Chapter Three


Introduction

This chapter covers the period from 1967 to 1969 and investigates the impact of the rapid changes during these three critical years on Mildura, McCullough and Davis, thereby setting the scene for the 1970s. In response to the Commonwealth Government’s Martin Report and the Victorian Government’s Ramsay Report – both concerning developments in tertiary education in Australia – the Victorian Government established the Victorian Institute of Colleges (VIC) in 1965. By 1967, with federal and state funding, the VIC began the gradual process of separating vocational art training in the technical sector from the state Department of Education and transferring these courses, and institutions, to a new parallel tertiary system of colleges of advanced education. Into this turbulent period stepped John Davis with his first appointment as a part-time teacher of three-dimensional studies in the rapidly changing technical art school sector. The tensions and contradictions between his concept of an emerging professional identity and the resistance of the vocational technical sector to these changes are played out to critical effect during this period. In essence, these tensions are the result of the ‘struggle’ of sculptor/teachers (like Davis) ‘to conquer their autonomy’, where the wresting of control from the ‘hierarchised and controlled’ Department of Education and the movement towards an autonomous system of art schools within colleges of advanced education leads to the genesis of ‘a field of competition for the monopoly of artistic legitimacy’.195

Meanwhile, Davis and McCullough would meet again at McCullough’s first directorship of the 3rd Mildura Sculpture Prize in 1967. Davis had completed his Associate Diploma in Sculpture at RMIT and was just commencing his new career as a part-time lecturer in sculpture and three-dimensional studies at the recently VIC-affiliated Caulfield Institute of Technology. McCullough was director of the largest regional arts complex in Victoria and director of a major national sculpture exhibition and prize.

For McCullough and the Mildura Sculpture Prize, competition from a number of recently established national, annual, metropolitan sculpture prizes signalled a rapid shift in the position of sculpture within the Australian art world. This shift also coincided with discussions concerning ‘new art’, a focus on younger artists made evident through an increase in the coverage and commentary on visual art in magazines and newspapers. By 1969, McCullough recommended to his Advisory Council that the prize format be rescinded in favour of an invitational triennial exhibition. The plethora of prizes, the change in the definition of sculpture and the more active focus on a contemporary sculpture acquisition policy at the Mildura Arts Centre, as well as McCullough’s increasingly effective network of sculptors and advisors, were some of the factors involved in the change in direction recommended by McCullough for the 4th Mildura Sculpture Triennial event planned for 1970.

By the end of the 1960s, the preconditions necessary for the genesis of an autonomous field of cultural practice were coming into place. The political and economic will of the Commonwealth and state governments (especially in Victoria) in response to the educational demands of a rapidly expanding population saw the development of a parallel tertiary education system. This new system provided the necessary rise in professional status of artists, particularly sculptors, through their employment as part-time teachers in a rapidly evolving system. It was this economic avenue that allowed many more young sculptors to continue their practice, and thus seek opportunities to exhibit and promote their work. As the number of students increased, the need to find exhibiting and validating opportunities for their work became imperative. The burgeoning sculpture
prizes of the middle decade and the new alternative, commercial spaces were, in part, a response to this need.

The Mildura Sculpture Prize was the first national exhibition platform for Australian sculptors and, by decade’s end, had retained this mantle, having weathered competition from a number of short-lived metropolitan prizes. However, by 1970, the proposed change in format from a prize to an invitational exhibition, with an emphasis on further acquisitions for the Mildura collection, represented a significant shift in intention on the part of McCullough and his Advisory Council.

Davis’s trajectory reveals the intensity of the level of competition for legitimacy amongst the Melbourne sculptor-teachers. This competition created increasing fragmentation and the resultant search for points of differentiation drove the change in Mildura’s policy. By 1969 the arbitrary ranking process used by prizes was beginning to be regarded unfavourably by a new generation of artists and sculptors. Ranking radically different works that defied the traditional definition of sculpture required new sets of criteria. What was needed for this new generation of sculptors and artists was also a recognised exhibiting venue. Instituting an invitational process for future Mildura Sculpture exhibitions implied that to be invited and included, one was recognised as part of a network: ‘a public of equals who are also competitors’ in a new orthodoxy. Although all these factors came into being through their own necessity, it is their convergence at the end of the decade that signals the emergence of what would become an autonomous field of artistic practice.

3rd Mildura Sculpture Prize

The Mildura Sculpture Prize faced stiff competition from the plethora of well-funded metropolitan sculpture prizes that had arisen since 1966. The 3rd Mildura Sculpture Prize opened on 22 April 1967, making use of the large purpose-built gallery space and the

\[196 \text{ibid., p. 116.}\]
landscaped lawns outside the new Mildura Arts Centre. Selected by the directors of the state galleries or their nominated curators, the eighty-eight works by sixty-eight sculptors revealed a significant shift in the selection towards younger participants, many being recent art school graduates and three of whom were still students. A number of previous participants were overseas and, of the Centre 5 Melbourne group, only Inge King and Clifford Last were present. Despite the absence of these established sculptors, Daniel Thomas, curator at the AGNSW, noted in his review of the sculpture prize:

It is still Australia’s most important sculpture exhibition. Previously, it was partly by invitation but this year it was completely open. It is the invasion of sculpture by painting and on the other hand, the conscious reaction towards anti-pictorial sculpture, which is producing the best work today.

McCullough, as a new director, was still dependent upon the state gallery directors’ selections both because of his relative inexperience and the need for legitimacy that their positions and expertise brought to the prize and to the Mildura Arts Centre. This legitimacy was even more important to McCullough and Mildura, given the level of competition from the sudden rise in metropolitan sculpture prizes. What Thomas’s statement revealed therefore was a change in some of the selectors’ dispositions. The number of younger participants invited from Sydney, Melbourne and Adelaide pointed to the changing preferences of the selectors.

New selectors, new dispositions

John Bailey, who had previously been an art educator and inspector for the Department of Education in South Australia, had just been appointed as director of the National Gallery of South Australia. At the time of his new appointment, Bailey was also the president of the following organisations: the South Australian branch of the Contemporary Art Society (CAS), the Art Galleries Association of Australia (AGAA) and the Australian Society for Education through Art (ASEA). His background in art education, interest in contemporary art and commitment to professional development of
gallery employees ensured that he had a very different network of contacts and interests from his predecessor, Robert Campbell.199 In his previous position in the Department of Education, Bailey would have been very familiar with the changes and developments of the South Australian School of Art (SASA), especially the impact of the appointment of the sculptor Paul Beadle as the principal from 1958 to 1961, artist-educators such as Charles Reddington from Chicago and Australian Sydney Ball who had recently returned from living and working in New York. Significantly, during the 1960s, a number of recent graduate artists had been appointed as teachers.200

In Melbourne in early 1967, the young American sculptor C. Elwyn Dennis was appointed to the newly created position of Assistant Curator of Decorative Arts, responsible for the sculpture collection at the NGV.201 Dennis had taught sculpture the previous year at Caulfield Technical College. The significance of this new appointment rested not only in it being the first curatorial appointment that recognised sculpture as a discrete discipline in an Australian gallery but also, more importantly, that it was offered to a young, recent arts graduate. McCullough noted in the 1967 Mildura catalogue: “Mr [sic] Elwyn C. Dennis is compiling a survey of Australian sculptors at the present time; if so, I hope that it soon will be published for it is a badly needed document.”202 Dennis was highly articulate and a good writer, a quality that many sculptors and critics realised was

