cultural life.\(^{436}\) The announcement of the new interim Australian Council for the Arts on Australia Day confirmed that support for writers and artists would no longer be dispensed ‘with notable frugality by ageing committees notorious for their political and social biases’.\(^{437}\) More significantly, a number of the new members of the Australian Council and within it, the Visual and Plastic Arts Board, were close associates of Davis and the ‘Hampton Mafia’ and supporters of the Mildura Sculpture Triennials.\(^{438}\)

The Labor Government’s largest budget allocation was devoted to education expansion as part of their broader social reform agenda of access and equity. The new arts policies,


\(^{437}\) ibid., p. 555.

\(^{438}\) These included chairman of the Visual and Plastic Arts Board, John Bailey, director of the AGSA; chairman of the Crafts Board, Marea Gazzard (participated in 1967 and 1970 Mildura sculpture events) and also president of the Crafts Council of Australia. Members of the Visual and Plastic Arts Board included Nigel Lendon, Patrick McCaughey, Ron Robertson Swann, Lenton Parr, Udo Sellbach, James Mollison, acting director of the Australian National Gallery, David Thomas, director of Newcastle Region Art Gallery and chair of the newly formed Regional Galleries Association of NSW and respected artists Fred Williams, Leonard French and James Gleeson.
led by the flagship Australian Council for the Arts, were developed to nurture artists with the added goal of creating a new kind of educated and informed society, imbued with the appropriate cultural capital to appreciate the arts. As Whitlam acknowledged, ‘even with the most generous and imaginative schemes the arts could not be grafted onto a society that was barren and hostile to them’. 439

For sculptors such as Davis, this amounted to a doubled acknowledgment of their professional positions as practising artists and professional educators, offering both an economic as well as a symbolic ‘measure of security and status in the community’ and ensuring that they were not dependent upon an external market for validation. 440 Cultural competency was accorded by professional qualifications and peer recognition. Davis was well positioned to benefit from the rapid expansion engendered by the injection of significant amounts of funding into this new social order, both as an educator and as an artist.

Fred Cress approached Davis immediately on his return with the offer of a new teaching position at the now upgraded Prahran College of Advanced Education (CAE), previously Prahran Technical College. Davis’s wife, Shirley, returned to secondary school art teaching, after a break of ten years. The Davis’s were indicative of a new generation of dual income, aspirant middle class families, who were Labor Party supporters and were ready to participate in determining the future direction of Australia. 441

The position at Prahran CAE represented a promotion to lecturer in charge of sculpture where he would take students through to diploma level and offered a salary commensurate with the new responsibilities and status of the parallel tertiary sector of colleges of advanced education. The Council of Prahran CAE had appointed a new head of school, Dr David Armstrong, an Australian who had art-school teaching experience in the United States and Canada. According to Davis, ‘Prahran was developing as a college

440 Whitlam, op. cit., p. 561
441 John Davis, in a letter to Robert Jacks, dated 13 March 1973, commented: ‘we are also looking for a house to buy as money is easy to borrow now’, Robert Jacks archive.
with new ideas and a refreshing liberalism." For Davis, the beginning of 1973 was indicative of the extent of the changes that had taken place since he left Melbourne at the end of 1971. His one-year sabbatical – a major investment in his own professional development – had resulted in improved status; he had been invited by his peers to take up a new position with a better salary in a recognised college of advanced education. Davis had also returned with a stronger sense of purpose towards his own practice – ‘the environment of New York taught me to improvise … my concept then became about the process of making art …and made me reassess the importance of materials’ – and a strong sense of the potential of artists in negotiating control over their artistic environment. The Labor Government’s commitment to the Australian Council for the Arts provided added endorsement of his professional confidence.

McCullough’s invitation to artists to participate in the forthcoming Mildura Sculpture Triennial recommended that those who were prepared to use the Sculpturscape area arrange a visit to Mildura to view the site and select the positions they wished to use for their projected work. Clive Murray-White and John Davis drove to Mildura in mid January, soon after Davis’s return from overseas. As Murray-White stated in a letter to Sturgeon, and here he was drawing on his diary entries of the period:

John Davis and I returned from a trip to Mildura on Sunday 14 January 1973 annoyed at the prospect of having a motley collection of French sculpture sharing what we considered to be our own Australian show [my italics]. John thought of the nuclear protest but it was as much a nationalism concern as far as we were concerned ... It was this act that established Mildura as a unique artist oriented exhibition … The Mildura spirit was probably born accidentally in January 1973.