199 McCulloch, *Encyclopaedia of Australian Art*, vol. 1, op. cit., p. 68. Robert Campbell was a member of the CAAB from 1953 until his death in 1972.
201 This was the first curatorial appointment in sculpture in Australia. From 1968 to 1970, Dennis was formally appointed as curator of Sculpture and Ethnic Arts at the NGV.
202 Thomas McCullough, Editorial Comment, *Mildura Prize for Sculpture 1967*, Mildura Arts Centre, Vic., 1967, p. 6. As well as holding the position of curator of Sculpture and Ethnic Art at the NGV, Elwyn Dennis was also, during 1968, a lecturer in sculpture at the Prahran Technical College and from 1970 to 1971 was a part-time lecturer at the National Gallery School under Lenton Parr’s directorship. With his teaching assignments, and in his capacity as curator responsible for sculpture at the NGV, Dennis (with Thomson as NGV deputy director) was in a good a position – along with Mervyn Horton, editor of *Art and Australia* – to undertake a survey of Australian sculptors. (In a letter from Horton to John Davis, dated 27 April 1970, Horton indicated his intention to publish ‘a possible book about Australian sculpture to be published shortly by me in conjunction with Mr C. Elwyn Dennis, Curator of Sculpture at the National Gallery of Victoria’, Davis Estate.) This did not eventuate and it was not until 1978 and the publication of Graeme Sturgeon’s *Development of Australian Sculpture: 1788–1975* that the first scholarly history of Australian sculpture was published. Sturgeon’s first resource was Dennis’s initial files on Australian sculptors.
important in order to raise the standard of critical debate in Australia. Such a project had the support of his senior administrators at the NGV, notably the assistant director Gordon Thomson (a great supporter of Australian sculpture and curator of the first touring exhibition, *Recent Australian Sculpture*, in 1964, which drew extensively upon the first two Mildura Sculpture Prizes) and director Eric Westbrook.

The dispositional differences between C. Elwyn Dennis and Gordon Thomson were evident: Dennis was a university trained sculptor with a liberal arts background who, at the time of his appointment, was twenty-six years old; the same age or younger than many of the Victorian sculptors selected for Mildura. Thomson (born 1911), on the other hand, was the first art teacher seconded to the NGV as an education officer in the early 1950s under the plan devised by Professor Joseph Burke in consultation with the then NGV director, Daryl Lindsay. By 1967, having returned from one year as the inaugural curator of the Power Institute of Fine Art collection at the University of Sydney, Thomson resumed his position as the assistant director at the NGV.

The competition for the control of the definition of ‘professional’, in this case its redefinition to encompass a set of specific credentials or qualifications rather than a definition determined by market success, was beginning to shape the selection for the 1967 Mildura Prize. A significant proportion of the young Melbourne sculptors who were selected (including John Davis) were recent graduates of the RMIT sculpture department and two were current students with Mildura connections. Lenton Parr, Vincas Jomantas and Teisutis Zikaras, the three Centre 5 members who were also sculpture lecturers at RMIT, did not participate in the Mildura Prize and it would be reasonable to surmise that they were in fact advisors to Dennis. The set of ‘professional’ sculptural dispositions – ‘a form of symbolic capital’ – as espoused by the Centre 5 group (and taught in the sculpture department at RMIT), were promoted through this selection.

In Sydney, young art-school teachers did not play a part in the selection of participants in the Sculpture Prize. In New South Wales, the development of a new tertiary art school system lagged behind Victoria, South Australia and Tasmania. However, the ‘openness’
Daniel Thomas referred to in his review of the Mildura Sculpture Prize indicated new selectors with a different set of dispositions with preferences for ‘new art’. Thomas, in his roles as curator at AGNSW and art reviewer for a number of Sydney metropolitan newspapers, was connected into the CAS in Sydney, the commercial gallery network and Central Street Gallery and its constellation. With the gradual decline of the NSW Society of Sculptors and Associates organisation, many younger artists – the more experimental – were being shown at the annual CAS Young Contemporaries exhibitions. Sculpture at the National Art School, and its feeder technical colleges, was in a moribund state under the control of the Department of Education. Thomas’s comment about the ‘invasion’ of sculpture by painting was particularly evident in the Sydney selection. With regard to Adelaide and Melbourne, the elision between the new selectors and art education was obvious. A similar proposition could be raised in regard to the participation of young sculptors from the Elam School of Fine Art, Auckland.203

**New gallery space**

The impact on participants and much of the ‘new work’ of a purpose-built exhibition space with track lighting and white walls, compared to the narrow drawing room of the historic house that had previously functioned as the gallery space, cannot be overestimated. At that time most commercial galleries were either converted shopfronts or private houses.204 The publicly funded state art galleries and the very few regional galleries were usually housed in nineteenth-century buildings, in cramped conditions, often shared with a museum or library.

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203 Paul Beadle, Professor of Fine Arts at the Auckland University (previously head of Newcastle Art School, inaugural director of Newcastle City Art Gallery and principal of SASA from 1958 to 1960), and an exhibitor at Mildura in 1961 and 1964, did not participate in 1967. However, William (Jim) Allen, lecturer in sculpture at Elam School of Fine Art at Auckland University and president of the New Zealand Society of Sculptors and Associates, was selected, together with two recent Elam graduates, Darcy Lange and Warren Viscoe, implying that Beadle, like the RMIT Centre 5 lecturers, was one of the selectors for NZ.

204 Central Street Gallery in Sydney, established in 1965, was the exception. It was a large industrial warehouse space in Sydney’s CBD with exposed beams, concrete floor and white painted walls and ceiling.
The influence, after 1964, of new art magazines such as *Artforum*, *Art International* and *Studio International* and publications such as *Private View*, was another factor distinguishing this sculpture prize from the previous Mildura events. Photography, particularly colour reproductions of ‘new British sculpture’ or minimalist works using highly coloured and reflective materials became increasingly important as part of the discursive medium of these new publications and later exhibition catalogues. Sited in the white cube of a loft studio or industrial gallery space (like Central Street Gallery in Sydney), this ‘new art’ highlighted the need for uncluttered exhibition spaces.

These same art magazines were filled with discussion and argument concerning the ‘theatricality’ of contemporary art, the inert and impersonal aspects of minimalism and the direct engagement of such works with the viewer’s space. Michael Fried’s famous polemic, ‘Art and objecthood’, although published after the Mildura Sculpture Prize, was written in response to earlier published writings: Donald Judd’s ‘Specific objects’ and Robert Morris’s four-part ‘Notes on sculpture’, two parts of which were reproduced in *Artforum* in 1966. In ‘Notes on sculpture: part 1’, Morris’s explanation of minimalism’s approach was to ‘take relationships out of the work and make them a function of space, light and the viewer’s field of vision. [The viewer] is more aware than ever before that he himself is establishing relationships as he apprehends the object from various positions and under varying conditions of light and spatial context.’ Morris was concerned with the non-mimetic, anti-illusory functions of minimalist works, in direct contrast to the formal and expressive concerns in the works shown in the 1964 touring exhibition, *Recent British Sculpture*, and the two previous Mildura Sculpture Prize exhibitions.

There was a generational shift evident in the 1967 Mildura works, in both selected sculptors and the dispositions of the new selectors. The examples of ‘new art’ stood out

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against many works that clearly drew upon a European post-humanist style, particularly exemplified in post-war Italian and English sculpture. The consecration of this new work in a national survey of contemporary Australian sculpture in, possibly, the newest modern professional-standard public gallery in Australia at that time was significant.

The selection of RMIT graduates by RMIT lecturers also indicated the beginning of a subtle shift in the definition of the conception of a professional sculptor and professional practice. Against the background of the beginning of the transition in Victoria of technical art schools to autonomous colleges within the new tertiary VIC system, the competition to control the ‘recruitment, training and promotion’ of sculptors as lecturers, to raise the status of sculpture and to control the definition and ranking of professional practice was critical to those members of Centre 5 who were senior lecturers at RMIT.207

High-level institutional and corporate backing offered by the director and the trustees of the NGV to the Mildura Arts Centre and its Triennial Sculpture Prize reinforced the symbolic and economic value of the investment by state and local governments in Victoria’s first regional arts centre and confirmed the Mildura Sculpture Prize’s position as an important national event. The most significant sponsorship for acquisitive awards was $1500 provided by BP Australia Ltd. The chairman of BP Australia, Mr N. R. Seddon, who also performed the official opening of the triennial, was also the president of the NGV trustees. The chairman of the MACAC, Cr N. J. Noyce, acknowledged the significance of the sponsorship by BP Australia to the Mildura committee: ‘The $1500 gift has really encouraged us and made us realise just how important the competition is.’208

207 Schwarz, Culture and Power, op. cit., p. 206.
208 ‘The prize of the inland’, BP Accelerator, no. 144, June 1967, n.p. In an attempt to ensure further metropolitan exposure for the sculptors and also for the prize, a number of entries in the Mildura Sculpture Prize were exhibited in July 1967 at Georges Gallery in Melbourne. This was probably organised by Tom McCullough and Alan McCulloch, the art critic and organiser of the Georges Invitational Prize in Melbourne. The mention of this mini-Mildura exhibition is listed in an entry for Margaret Sinclair, winner of the 1967 small sculpture prize, in Scarlett, Australian Sculptors, op. cit., p. 601.
Local sponsorship was also critical to the success and continuance of the Mildura Sculpture Prize, particularly during this period of competition from annual metropolitan-based sculpture prizes and scholarships. Mildara Wines Ltd agreed to host the formal opening dinner and freight sponsorship provided by the Mildura freight forwarders McGlashan Transport Pty Ltd took care of works to and from Melbourne and Sydney. W.A. Young’s Transport Service offered a similar arrangement to and from Adelaide and the Union Steam Ship Co. of New Zealand offered free sea transport for New Zealand participants. The value of the Triennial Sculpture Prize as a major tourist attraction and income generator for the businesses of Mildura was acknowledged when the Mildura Chamber of Commerce and the Sunraysia District Tourism Association provided $400 (not an insignificant amount in 1967) for the small sculpture award.

Commentary on selected works

The judges for the 1967 Mildura Prize were Dr Donald Brook (a practising sculptor, academic and art critic for The Canberra Times), Laurie Thomas, then director of the QAG and Tom McCullough. The prize of $1200 for a monumental work was awarded to Bert Flugelman for Equestrian, 1966, made of cast iron (Figure 27); that of $400 for a small indoor work was awarded to Margaret Sinclair for Fallen Warrior, 1966, cast in bronze (Figure 25). As cast works, both winning sculptures fell well within the definition of the traditional craft of sculpture. Flugelman’s work made loose references to the British middle generation of sculptors shown in the Recent British Sculpture exhibition and the Italian sculptor Marino Marini’s horse-and-rider motif. Sinclair’s Fallen Warrior revealed the impact of post-war Italian sculpture and traditional Italian casting practices as a result of a Churchill Fellowship spent in Milan. In many respects, these two winning works were very much in keeping with the prize selections of the two previous Mildura Prizes.

However, this traditional perception of sculpture as something modelled, cast or carved was directly challenged by a number of other works in the triennial; significantly, the acquisitions for the Mildura Art Centre collection. Phoenix II, 1967, by Michael
Kitching, was acquired for the collection through the sponsorship of BP Australia Ltd (Figure 26). Kitching had already collected a swathe of prizes, mostly for painting. However, having won the prize for Sculpture at the Royal Agricultural Show in Sydney in 1966, it was 1967 that would be a very important year for him in terms of recognition of his work as a sculptor in a new idiom. It began with the purchase of his work for the Mildura Arts Centre from the Sculpture Prize, followed by his winning the second Alcorso-Sekers Travelling Scholarship Award for Sculpture and the first Flotta Lauro Prize for painting and sculpture (he, of course, with his sculpture and Guy Warren for painting). Kitching epitomised the energetic younger generation of artists who characterised Daniel Thomas’s claim of ‘sculpture’s invasion by painting’; a generation in a hurry without regard for rigid and academic boundaries. Phoenix II incorporated prefabricated, industrial elements constructed within a welded aluminium frame. Its component parts consisted of ‘a washing machine agitator with a Ford Thunderbird type tail light in the middle, plus a plastic umbilical cord, some children’s play balls all surrounded by a plumage of pink Perspex’.209

The second work acquired with the BP Australia sponsorship, Slotzyman and Slotzywoman, was by New Zealander Jim Allen (Figure 24). Made of rough cast aluminium, this assemblage coupling displayed an affinity with Eduardo Paolozzi’s machine aesthetic.210 Although New Zealand sculptors had participated in the Mildura Prizes from the outset (one, Paul Beadle, in 1961 and three participants in 1964), it was through Jim Allen, a lecturer at the Elam School of Arts, University of Auckland and his organising of the participation of a further five sculptors from New Zealand in 1967 that signalled what would become a regular and very productive exchange between Australian and New Zealand artists.211 Two more works were purchased by the Mildura City Council for the permanent collection: C. Elwyn Dennis’s Device for Discovering the Stars II, 1967 and Ron Upton’s biomorphic Push-Pull, 1966, which apparently gurgled

209 ‘The prize of the inland’, op. cit.
210 Works by Eduardo Paolozzi were included in the British Council exhibition, Recent British Sculpture, which toured NZ in 1962, a year before touring through Australian state galleries.
211 Paul Beadle, the first participant sculptor from New Zealand in 1961, was, until just prior to the Prize, the dynamic principal of SASA. Therefore, from the Mildura Sculpture Prize’s inception, the NZ link was firmly established through the Australian art school network.
provocatively when handled. None of the purchased works were monumental outdoor works. All were conceived for display within a white walled gallery space.

The least traditional works – by Nigel Lendon, Warren Viscoe (NZ) and Michael Nicholson – drew on minimalist or hard-edge influences. Made from geometrically crafted wood with highly coloured and finished surfaces, these objects oscillated between the illusion of two-dimensional painting and the three-dimensionality of sculpture. Lendon’s *Slab Construction II*, 1967 and Viscoe’s *Red Shift-Green Shift*, 1966, eschewed the traditional plinth in preference for the floor as base. *Slab Construction II* was exhibited while Lendon was still a sculpture student at SASA and the work aligned him with the hard-edge painting movement. Apart from the influence of international art magazines and the reviews of contemporary international exhibitions in the reborn (and renamed) local journal, *Art and Australia*, Lendon and his contemporaries would have seen the travelling exhibition, *Contemporary American Painting: A Selection from the James A. Michener Foundation Collection*, which opened at the Adelaide Festival in 1964 (in tandem with the 2nd Mildura Sculpture Prize) and then toured Australian state galleries and Newcastle City Gallery throughout 1964.

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212 A similar work in this series was exhibited in *The Field* exhibition at the opening of the new NGV premises in 1968. At SASA, the painting lecturer Sydney Ball had returned in 1965 from living and working in New York. He was associated with Theodorus Stamos and other members of the New York school and was ‘an early and influential representative of hard-edge abstraction’ in Australia’. See McCullough, *Encyclopaedia of Australian Art*, vol. 1, op. cit., p. 75. Ball was an important influence on Lendon, who was a student at SASA from 1966 to 1969.