442 John Davis, handwritten notes, ‘Time and place – some thoughts on three art schools’, n.p., Davis Estate. Davis’s resignation letter to Harold Farey at Caulfield Technical College was written on 16 January, two days after he had returned from a reconnaissance trip to Mildura, in preparation for Sculpturscape ‘73, with Clive Murray-White.
443 Clive Murray-White, letter to Graeme Sturgeon, undated, Graeme Sturgeon archive, NGV Research Library, Box 9. Modern French Sculpture was hardly a ‘motley collection’ of works. Murray-White’s letter was probably written c. 1983–4, in response to Sturgeon’s research for his publication, Sculpture at Mildura: the story of the Mildura Sculpture Triennials, 1961–1982, published in 1985 and funded by the Mildura City Council. The French exhibition comprised 46 small works. It was a conservative selection and apart from Cesar’s Thumb, did not include any of the artists who were part of the early 1960s New Realism group. It is quite possible that an earlier exhibition, Scultura Italiana, toured by the Peter Stuyvesant Trust for the Development of the Arts through nine state and regional galleries between 1971–72 and which had
Davis was committed to Labor’s election policy including the government’s anti-nuclear proliferation policy and its threat to take action against the French Government to the International Court of Justice if further nuclear tests were planned in the Pacific area. Although this alignment with government policy became the dominant reason for what would amount to a threatened boycott of the triennial by a number of sculptors, many of whom were part of McCullough’s core selectors, the fundamental issue at stake was control of the context in which artists’ works were exhibited. Davis was certainly drawing on his knowledge of the militancy of New York artists in regard to controlling the context of how their work was exhibited and also controlling access to works.

In a letter to Tom McCullough about the boycott, Davis clarified his position. He maintained that his primary objection was political, reiterating that he would not be associated with any project initiated by the French Government. However, his concern that the exhibition of French sculpture was not an integral part of the Sculpturscape initiative, that it was a separate exhibition which changed the whole basis upon which artists had originally agreed to participate in Sculpturscape ’73, offered a more complex reading. He was not opposed to international participation, as he stated: ‘an integrated international show planned as such would have been a great thing, particularly if planned

been curated ten years previously, may have prejudiced Murray-White’s attitude. Most of the works in this exhibition dated from the 1940s and 1950s and were created by important Italian sculptors of the same generation as the English sculptors, Moore, Hepworth and Epstein. Although of historical interest, the exhibition and the catalogue were dated by the time they reached Australia.

444 John Davis, letter to Tom McCullough, dated 14 February 1973, Graeme Sturgeon archive, Box 9, NGV Research Library. The Melbourne sculptors John Davis, Clive Murray-White and Ti Parks sent a telegram to McCullough on 14 February stating: ‘Because of French nuclear testing in Pacific we are strongly against exhibiting our work with sculpture sponsored by French Government unless French exhibits withdrawn by Feb 22 we shall not show. Awaiting your decision.’ The Sydney response was coordinated by Noel Hutchison, who had received a letter from Clive Murray-White outlining the concerns of the three Melbourne sculptors – himself, Davis and Parks. Hutchison sent out a detailed letter to all Sydney proposed participants outlining the issues and options for action and called for a meeting on 19 February at Marr Grounds’s place in Balmain. This meeting, which McCullough unofficially attended, resolved that ‘if the French are in, we are out’. A telegram to this effect was despatched to the Cultural Counsellor, French Embassy, Canberra. The signatories were: Ron Robertson Swann, Robert Brown, Michael Nicholson, Tim Burns, Dave Morrissey, Joan Grounds, Michael Buzacott, Richard Brecknock, Ian McKay, Immints [sic] Tillers, Alex Tzannes, Maureen Creaser, Noel Hutchison and Marr Grounds. Sculpturscape ’73: an exhibition in Mildura, Australia, op. cit., n.p.
around philosophical or concept areas. His closing recommendation to McCullough revealed the real issue at stake:

I think that Australian and New Zealand sculptors, critics etc should have been approached for attitudes and ideas to assist in the planning and direction of the Triennale.

For Davis and his peer group of sculptors, it was not only that they identified the Mildura Sculpture Triennials as ‘our own Australian show’, more significantly, having gained the right as selectors to contribute to a peer-review process of the participants, they now wanted the right to determine the context and manner in which their works, and hence their professional reputations, were presented. The consultative approach that Davis advocated between McCullough and his core group of sculptors would become an important signature of future triennials. Further, his suggestion that exhibitions be planned around ‘attitudes and ideas’ revealed the change, already instigated with Sculpturscape ’73, to move away from survey-type exhibitions of works and styles already in existence, to thematic approaches that required innovative responses from participants. In a letter to the Regional Galleries Association of Victoria meeting in June, Davis requested that all regional galleries should consider more collaborative approaches with artists in developing exhibitions. Davis’s demand was symptomatic of a bid by artists to exert greater control in an increasingly autonomous art system and indicative of Bourdieu’s observation that only in a field that was already autonomous would participants assert that autonomy was important.

**Davis at Sculpturscape**

The two works that Davis devised for the triennial – *Tree Piece* and *Unrolled* – drew upon his tentative explorations at the end of 1971, before his sabbatical, that were then

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445 John Davis, letter to Tom McCullough, ibid. This was borne out in the participation of three English sculptors, whom Tom McCullough had met in England during his 1970 trip, and whose works were organised by the British Council. Their works were created in response to the Sculpturscape brief that had been sent out to Australian artists.
446 John Davis, letter to Tom McCullough, ibid.
447 John Davis, letter to The Chairman, Regional Galleries Conference, n.d. circa June 1973, Davis archive, Box A, Correspondence: Galleries/Regional.
forged and given some theoretical underpinning by his New York experience (Figures 56, 57, 58). *Tree Piece* extended the investigations attempted with his *Grass Process Works* series at Heidi in November 1971 and *Unrolled* adapted the use of the ceramic rods from *Tubes and Boxes*, 1971: both works eschewed ‘finish’ preferring the use of low technology and easily manipulated and available materials (Figure 59).

Davis’s concern with systems had moved from his earlier series replication to a more nuanced enquiry into perceptual systems. Through a methodical process, Davis explored the use of what he termed ‘a constant factor’ in each of his processes in order ‘to emphasise the readjustment of the variable [factors] to it’. Variables could include duration and the changes implicated in this factor as well as chance or indeterminacy. He was searching for new metaphors for conceiving of space.

In *Tree Piece*, Davis selected six tree trunks of similar age and girth, closely located on the flood plain area. In his drawings, the constant factor was the trunk girth. Around each of these trunks he wrapped various ‘non aesthetic’ materials – as he described, ‘some introduced to the site, some found on the site and utilised’ – such as strips of latex, laced canvas, sisal twine, papier mâché newsprint, cut tree branches and grass clippings from the nearby lawn tennis courts stuffed into polythene casings.

… I wanted to present a new set of criteria rather than acceptable aesthetic objects … to be non-commercial, non-limiting, a kind of free wheeling that was adaptable to almost any site …

Like his *Greene Street Piece*, 1972, *Tree Piece* sought to spatially activate the experience of its degraded environs. Although the relationship between the constant ‘trunks’ and the variable ‘materials’ was a set of relations that could be mapped to ‘almost any site’, their alteration over time and in response to changing weather conditions, evoked more than he

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449 John Davis, handwritten notes, Mildura Piece April ’73. Davis archive, Box B, Private Notes: Sculpture/Art.
450 ibid.
451 John Davis, interview with Graeme Sturgeon, c. 1975, Graeme Sturgeon archive, Box 7, NGV Research Library.
intended.\textsuperscript{452} The weathering and decay activated awareness of a larger constant, that of the specific place itself, both contemporarily and historically located, a flood plain of the life-giving Murray River. Several weeks after the initial installation of Tree Piece, Davis took a series of photographs detailing the disintegration and changes of the various materials wrapped around the tree trunks. Unlike many other participants, for Davis, Mildura was a return to a familiar landscape. The ease was evident: ‘I enjoyed putting up the work enormously, working outside and not concerned with breakages and surface for a change, with plenty of flexibility.’\textsuperscript{453}

Davis photographed Unrolled in various stages – from closed and tied to fully rolled out – at the Pinacotheca Gallery, prior to exhibiting it at Mildura. The six black and white photographs were exhibited at Sculpturscape in McCullough’s bright orange marquee, erected specifically for small works that were not suited to the rigours of the outdoor environment. The work itself, which was purchased for the Mildura Art Centre collection, was rolled out in the soft, flat earth near Tree Piece. Made of a long strip of canvas with ties and canvas pockets into which were fitted forty-nine low-fired ceramic rods, it required significant repairs: several of the rods were broken, and the canvas, exposed to the elements, had rotted and torn in places. As Davis noted in a letter to Noel Hutchison, the photographs of the work in its various stages, indicated that this work was better suited and understood within a defined gallery context, rather than dispersed in such a challenging and changing environment as Sculpturscape. Unrolled’s exploration of spatial containment and portability required the anonymity of the white walled gallery spaces in order to focus attention on the detail of the work and its conceptual premise. Nevertheless, this work also engaged with a new understanding that Davis had encountered in his travels and his reading, that space could be the subject of sculpture.