Figure 24: top left, Director of Mildura Arts Centre, Tom McCullough with Jim Allen’s *Slotzyman and Slotzywoman* 1967, cast aluminium, 81.5 cms(h). Collection Mildura Arts Centre.

Figure 25: Margaret Sinclair, *Fallen Warrior* 1966, bronze, 61 x 152.5 cms. Mildura Prize for Small Sculpture, 1967. Gifted by the artist to Winston Churchill Memorial Trust, Canberra 1972.

Figure 26: Mike Kitching, *Phoenix II* 1967, aluminium and Perspex, 202 cms (h). Collection Mildura Arts Centre.

Figure 27: Herbert (Bert) Flugelman, *Equestrian* 1966, cast iron, 242 cms (h). First Prize, 1967 Mildura Sculpture Prize. Collection Mildura Arts Centre.
Figure 28: top, Darcy Lange. *Cadmium Red* 1966, painted steel, 25.5 x 152.5 cms.

Figure 29: above, Christo’s *Wrapped Coast, Little Bay*, 1969. Photo: Wolfgang Wolz. 1st Kaldor Art Project.
Darcy Lange, a young sculptor who had just completed a Diploma of Fine Arts in sculpture at the Elam School of Fine Arts in Auckland, exhibited the first Caro-esque works in Australia.\(^{214}\) Lange’s works, \textit{Cadmium Red} and \textit{Scarlet Chrome}, both made in 1966 of painted steel, were flowing floor-based works (Figure 28). Like \textit{Slab Construction II} they made the most of the new professional gallery premises in Mildura.

Not only did the 1967 Mildura Prize have to contend with other metropolitan art prizes, there was also the much-publicised concern of local people in Mildura’s \textit{Sunraysia Daily} newspaper. The two non-acquisitive prize-winning works that conformed to the traditional definition of sculpture were funded from locally raised sponsorship. However, it was the more adventurous acquisitions for the gallery collection, funded by BP Australia and the Mildura Council, which were controversial and raised the ire of the local community.\(^{215}\)

The bestowal of the two prizes on works that conformed to the traditional definition of sculpture and the voluble, public controversy surrounding the works acquired for the gallery collection indicated two different sets of preferences operating in the selection process. It was the ‘disjunction between [the selectors] own principles of evaluation and those [of] the general public’ with regard to gallery acquisitions (more permanent than the prestige of prize titles), and the legitimacy that this bestowed upon ‘new art’ by younger artists, which revealed the emergence of a new market and a new audience, with a new set of preferences for professional practice and what defined ‘sculpture’.

\(^{214}\) \textit{Recent British Sculpture}, which toured Australian state galleries in 1963, did not include any Anthony Caro works. Caro’s first work to appear in Australia, \textit{Piano}, was brought out by the CAS in 1968 to celebrate its 30\(^{th}\) anniversary. Having completed a Diploma of Fine Arts at the University of Auckland, Lange would leave for the UK to study at the Royal College of Art, London (1968–1971).

\(^{215}\) Mike Kitching’s work, \textit{Phoenix II}, acquired for the gallery with funds from BP Australia, was valued at $1000 and was loaned to the NGV for its gala opening exhibition of contemporary Australian work, \textit{The Field}, in August 1968. The local poultry farmer and Councillor Lloyd Beasy took umbrage at Ron Upton’s work, \textit{Push-Pull}, which was acquired for the Mildura collection with the approval of the MACAC; and Councillor Mills described the works purchased as ‘monstrous’. \textit{The Herald}, 28 April 1967, quoted in Brad Leonard, ‘The First Australian Sculpture Triennial’, \textit{Art Network}, issue 3-4, winter/spring 1981, p. 21.
Sales of sculpture from the exhibition to private and corporate clients, which had been a successful feature of both previous triennial prizes, were limited in 1967. McCullough was concerned and, in response, organised with Alan McCulloch for selected works to be shown at the Georges Gallery in Melbourne in July 1967. One of the prize’s founding aims was to build an audience for contemporary Australian sculpture and generate income for sculptors. Failure to do so, in such a competitive climate, could damage Mildura’s pre-eminent position amongst the various metropolitan sculpture prizes. Nevertheless, for many of the younger graduate sculptors, particularly from Melbourne, where the opportunities to secure a part-time teaching position were beginning to expand, the cultural and symbolic gains in being selected and exhibited that accrued to one’s professional standing was as important as potential sales.

**Catalogue essays: developing the discourse**

McCullough in his catalogue introduction and Elwyn Lynn in his essay highlighted the need for current information on Australian sculptors and informed critical debate on sculpture. McCullough commissioned four essays with an Australasian metropolitan geography in mind: Auckland, Melbourne, Sydney and Canberra. These included Elwyn Lynn’s ‘Trends in recent Australian sculpture’, Donald Brook’s mild polemic, ‘Sculpture and public sculpture’, Bernard Smith’s ‘Sculpture abroad’ and Hamish Keith’s ‘Sculpture in New Zealand’. The essays aimed to contextualise sculptural practice in Australia and New Zealand and contribute to an emergent sculptural discourse.

In the six years between the three Mildura events, the situation for sculptors and sculptural practice in Australia had begun to change through increased, albeit limited, exhibition opportunities, international touring exhibitions, publications, including reviews in *Art and Australia* and the burgeoning print media, an increasing number of prizes that encouraged sculpture and, most importantly, the expanding number of students taking up

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216 ‘The Georges Exhibition of “Prize Winners and Selected Entries” from the competition seems to be going well … I don’t know whether Georges will sell any but for the sculptors’ sakes, I certainly hope so.’ Tom McCullough, letter to Donald Brook, 5 July 1967, Donald Brook Archive, Mildura Correspondence.
art at technical school, mostly for teaching purposes. However, public understanding and appreciation of sculpture still lagged behind that of painting and the expanding commission opportunities for sculptors exposed this dysfunctional relationship.

Professor Joseph Burke in his 1961 Mildura Sculpture Prize catalogue essay, ‘Tradition and innovation in Western sculpture’, had stated that the situation in Australia was ‘deplorable but not hopeless’.\textsuperscript{217} It was a rather different scenario offered by Elwyn Lynn in his 1967 catalogue essay:

If 1966, which beheld the inception of the Alcorso-Sekers Prize, a Transfield Prize dedicated to sculpture and the establishment of the Sculpture Centre in Canberra, was a sculptor’s year, then the way to this \textit{annus mirabilis} had been prepared not only by the Mildura competitions, but also by the rejuvenation of sculpture societies, the establishment of a sculpture section at Sydney’s Royal Easter Show, the work of Melbourne’s Centre Five and the 1964–65 touring exhibition of Recent Australian Sculpture … by the end of 1966 a wealth of new names, new attitudes and a more intensive realisation of established modes had come to the notice of a public …\textsuperscript{218}

Lynn painted a picture of a rapid growth of interest in and commitment to Australian sculpture within a relatively short period. The Mildura Sculpture Triennial was now one of a number of nationally focused initiatives. However, more revealing was Lynn’s mention of ‘a wealth of new names, new attitudes’. A number of these were current students or very recent graduates. Their interest in the ‘objectness’ of a work of art revealed the influence of images and ideas in new international art magazines as well as the local \textit{Art and Australia}, all of which began publishing in the early to mid 1960s, coupled with the impact of young artists, either coming or returning from Britain and the United States, who were now teaching in art schools. It was this younger group, many present for the first time in the 1967 Mildura Sculpture Prize, who were the beneficiaries of this expanded contemporary and international artistic discourse and the national exhibition opportunities afforded by such new prizes as the Flotta Lauro Scholarship and the Comalco Invitation Award for Sculpture.