\textsuperscript{452} In a verbatim transcription of Graeme Sturgeon’s interview with John Davis, 1975, Davis stated: ‘I hadn’t intended it but I seemed to get a feeling for fetish elements in the landscape and perhaps, because the landscape was so ancient, probably had so much Aboriginal tradition, the kind of pressures on that landscape have come to bear on the work and therefore it took on more than what I intended – a very objective work but rather it became almost a mystical piece of work.’ Sturgeon archive, ibid.

\textsuperscript{453} John Davis, letter to Noel Hutchison, 10 May 1973, Hutchison archive.
For him horizontal extension, literally ‘rolled out’, invoked a ‘landscape mode’ rather than a ‘specific object’ order of sculpture.\(^{454}\)

Davis’s statement, that his work should be ‘non-commercial’, was a symbolic gesture. The choice to be non-commercial for sculptors in Australia was, at that time, hardly a choice; there was a limited market for contemporary sculpture. It was more indicative of his willingness to adapt to the new social and cultural policies of the time that clearly expanded the role of tertiary artist-educators as contributing to the development of a new audience for contemporary Australian art. This changing role also coincided with the shift in the definition of ‘professional’ towards an investigative research model compatible with the new tertiary art school status. Terms such as ‘experimental’ and ‘avant-garde’ in relation to sculpture, and the need for providing support for these kinds of activities not supported by the market, were already part of VAB discourse as far back as 1970.\(^{455}\)

Several members of the nascent VAB, who were present at the opening of Sculpturscape ’73, were there also to discuss policy and funding issues, as the Whitlam Labor Government had asked that the Australian Council for the Arts submit an initial budget by May for implementation in the new financial year.\(^{456}\) Davis and his fellow sculptor-teachers were fully aware of this situation, and even more so given that the accreditation system for artists within the expanding colleges of advanced education was still fragmented from state to state. What the VAB offered was primarily a national accreditation through its peer-review system for professional practising artists, akin to a national currency for the exchange of symbolic values.

However, for Davis, ‘non-commercial’ also signified that he was no longer concerned with producing discrete objects. He was following Robert Morris’s dictum that art was no longer ‘a form of work that results in a finished product’. The writings and works of Robert Morris and Sol LeWitt offered Davis a kind of theoretical rationale upon which to launch his newfound freedom with sculpture that explored metaphors for space; low technology, non-discrete and responsive to place. Davis displayed a conscious and complex balancing of competing artistic and professional dispositions in response to the articulate gathering of a new autonomous field at Mildura’s Sculpturscape in April 1973. This autonomous field of artistic production, a parallel government-supported market, for sculpture, had its genesis in the expanding field of autonomous tertiary education of which he was an integral part.

**Assessment of Davis: 1973–1974**

The two years between 1973 and 1974 was a period of optimistic consolidation for Davis. He was well positioned; his appointment at Prahran CAE represented career advancement and a challenge (to expand the number of sculpture students and lecturers) and he retained his position on the VIC Fine Art Course Curriculum Committee during 1973.

His involvement with the selection of participants and the manner of exhibition at the Mildura Sculpturscape was indicative of a pattern of greater artist control, not only within the Mildura Sculpture Triennials. Visual artists were vocal in their concerns that the VAB maintained its autonomy within the Australia Council and that artists’ representation on the board and in policy development was seen to be driving the agenda. With VAB funding available for curatorial program development at the Ewing Gallery at the University of Melbourne, the directors established an advisory collective body that included ‘Fine Arts academics and students; staff and students from tertiary art schools; and independent artists, art historians, critics and curators … to forge initial contacts with potential audiences and contributors while channelling diverse views and theoretical

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insights into the exhibition program. Davis was appointed for the two years of the collective’s existence (1974–75). His concern, as he outlined in his letter to the Regional Galleries Association of Victoria, that curators and gallery directors needed to be more conceptually thematic in their exhibition planning, addressing the current ‘attitudes’ inherent in artists’ work, and also more consultative with artists, was evidently incorporated in spirit in the series of ‘Ideas’ exhibitions that spanned the Ewing Gallery’s program between 1974–75. The inclusion of staff and students from tertiary art schools with those responsible for generating the discourse for this radical ‘new art’ – many of them academically associated with the university – was indicative of an internal logic of autonomous field behaviour. The Ewing Gallery program, like the Mildura Sculpture Triennials, offered a site in which the production, verification, exhibition, interpretation and reception of this ‘new art’ and artists could be seen in operation and, importantly, where the audience and the participants were most often interchangeable. The new system of federal government patronage reinforced the inherent disposition towards ‘non-commercial’ of Davis and his sculptor-educator colleagues, through its support of ‘avant-garde’ and innovative art practices by professionally practicing artists. This support acknowledged that there was little or no external market for such work and that, in itself, this was a necessary process of differentiation from the commercial market.