Hamish Keith offered a very brief historical overview of developments in sculpture in New Zealand, noting that in the previous three years New Zealand, like Australia, had seen a significant increase in mostly public commissions and was experiencing similar problems. Bernard Smith’s essay ‘Sculpture abroad’ noted the medium’s popularity and vigour and that many painters were moving to sculpture as a field that offered considerable scope and challenge beyond the ‘Greenberg-Smith-Caro axis’.\(^{219}\) His comment about the ‘new predilection for glitter and shiny surfaces, with much use of metal foil and plexi-glass’, observed during his overseas sabbatical and in evidence in a number of works at Mildura, again reflected the rapid transmission of images and ideas via new publishing media including television and magazines, and the influence of younger, well travelled teachers.\(^{220}\)

Lynn’s essay lamented the lack of informed, critical, public debate about sculpture in Australia; with the essays in the three Mildura catalogues constituting the most sustained contemporary appraisals. Encouraging architects and government departments interested in commissioning work for public buildings was one of the aims of the Mildura Sculpture Prize.\(^ {221}\) Commissioning for public sculpture was, by its very nature, public and political, and hence became a focal point for conflict. Brook’s and Lynn’s essays were critical of the commissioning process for public sculpture at a time when prizes and public commissions probably offered the only commercial potential for many sculptors, as well as broader public exposure. There were concerns about the lack of competence and qualifications of those appointed to develop tenders and make selections. Tensions were evident between the conservative, sometimes ill-informed commissioning agents, usually public officials, and contemporary ‘expert’ peers competing for control of the selection process.

Brook opened with a discussion on two types of attitudes to sculptors; that of the artist-sculptor who works ‘without contextual specifications’ and the designer-sculptor who

\(^{220}\) ibid., p. 43.  
produces works to specific briefs. He then challenged architects and commissioning agencies to ‘think much more seriously of their duty to provide spaces where works of art can be sympathetically displayed’ and in his concluding lines warned sculptors: ‘but one way or another, he must keep those patrons in their place, or they will surely ruin him’. 222

In acknowledging the tension between these two categories, Brook indicated the beginning of the shift in the meaning of ‘professional’ for sculptors from one of a reputation based on a recognised skills-base and market success in gaining commissions while satisfying client objectives to one of the autonomy of self-expression. Implicit within the conception of a separate category of artist-sculptor was the necessity of a separate market for such a category; one that was not based on sales or successful commissions.

Assessment of 1967 Mildura Sculpture Prize

From the early 1960s there was the beginning of a will on the part of a powerful elite to transfer money and prestige into the creation of a market for Australian sculpture. This transfer of prestige increased significantly between 1966 and 1969 with the number of metropolitan prizes and exhibitions either aimed at or inclusive of contemporary sculpture. The three Mildura Sculpture Prizes were exemplars of this trend; moving from the position of an initiator in 1961 to a competitor within this expanding field of activity by 1967.

Concurrent with this new market development for Australian sculpture were the changes in tertiary education in Australia. The early implications of this expansion within the state art school systems were evident in the changing dispositions of the selectors for the 1967 Mildura Sculpture Prize, in particular their inclusion of ‘new art’ by recent graduates and even current art school students in this national exhibition. These new selectors presaged the shift in the definition of ‘professional’ practice from one based within a vocational set of skills and external market evaluation through sales and commissions to a ‘professional’ practice that was increasingly based on a set of credentials and criteria.

recognised by a peer group of which they were a part. It is the introduction of a new set of cultural dispositions, tentatively evident in the selection process and in the acquisitions for the Mildura collection, that marks 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’; a field of activity that is fundamentally linked to, and shaped by, the increasing autonomy of art education.  

**Tom McCullough 1967–1969**

For McCullough, the impact of competitive pressures and the need to differentiate and define a unique niche for the Mildura Sculpture Prize were clearly evident in 1967. The beginning of the expansion of three interrelated emergent institutions created these pressures: tertiary education (art schools), art prizes (particularly sculpture prizes) and new gallery developments (particularly in Victoria).

In an astute move as the new director, McCullough subscribed to a media service that provided him with monthly clippings of all arts reviews and reports in the metropolitan dailies around Australia.²²⁴ It was an excellent way to become familiar with the critics and follow what they were recommending as interesting and new art. He was introduced to Dr Donald Brook, an academic and sculptor, as the art critic for *The Canberra Times*, through the clipping service. McCullough wrote to Brook in March 1966 introducing the Mildura Prize and requesting Brook to consider being one of the judges for the forthcoming Prize in 1967.²²⁵ He also asked whether Brook would consider writing an article for the catalogue.

In the ensuing correspondence between the two, McCullough noted in a letter dated 6 April 1966 that he hoped to meet Brook in Canberra on his (McCullough’s) return from

²²⁴ McCullough, interview with the author, 30 March 2006, Mt Martha, Vic. Ansett Airlines is also credited as a sponsor in the Mildura Arts Centre Annual Reports.
²²⁵ Tom McCullough, letter to Donald Brook, 24 March 1966, Donald Brook archives, Mildura correspondence.
Sydney, where he intended to view the 1st Alcorso-Sekers Travelling Scholarship Award for Sculpture at the AGNSW. McCullough was also hoping to meet with Mrs Lesta O’Brien, the proprietor of the recently opened Australian Sculpture Centre, a commercial enterprise located in the diplomatic circuit in Canberra, of which Brook had kept him informed. The clippings service would also have informed him that the Transfield Prize, which since 1961 was the richest art prize in Australia, would be dedicated to Sculpture in 1966. Organised through the auspices of the NSW Society of Sculptors and Associates, the exhibition was held in November in Hyde Park, Sydney and the £1000 prize was won by Norma Redpath for her cast bronze work, *Immortal Warrior*.

McCullough also realised that, given the competition in 1966 from other sculpture prizes established in the major cities of Melbourne and Sydney, he would have to secure increased publicity to ensure that the triennial Mildura Sculpture Prize maintained its pre-eminent position. By 1967, apart from the Mildura Sculpture Prize, there were now a number of other prizes focused on sculpture. These included the Flotta Lauro Prizes and the Comalco Invitation Award for Sculpture. This invitational award, which continued until 1970, was specifically aimed at aluminium ‘sculpture for architectural environments’. Between 1966 and 1969, these annual prizes were perceived as stealing a march on the triennial Mildura Sculpture Prize.

As part of the preparations for 1967, McCullough negotiated a sponsorship arrangement with Ansett Airlines that would allow him to fly free of charge (when the flights were not fully booked) and secure return air tickets for the prize opening event as an incentive for art critics to come to Mildura and review the exhibition. He also planned a national sculptors conference to strengthen and differentiate the Mildura Prize from the metropolitan competitors. However, the conference did not eventuate.

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226 George Baldessin won the Alcorso-Sekers Award (exhibition ran from 27 July to 28 August 1966).
227 Redpath had also won the 1st and 2nd Mildura Prize for Sculpture in 1961 and 1964, and her 1964 Mildura Sculpture Prize-winning work *Dawn Sentinel* was purchased by the NGV.
228 Although established in 1967, the Comalco Award was not conferred in the first instance until 1968.
229 Tom McCullough, email response to author’s questions, 18 October 2006. In his Editorial Comment in the 1967 exhibition catalogue, McCullough noted that the director of the Victorian Council of Adult Education (VCAE), Colin Badger, organised a sculpture appreciation school for the final weekend of the
The national professional body, the Art Galleries Association of Australia (AGAA), held its annual conference on the opening weekend of the 3rd Mildura Sculpture Prize. This ensured that members had a chance to view the new facilities at the Mildura Arts Centre and also enjoy the triennial Sculpture Prize exhibition. It also provided important professional recognition for McCullough as the newly installed director of Mildura Arts Centre, and for his successful management of the 3rd Mildura Sculpture Prize. This was only the third annual meeting of the AGAA and the selection of Mildura indicated the significant position it occupied in the hierarchy of member galleries and the triennial Sculpture Prize’s importance as a network hub.