Following Sculpturscape ’73, Davis concentrated on working through ideas in small works and series, using primarily paper, clay, canvas and latex. His photographs of Tree Piece were included in Daniel Thomas’s AGNSW survey exhibition Recent Australian Art. This was a far more successful exhibition than the inaugural Biennale of Sydney.

461 The ‘Ideas’ series of exhibitions at the Ewing Gallery included The Letter Show: An Ideas Show and Boxes: An Ideas Show, both 1974; and Grids: An Ideas Show, 1975. As Clive Murray-White adduced, ‘[we never] really considered our entries to be ART. They were just evidence of how our thinking process worked’. Email exchange between Carolyn Barnes and Clive Murray-White, 6 June 2006, ibid., p. 152.
which formed part of the opening ceremonies of the Sydney Opera House in late 1973. However, of more direct significance to Davis was the VAB grant of $1300 as ‘assistance to purchase equipment for sculptures’, which contributed towards the cost of building and equipping a backyard studio in his new house.462

A MOMA international touring exhibition, Some Recent American Art, which was launched at the NGV and toured to Australian state galleries and New Zealand throughout 1974, was also an important source of inspiration.463 Eva Hesse’s work Accretions – her use of the cardboard cores of found fabric rolls as moulds for her fibreglass rods linked to Davis’s use of these same rods in his Greene Street Piece in 1972 – was evidently formative in his works such as Ti-ed Piece, which appeared in the touring Works with Paper exhibition.464 However, it was Hesse’s sensibility expressed in the artist statement from the June 1968 catalogue – ‘I would like the work to be non-work … It is the unknown quality from which and where I want to go’ – that echoed Robert Morris’s phenomenological writings about process and Sol LeWitt’s statements about an intuitive process to conceptual art from which Davis had drawn sustenance. My interpretation of what Davis had instinctively arrived at is that the process of creating a representation for his experience was, simultaneously, itself the construction of a theory for that experience and also a testing of that theory as a successful or ‘true’ representation. Therefore, the theory was embodied in the making of the representation

464 Works with Paper, Latrobe Valley Arts Centre, 5–14 April 1974 and Ewing Gallery, Melbourne University, 6–24 May 1974. Artists included Neil Taylor, Nigel Lendon, Peter Sinclair, John Davis and Clive Murray-White. The invitation stated that the exhibition was ‘assisted by the Visual Arts Board Australian Council for the Arts and the Australian Paper Manufacturers’. On a copy of the invitation, Graeme Sturgeon had written next to a photograph of John Davis’s work Ti-ed Piece: ‘or Eva Hesse’. See Graeme Sturgeon archive, Box 4, NGV Research Library. Sturgeon, a good friend of Davis’s (they had trained together as secondary school art teachers in the 1950s) was the exhibitions manager at the NGV and had worked closely with John Stringer at MOMA on the development, catalogue and installation of the exhibition Some Recent American Art, as well as managing the programs of the visiting American artists, such as Robert Irwin, Carl Andre, Vito Acconci and Yvonne Rainier, to Australia. Like Davis, he also travelled overseas in 1972, and was assisted by a Gulbenkian Fellowship awarded by the AGAA (as was McCullough in 1970).
for a particular experience and could be said to have an isomorphic relationship to both the representation and the experience.

Davis’s solo exhibition at Pinacotheca in September 1974 brought together many of the ‘attitudes and ideas’ that he had been working through and developing since returning from overseas. Davis was clearly placing himself within a phenomenological-conceptual discourse that validated his urge to ‘make’ and sanctioned a return to the use of metaphor that had been repressed by some of the more analytical conceptualists and the earlier minimalism of Donald Judd. Further, Davis recognised that situating his work within a theoretical framework elevated it beyond mere ‘craft’ and the implication of labour to that of intellectual research within a tertiary discipline, befitting the new status of art schools within the parallel tertiary system of colleges of advanced education.465 It offered Davis a way to negotiate the potential conflict between the ‘professional’ dispositions necessary to compete for status and recognition within the emergent autonomous field and his originary artistic disposition with its need to make.