McCullough learnt significant lessons from directing his first Sculpture Prize at the Mildura Arts Centre. The change in the dispositions of the selectors made him aware of the beginning of a shift of the focus of the Mildura Prize from ‘designer-sculptor’ for public commissions to ‘artist-sculptor’. Of the sixty-eight participants, thirty-two per cent were either still students or very recent graduates of sculpture diploma courses (some already teaching in the system), and a number of these sculptors produced the most exciting work. A number of the exhibits in 1967 were indicative of an opening out of the category of sculpture, such changes already becoming apparent in the CAS Young Prize (10–12 June 1967). I located a promotional brochure, ‘Mildura Weekend Sculpture School, 10, 11, 12 June 1967’, produced by the VCAE in the Mildura Arts Centre box at the NGA research library. However, like the initially proposed national sculptors symposium, McCullough noted in a further email exchange to the author, 22 February 2007: ‘I think the CAE eventually cancelled because of a lack of attracting visitor enrolments … We thereafter discontinued our ambitions to attract an audience … realising that the exhibition and celebratory action was mainly focused on the opening weekend. We later added various programs throughout the display period, such as visiting performance artists … artists in residence and follow up publications to encourage interpretation and reflection.’

230 Formed in 1965, at its inaugural meeting at the AGNSW, the AGAA appointed Gordon Thompson, deputy director of the NGV as its president and Ron Appleyard, deputy director of the National Gallery of South Australia as its secretary. The association was dedicated to encouraging professional development of the professional staffs of state and regional art galleries.

231 Most of the AGAA participants, comprising curators and directors from state and regional galleries around Australia, were staying at The Grand Hotel in Mildura. Daniel Thomas recounted a tale that is now part of Mildura legend and was reported in the Melbourne Herald along the lines that some art museum professionals had taken a dislike to some of the pictures hanging on the walls in the Mildura Grand Hotel and had removed them and thrown them into the lily pond at the hotel. No names were mentioned in the despatch but the police were called the next morning and told that it was Laurie Thomas, one of the judges and QAG director. It was the wrong Thomas. It was the work of Daniel Thomas and Mirka Mora and they had removed reproductions of Tretiakov blondes and brunettes.

232 Calculated on the basis of brief biographical data provided by each participant in the 1967 catalogue. Daniel Thomas, telephone interview with the author, 31 July 2006.
Contemporaries shows and at new, innovative commercial galleries such as Central Street Gallery and Watters Gallery in Sydney, and in Melbourne at Argus Gallery, Gallery A, and, from 1967, at Tolarno Gallery and Pinacotheca. For many, this Mildura Sculpture Prize was their first major public exhibition.

McCullough’s friendship with John Davis and Ken Scarlett and his introduction to their sculpture students from Caulfield and Prahran technical colleges reinforced an important element that McCullough would adopt for the future of the Mildura Sculpture Prize. It was this conscious acknowledgement of the increasing role and importance of the new art education system – the inclusion of sculptor-teachers and their students – that would become a central tenet of the Mildura Sculpture event during the 1970s. As McCullough noted in an email exchange: ‘[I]t was my policy thereafter to try and foster such excursions from colleges in Melbourne, Adelaide, Sydney and Canberra with some success’.233

Also apparent in 1967 was an emerging alliance of ‘agents of consecration’, with new sets of dispositions favouring a rupture with the traditional definition of sculpture and the redefinition of ‘professional’ as an assessable criterion.234 These new dispositions were evident in McCullough in his new role as the professional arts centre manager; in new critics, particularly Dr Donald Brook, Daniel Thomas, Patrick McCaughey and Elwyn Lynn; in new institutional curators/selectors such as Elwyn Dennis, Daniel Thomas and John Bailey; and in recent graduate sculptors as teachers in the early phase of the expansion of the tertiary art school system. These new ‘agents of consecration … ensure the reproduction of … [certain sets of] cultivated dispositions’ which are manifested ‘in a certain type of work and a certain type of cultivated person’.235 This shift was indicative of McCullough’s role as director being in a state of flux.

233 Tom McCullough, email to author, 18 October 2006.
235 ibid., p. 121.
In 1968, the impact of *The Field* as the launch exhibition of the new NGV premises, at that time the leading Australian state art gallery, and its promotion of the NGV as the ‘institutional sponsor … of an “avant-garde” context for contemporary art in Australia’ was evidence of the changing role of art galleries and curators.\(^{236}\) In adopting this new institutional orientation, the NGV provided the necessary status and impetus for McCullough to begin contemplating a radical new format for the next Mildura sculpture event in 1970.

**Preparations for 1970**

By 1969 McCullough had established his credentials as both a regional gallery director and the director of a national triennial sculpture prize. The previous four years had been a period of learning and consolidation. He undertook a pilot professional development course established by the AGAA. As the course required time spent in internships in Melbourne and Adelaide State Galleries, McCullough availed himself of the opportunity to spend time at the NGV with Gordon Thomson, the deputy director, who was interested in sculpture and the new young curator of Sculpture and Ethnic Art, C. Elwyn Dennis. He also got to know the education officers. It was evident that Westbrook’s new professional vision for the NGV, with its expanded curatorial and education departments, was an important guiding model for McCullough.

It was also a time when McCullough and Brian Finemore, the curator of Australian Art at the NGV, were courting and competing to secure Mrs Hilda Elliott’s bequest, which included a number of paintings by Arthur Streeton and Frederick McCubbin. The bequest of Senator R.D. Elliott had established the Mildura Art Gallery in 1956. McCullough’s bargaining power was supported by the national success of the Mildura Sculpture Prizes, which had garnered significant prestige to the Mildura Arts Centre and its collections and, was contiguous with his ambition for Mildura that regionalism need not equate with

inferiority. The most significant works in the bequest eventually went to Mildura, which did not endear McCullough to Finemore.

In 1969 McCullough was encouraged to apply for a Gulbenkian Fellowship, which was auspiced by the AGAA. These professional development fellowships had recently been established for Australian curators to travel overseas to study museological and curatorial aspects relevant to their career. They were highly competitive, with only one fellowship being granted per year.

I suppose I had aspirations to become a global kind of museum person and by 1969 I had won the Gulbenkian Fellowship to travel overseas to study art exhibitions and sculpture parks … That year, aged 33, I felt I was really walking on air.

The awarding of this highly competitive and prestigious scholarship to McCullough (the award had only been established the previous year) is evidence that his aspirations to ‘become a global kind of museum person’ were founded in real possibility. It is evident that McCullough was favoured by a number of significant and powerful figures within the art gallery network. McCullough was awarded the fellowship at the end of 1969 and took it up in 1970 just after the completion of the 1970 Mildura Sculpture Triennial. Westbrook was one of his supporters.

McCullough was also at this time seeking ideas for a change to the prize format for the 1970 event. In his Director’s Report to MACAC (28 February 1969), he outlined his concerns regarding competitions, particularly sculptural prizes:

In the past two or three years, competitions … have been attracting strong criticism in Australia. The approaches to sculptural philosophy are diversifying … degrees of excellence become obscured among a complex of aesthetic ideals … let Mildura then avoid the mudslinging aspect attendant upon most competitions/exhibitions today.