Davis was conscious of an audience in the making and presentation of his exhibition at Pinacotheca. In interview he spoke of wanting the audience to engage with his work through posing dilemmas; should the work be rolled out or tied up, whether material should be taken out of boxes or pockets and looked at, handled even.466 However ‘free-wheeling’, educative and democratic this proposition sounded, it presumed a particular kind of familiarity with current conventions in art practice. The highly differentiated, contemporary audience that frequented Pinacotheca could not have been more different from the ‘local guerillas’ of Mildura who had destroyed Ti Park’s Egg-one and broken the ceramic rods in Davis’s Unrolled Piece at Sculpturscape ’73.467 Although the exhibition received a good critical response in the Melbourne press, sales were not the

465 Singerman, Art Subjects, op. cit., p. 200. McCullough’s sculptor-advisors rejected McCullough’s proposal for an exhibition entitled ‘Artist/Artisan’ that explored the porous boundaries between the making of art and craft. They did not want their hard won professional and intellectual status tainted by association with the idea of craft skills.
466 John Davis, interviewed by Graeme Sturgeon, c. 1975, Graeme Sturgeon archives, Box 7, NGV Research Library.
467 John Davis, letter to Noel Hutchison, 10 May 1973, Noel Hutchison archive.
objective.\textsuperscript{468} In preliminary notes, Davis proposed to ‘place any given number of ceramic rods … in a random or systematised arrangement in a “monumental position” in … sites of accepted prestige.’ \textit{The Artist’s Dream}, 1974, was a series of fifteen photographs documenting the journey of a ceramic rod placed outside the entrances to fourteen galleries in Melbourne (as the fifteenth gallery was the NGV, a bronze rod was placed at its entrance). It was an ironic comment on the competitive and highly selective criteria that determined an artist’s professional curriculum vitae and symbolic status.

\textbf{Tom McCullough 1973–1974}

As discussed earlier in this chapter, there were two important outcomes as a result of McCullough’s Gulbenkian Fellowship in 1970: one was the proposed development of a Cultural Park on the riverbank near the Mildura Arts Centre, of which Sculpturscape ’73 constituted Stage One, and the second outcome was a proposed international touring exhibition, \textit{Modern French Sculpture}, sponsored by the French Government. It had taken three years of negotiation with the exhibition due for its Australian premiere at the Mildura Arts Centre at the same time as the triennial before travelling to state art galleries and thence to Mexico.

According to McCullough’s plans, opening the exhibition of French sculpture in the gallery space would ‘encourage’ the Australian triennial participants to relinquish their use of the gallery space and, hopefully, conceive of work suitable for the ‘sculpturscape’ environment. He had already purchased a large nylon tent structure to show object-based works that required an indoor setting. As he noted in an article: ‘I had to convince enough artists to abandon our lovely, white-walled Gallery and manicured lawns for a totally different display environment.’\textsuperscript{469} Yet, according to Laurie Thomas’s extensive article in \textit{The Australian}, McCullough had only received official confirmation from the French

\footnotesize\textsuperscript{468} Donald Brook, the recently appointed Professor of Visual Arts at Flinders University in Adelaide, purchased \textit{Inching} and an earlier photographic series of works, \textit{Grass Process at Heidi}, 1971 for Flinders University collection of Australian post-object art; and Daniel Thomas included a showing of \textit{A Tearing Work} in his session on Artist Filmmakers at AGNSW in November 1974.

\footnotesize\textsuperscript{469} Tom McCullough, ‘Mildura’s sculptural heritage: an enchanted garden’, \textit{Artlink}, op. cit., p. 22.
Government, ‘three days before last Christmas [1972]’. The opening of the triennial (and therefore the French sculpture exhibition) was scheduled for 7 April 1973, just over three months away. Although he briefly notified selected artists of this development, most were on holidays. It was not until February 1973, in a more detailed newsletter to all participating artists, that McCullough actually spelled out what his plans were:

These works are particularly welcome as they are the first major international contribution to Mildura’s triennial exhibitions, but they will be displayed in the Arts Centre galleries instead of the sculpturscape site for organisational reasons.

The threatened artists’ boycott resulted in the French exhibition being postponed in Mildura until after Sculpturscape ’73 and the tour being re-routed to open first at the QAG. Crisis management cost McCullough two vital weeks in the planning and organising of the triennial. It no doubt represented a significant loss of face, personally and professionally, for McCullough and for the Mildura City Council. Presumably, a high profile French consular presence had been planned to attend the opening with the Victorian premier at Mildura in April. It was clearly a clash of professional ambitions between McCullough and his advisory committee (MACAC) and the professional dispositions of the selector-sculptors for the triennial event. The artists would deliver, but McCullough had to sacrifice his international focus for the sake of the triennial.

McCullough had underestimated the level of political outrage registered in response to the French’s Government’s perceived arrogance. However, only three sculptors from Melbourne registered their disapproval: Ti Parks, Clive Murray-White and John Davis. It was not until the issue reached Sydney that the majority of Sydney participants declared their disapproval that the matter became national news headlines. Although there was an underlying agenda of artists seeking control of the selection process for the triennials in Davis and Murray-White’s intentions, this may not have been achieved without the moral and political force of the boycott. The realisation of the sculptors’ collective power in succeeding to pressure McCullough by threatening to boycott the triennial altered the

471 ibid.
selection and exhibition policy, ceding greater control to the sculptor-selectors for determining what would and, perhaps more importantly, would not, be selected for invitation to participate.

However, for McCullough, controversy had its benefits. As Noel Hutchison commented: ‘… the whole affair has thrown the spotlight on the triennial. I am amazed how many people are intending to go down and see the show this time. Easter weekend could be chaotic for you and Mildura.’472 The vacant gallery space and lawns were devoted to a survey of sculpture purchased for the Arts Centre’s collection from the previous Mildura Triennials.

McCullough’s observation that, ‘It has been a major experiment for a public art gallery to move a serious, selective exhibition completely away from a museum-bound atmosphere’, clearly revealed his intention to provide a new context for experimental ‘new art’, the kind that was being reviewed by Daniel Thomas and Donald Brook in Sydney and Patrick McCaughey in Melbourne during the early 1970s.473 Both the role of a public gallery in presenting an environmental event such as Sculpturscape and the works of art exhibited were experimental propositions. Sculpturscape ’73, as the inaugural stage in the development of Australia’s first public sculpture park and as an event, offered both state and federal funding agencies a ready-made platform to promote their new arts support policies. McCullough’s position within the emerging autonomous field of visual art was significantly enhanced in relation to political and economic power, represented through the presence of the premier as the guest of honour at the opening and the members of the VAB who also attended. However, unlike his curator colleagues in the state galleries, his selectors had assumed equal curatorial control; all discussions concerning the direction of future triennials would be consultative with his core group of selectors.

472 Noel Hutchison, letter to Tom McCullough, 24 March 1973, McCullough archive PA97/33, Box 9, SLV.
Local support

In the catalogue McCullough applauded the level of support provided by various local clubs, organisations, council workmen and schools in Mildura in the preparation of and, in many cases, direct involvement in the triennial; activities such as preparing and fencing the Sculpturscape site, assisting artists in finding materials and in installing their work, and organising and providing billeted accommodation for art students.\[^{474}\]

McCullough had also found a great supporter in the local town clerk Bill Downie, who had provided the use of council workers and council equipment such as bulldozers to artists like Ken Unsworth for his *Concrete Slab Construction* (Figure 53). Where there were structural problems, as in the case of Ross Grounds’s *Ecology Well*, it was the town clerk who came up with the solution of using old water tanks and railway sleepers (Figure 51). This represented a significant shift from sponsored freight for completed sculptural works to a community cost in terms of the use of council resources.

The level of community involvement in and contribution towards the triennial project was evidence of McCullough’s strong connections into the local community networks. This in-kind commitment had helped to secure $10,000 apiece from the state government and the VAB, in part to pay for a proper catalogue and also to reimburse council departments for their man-hours and use of equipment.

The acquisition of twelve contemporary Australian works for $15,000 was a remarkable achievement for a regional gallery and represented a considerable contribution to Mildura’s growing sculpture collection. The combination of increased funding for acquisitions and evident state and federal support for the event confirmed government...
patronage as a major new client for Australian sculptors and their work. The unprecedented level of government funding for Sculpturscape ’73, both state and federal, vindicated McCullough’s experimental gamble. However, although perceived as a symbol of the renaissance in the arts, government funding shifted the responsibility for and ownership of the triennials away from the local council and local community.

Although the Mildura City Council, in supporting McCullough’s feasibility study for the development of the riverfront as a sculpture park, ‘permitted the Arts Centre … to organise Sculpturscape ’73 as a demonstration of the site’s possibilities’, the local response to Sculpturscape had to be measured against the level of written attacks and complaints to councillors about the sculptors and students.475 Artists’ expectations of viewer engagement often confronted an audience alienated by the apparent meaninglessness of the arrangement or concept within the work. The public of Mildura was not always included within the ‘new art’s’ discursive and increasingly autonomous space. Vandalism, threats and furious letters to the local newspaper by some vocal ratepayers claiming that the locals were being ‘conned’, however, were not limited to Mildura.476

**Sculpture Park Development Committee**

Following the Mildura City Council’s in-principle adoption of McCullough’s feasibility study to turn the disused rubbish tip into a cultural park, and the successful implementation of Phase One of the plan for use as Sculpturscape ’73 (with funding assistance from the Victorian government of $10,000 in August 1972), MACAC invited members of the VAB and the Victorian Ministry for the Arts, present during the opening of Sculpturscape, to discuss the further development and implementation of the cultural

476 In 1971–1972, the Peter Stuyvesant Foundation in Britain had funded a program of sculptural installations in a number of British cities. The works were to remain in place for six months, after which, if there was public acceptance, they could be purchased. In Cambridge, a work by Barry Flanagan incited particular local censure, and was destroyed by vandalism. See Studio International, vol. 184, no. 946, July–August 1972, pp. 33–5.
park plan. The meeting resolved to establish a development committee comprising nominees from the three tiers of government: local, state and federal and the VAB agreed to contribute $10,000 to assist with the costs of plans and designs.