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237 This collection was valuable to both galleries. Senator R.D. Elliott had been a trustee of the combined State Library, Museum and National Gallery from 1924 to 1940; in the institutional reorganisation he was appointed a trustee of the NGV from 1944 until his death in 1950. He was a newspaper proprietor with substantial regional titles including the Sunraysia Daily, Mildura’s daily newspaper.
238 Tom McCullough, interview with the author, 30 March 2006, Mt. Martha, Vic.
239 Mildura Arts Centre, Director’s Report to Mildura Arts Centre Advisory Committee, 28 February 1969, Public Records Office Victoria, VPRS 12731/P2/File 6, Mildura Arts Centre.
McCullough clearly identified the fact that the discrete category ‘sculpture’ that had been the foundation of the first Mildura Sculpture event in 1961 had collapsed, and that the various practices and conceptions of what now constituted sculpture were diverse and irreconcilable, leading to competition for control of the definition among the various factions, and thus control of the process of consecration.

Instead of a competition with prize money we can ill afford, it is recommended that in March 1970, an exhibition called ‘the Mildura Sculpture Triennial’ is arranged on a personal invitation basis. This will omit the pre-selections in capital cities which caused concern (and unnecessary freight expense) among a number of established sculptors … We should now be able to interest a large enough number of sculptors in a prestige showing of their work in Mildura providing that we advertise the fact that we shall be purchasing a number of works for our permanent collection.240

The proposed format change was symptomatic of decline in the symbolic value of art prizes in Australia, which for sculpture had grown from one in 1961 (Mildura) to a plethora by 1967.241 By 1972, the major sculpture prizes had ceased to exist and in the case of Alcorso-Sekers and Transfield, they had transformed into internationally focused events that continue to the present.242 However, the proposed transformation of the Mildura Sculpture Prize to a national survey exhibition by invitation was dictated by necessities greater than simply the decline in symbolic value of prizes and concerns about ‘unnecessary freight expense among a number of established sculptors’.243

Implicit within the criticism by these ‘established sculptors’ that McCullough refers to was that some of them had failed to be included by the selectors in the 1967 Mildura

240 ibid.
241 Selection processes and selection criteria adopted by various prizes were a source of increasing conflict and controversy. McCullough’s quote on p. 101 above reflected a growing disquiet amongst curators and critics. Some of these issues were addressed in Elwyn Lynn’s article ‘Art prizes in Australia’, Art and Australia, vol. 6, no. 4, March 1969, pp. 314–18.
242 The Alcorso-Sekers Travelling Scholarship Award for Sculpture became Kaldor Art Projects, with the first in 1969 being Christo’s wrapping of Little Bay in Sydney. The Transfield Prize ceased in 1971 and by 1973 had become the Biennale of Sydney. A feature of both transformations is that access to exhibition and invitation was controlled by one person, either the patron John Kaldor, or, in the case of the Transfield, the invited director for the Biennale of Sydney. The first successful application of this model for the Biennale of Sydney was the second Biennale, 1976, directed by Tom McCullough.
243 Mildura Arts Centre, Director’s Report to Mildura Arts Centre Advisory Committee, 28 February 1969, op.cit.
Prize. Therefore, the 1967 Mildura Sculpture Prize ‘distinguished [itself] by whom [the selectors] exclude[d] than by whom they include[d].’ In proposing an invitational format, the control of access to exhibition was shifted to McCullough and his network of spotters, giving greater power to the dispositions that this network would select for. The necessity to control access to exhibition and thus validation, particularly within the burgeoning tertiary art school sector, was symptomatic of the need to establish their autonomy and differentiate themselves from the low status, vocational training that sculpture had endured under the Department of Education. The success of such a proposal was dependent on developing a network of peers, or ‘agents of consecration’ – teachers, curators, critics – who shared a set of criteria that defined their preferences and which would ‘ensure the reproduction of [those sets of] cultivated dispositions’ manifested ‘in a certain type of work and a certain type of cultivated person’ recognised by these agents.

The recommended shift of financial resources from prizes to acquisitions also raised the profile and concentrated the prestige of both McCullough as a curator-director and the Mildura Art Centre with its collection of contemporary Australian sculpture. This action identified a unique position for McCullough, the Mildura Arts Centre and the future role of the triennial sculpture events. Mildura Art Centre’s Advisory Committee gave in-principle backing to this new proposal for the triennial events. 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 events: from prizes to acquisitions for contemporary collection development; from organiser and venue manager to curator and critical nexus in the network of selectors.

This shift in register from open selection to invitation was particularly evident in the Alcorso-Sekers Travelling Scholarship prize for sculpture (established in 1966), which underwent a radical change in 1969. Apart from eliminating a major competitor of the Mildura events, this change would have important impacts on McCullough and future

245 Bourdieu, The Field of Cultural Production, op. cit., p. 121.
Mildura Sculpture Triennials. Rather than sending an Australian sculptor overseas on scholarship, it proposed to bring to Australia an international artist ‘who represent[s] important trends in contemporary art practice and to help [them] realise major projects of their work’. Christo Javacheff and his partner Jeanne-Claude were invited but at some stage during the process, the company, Alcorso-Sekers, withdrew and John Kaldor, the company’s managing director, decided to run with the project with his own backing, renaming it the Kaldor Art Project No. 1 (Figure 29).

The CAS Broadsheet called for volunteers to assist in the installation at Sydney’s Little Bay and Christo was invited to give a presentation to students and staff of the Power Institute at the University of Sydney. Students from the NAS, architecture students from the University of Sydney and University of New South Wales, and senior art students from selected secondary schools also participated. It was a major collaborative project. Daniel Thomas, in his submission to the Committee of Enquiry – Art and Design in New South Wales, stated:

> I have noticed that some of the better artists in Sydney in recent years have emerged not from the art schools, but from the universities. Perhaps they feel that there is little intellectual stimulus to be had in the art schools … that technical aspects can be learnt at part time courses … they have often been architecture students.  

Written at the time of Christo’s Wrapped Coast, it was a prescient observation. The sculptural field was being increasingly populated with young painters and architecture and engineering students. Medium-specific boundaries artificially applied by art historians and critics were assailed by the vigour of an expanding new generation. Recollecting his experience of participating as an architectural student in Christo’s project, Imants Tillers said: ‘My conception of what an artist could be had been quite a limited one, you know, prior to the sort of encounter with Christo and his work. So I

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247 ‘Submission to the Committee of Enquiry – Art and Design’, by Daniel Thomas, Curator, Art Gallery of New South Wales, 9 December 1969, Donald Brook Archives, Art Education.
think I was quite inspired by that aspect.\textsuperscript{248} There was no longer a single authority that proscribed what an artist was and what art was. Artistic legitimation was now sought within a contested field of competitors all vying for position.\textsuperscript{249}

McCullough travelled to Sydney to see and photograph Christo’s installation. He was stimulated by the experience of the scale of the project and its very public impact. On his return, he gave slide lectures at the Mildura Art Gallery. The 1970 Mildura Sculpture Triennial occurred only a few months after the controversial and exciting Little Bay project; time was needed for its influence to be fully registered. However, the participatory and performative aspects of Christo’s installation, its quality as an experiential event as experienced by McCullough would become hallmarks of the Mildura Sculpture events from 1970 onwards.