McCullough’s political mentor, Reg Etherington, in his capacity as a member of MACAC and deputy chair of the Regional Galleries Association of Victoria, invited Sir Roy Grounds, the architect of the NGV and Victorian Cultural Centre precinct, to be honorary consulting architect on the Development Committee for Mildura’s Cultural Park. The first meeting of the Development Committee was convened on 3 August 1974 with eleven members including Ron Robertson Swann as the nominee of the VAB and Cr Roy Burr, a Mildura City Councillor and chairman of the MACAC. Ex-officio members included Mildura’s town clerk, McCullough, and the city engineer. Clive Murray-White was a coopted member.

1974 had been a busy year for McCullough. He had not only hosted the first Development Committee for the design and implementation of Australia’s first public sculpture park in Mildura, but he was also in the process of coordinating and completing a detailed catalogue of the Sculpturescape event. Both of these initiatives had been funded directly by the VAB to a total of $20,000. Further, the new Victorian Ministry for the Arts, under Westbrook’s direction was keen to promote and celebrate arts practice in the state’s regional areas. McCullough was invited to participate in the organising committee for the planned Arts Victoria 75 events. It was decided to bring the Mildura triennial forward by one year and use it to launch the Arts Victoria 75 program. He was already consulting with his advisors and planning the new parameters of the sculpture event.

477 As discussed in earlier chapters, Etherington’s personal political contacts with the Victorian Government Cabinet (Bolte, Hamer and Rylah) and his close association with Eric Westbrook, then director of the NGV, ensured his participation on the Victorian Arts Centre Building Committee as a regional Victorian representative. This was his, and Mildura and McCullough’s, introduction to the architect Sir Roy Grounds.
Conclusion

Chapter Three discussed the introduction of new sets of cultural dispositions which marked the beginning of ‘the critical phase of the constitution of an autonomous field claiming the right to define for itself the principles of its legitimacy’, which were immanent in the 1967 Mildura Sculpture Prize. In this chapter which covers the period from 1970 to 1974, ‘changes in the social structures, both within and outside the field of cultural production’, principally from the fields of political power and education, ‘produced the forces necessary for change’.

The significance of the 1970 Mildura Sculpture Triennial was more than just the event itself. Rather, it was the result of, and a mirror for, a complex process that was fundamentally driven by the growth in the educational sector, as the Victorian selection with its bias towards graduates under thirty years old revealed. The combination of a selection process conducted by an invited group of McCullough’s associates with a set of dispositions with preferences for emerging artists, was indicative of a peer network increasingly linked to the expanding tertiary educational sector, itself indicative of nascent autonomous field behaviour.

The election of the Whitlam Labor Government with its commitment to access and equity in education, its linking of education to the production of an ‘informed’ audience for ‘new art’, and its acknowledgement of the ‘rapid expansion in the arts over the last few years’, primarily driven by the expansion in education, underpinned its rationale to radically expand the functions of, and fund, the new Australian Council for the Arts. Sculpturscape ’73 provided a platform that brought together an existing network of emerging professional protagonists and institutions with a new national accreditation process by peers for the transfer of symbolic power and money to forms of art practice that in the external market were marginal.

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The realisation for John Davis and his colleagues that control of the selection process and by 1973, that selector control of the exhibition event itself was within their grasp, was possibly the most important determinant in increasing their symbolic power within this emerging alternative field of artistic production. For McCullough, both sculpture events in 1970 and 1973 brought significant professional recognition as director of the Mildura Arts Centre. The success of the triennials, particularly the new selection process and the commitment of the Mildura Arts Centre to develop a significant collection of contemporary Australian sculpture established him as an important node within a growing network that was beginning to identify itself as a visual arts profession. This expansionary period, characterised by rapid change, was further supported by state government investment in infrastructure, principally in the increasing number of regional galleries established, while commercial galleries showing young artists jostled for attention alongside the VAB-assisted alternative spaces, such as Ewing Gallery in Melbourne, Experimental Art Foundation in Adelaide and the Sculpture Centre in Sydney; all in metropolitan centres.