The radical and concurrent changes in both the Mildura and Alcorso-Sekers sculpture prizes, and the need to differentiate distinct positions that significantly enhanced McCullough’s and Kaldor’s cultural capital, reveals the emergence of what would become a dynamic, complex and highly competitive field of activity. What these two projects point to in 1969 is the extent and complexity of the networks developing among various fields – education, political and economic power and contemporary visual art – the quality of such connections and, specifically, the high quality feedback that nodal networks such as these events generated.

**Professional development**

During the three critical years 1967, 1968 and 1969, McCullough was under pressure to reinvent the Mildura Sculpture Prize in order to maintain its status in the face of increasing competition that ensured challenges to the existing definition of sculpture. McCullough’s recommendations for a closed, invitational exhibition format for the 1970

\textsuperscript{248} Imants Tillers interviewed on ABC TV, broadcast 6.30 pm, 19 April 2004: transcript located at: \url{http://www.abc.net.au/gnt/history/Transcripts/s1090226.html}, viewed 10 November 2006.

\textsuperscript{249} Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production*, op. cit., p. 250.
Mildura Sculpture Triennial, with him as the curator, represented a radical redefining of the concept behind the triennial. Recognition would become a recursive function of this emerging field: in order to be invited to participate in the new Mildura Sculpture Triennial, one had already to be recognised by the selectors (McCullough and his network) as a member of that group.

For McCullough, after 1967, increasing professional recognition created an internal pressure to become a more active artworld participant, particularly in the development of the triennial sculpture event. In recommending to the MACAC that the 1970 event cease as an open invitation prize selected by state gallery professional personnel and instead become a ‘sculpture triennial’ event with participants selected on an invitation-only basis, McCullough was asserting his authority and autonomy as director. In taking this direction, he was clearly aligning his position and his preferences with the more powerful and rapidly expanding national visual arts community than with the local Mildura community.

By 1968 the AGAA, the professional gallery body, realising that galleries were now competing for staff with the expanding (and better paid) tertiary art education sector, initiated the Gulbenkian Scholarships. Professional development was now an important issue in terms of one’s status and employment opportunities within the expanding art world. In awarding the second Gulbenkian Scholarship to McCullough, the AGAA was rewarding his capabilities as a director and legitimating his claim to the title, as well as investing in its claim to be the professional body representing the art gallery network.

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250 The Gulbenkian Scholarship, aimed at ‘young professional art gallery officers’, was developed in response to the shortage of trained staff brought about by ‘the rapid growth of State galleries and the establishment of new regional galleries in the past decade … which has been [further] aggravated by losses to art schools and universities’. See Ron Appleyard, ‘Art Galleries Association of Australia’, Art and Australia, vol. 6, no. 3, December 1968, p. 191.
**John Davis 1967–1969**

For sculptors like Davis, the ability to maintain a sculptural practice was influenced (and made economically possible) by his employment within an expanding art education system that was in transition from a vocationally focused technical sector controlled by the central Department of Education to a series of autonomous tertiary colleges, defined by their professional practice.

After graduating from RMIT with an Associate Diploma in Sculpture at the end of 1966, Davis negotiated the move from employment in the secondary schools division of the Victorian Department of Education to the technical division. He had been offered a part-time position as lecturer in Three Dimensional Studies and Design at Caulfield Technical College. Now thirty years old, he was competing for teaching positions with much younger graduates. He had also entered the art school teaching system at a time when it was undergoing a difficult shift from the centralised administration of the Department of Education with its appointments based upon seniority, to autonomous colleges of advanced education – the new parallel tertiary system – under the administration of the VIC, where appointment was based on professional credentials. The transition between the two systems would take several years to complete; however, competition for positions and contestation over curricula and the definition of what constituted art and how it was taught were beginning to be felt in 1967 and would continue to define this transition process during this period.

**New professional career**

Davis was approached by Ken Scarlett, a fellow member of the Victorian Sculptors Society and its President from 1964 to 1965, and encouraged to apply for a part-time teaching position at the Art Department of Caulfield Technical College, one of the new affiliated colleges, at the beginning of 1967. The negotiation for his transfer from the secondary schools branch of the Education Department to the technical schools branch
met with some resistance, but the matter was cleared in time for him to commence the new teaching year at Caulfield.251

In 1967 Fred Cress, head of painting at Caulfield, had returned from a one-year sabbatical touring the United Kingdom, Europe and the United States. In 1966 he accepted a one-term part-time teaching position at his old school, Birmingham School of Art, now Birmingham Polytechnic, in England. As Cress recalled, he was both inspired and intimidated by the changes in the art school system in Britain as a result of the Coldstream Report.252 On his return to Melbourne he wanted to try a new approach, loosely based on the Bauhaus foundation-year method and drawing on his recent experience in Birmingham of teaching fine art and design students together, working on agreed themes that progressed from point to line to plane, volume and movement. Ideally, all departments, together with drawing and art history, would collaborate in integrating and developing these themes. The younger teachers, including Davis, responded enthusiastically and the then head of department, Cliff Tyndale, offered tentative support. Although there was some antagonism from more traditional staff towards a foundation course based on ‘ideas’, it was insufficient to prevent the course from proceeding. It was a very stimulating time for students and teachers: ‘We were all working at a frontier which was equally new to us as it was to the students … the ideas we were dealing with were ideas we were all involved in – staff and students’.253 A close-knit group, these young art teachers established relationships that were based on ‘the reality of making art, rather than the reality of a teaching institution’.254

The 3rd Mildura Sculpture Prize opened in 1967 on the Easter weekend. Davis had been in contact with Tom McCullough regarding arrangements to take thirty-five sculpture students from Caulfield and Prahran technical schools to the Mildura Triennial (Figures 30 & 31). Davis and Ken Scarlett were the accompanying lecturers from Caulfield

251 John Davis, handwritten notes (a kind of memoir of his time as a teacher), Davis Estate Archive, Melbourne.
252 Fred Cress, telephone interview with the author, 18 January 2008.
254 ibid.
Figure 30: John Davis (centre) with students at Lake Mungo during their visit to the 1967 Mildura Sculpture Triennial.

Figure 31: John Davis (centre), with students, boarding a flight for Mildura to visit the 1967 Mildura Sculpture Triennial.

Figure 32: John Davis, *Relief Image* 1967, carved, black stained Oregon on white painted hardboard, 112cm (h).
**Figure 33:** top, John Davis, *Bent on Mayhem* 1967, wood, stained black with some areas painted red, on white painted hardboard, 122 x 212 cms. Collection James Baker.

**Figure 34:** bottom left, John Davis, *Sixteen or 16* 1969, white fibreglass and polyester resin on hardboard and timber structure, painted white, 103 x 99 x 25 cms.

**Figure 35:** bottom right, John Davis, *Maquette for Prize* 1968, painted fibreglass, aluminium and red laminex, 50 x 58 x 17.5 cms with pedestal, 107 cms (h).
Technical College; both were selected for exhibition and were also recent sculpture graduates of RMIT. Of the sixty-eight selected sculptors, more than a quarter were recently graduated sculptors under twenty-seven years of age, including four who were still students: Sally Eastman from Caulfield Technical College, Noel Essex and Craig Haire from RMIT, and Nigel Lendon from SASA.

Davis’s entry *Relief Image* was made of carved oregon, stained black and mounted on white painted masonite (Figure 32). The work was indicative of a style termed ‘Melbourne biomorphic sculpture’, mostly practised by some recent RMIT sculpture graduates. At Mildura, Davis was made aware not only of new forms of sculpture but also, more importantly, that this ‘new art’ was mounting a serious challenge to the previously accepted notions of sculpture. There were a number of exhibits which reflected the influence of Britain’s ‘New Generation’ sculptors – Anthony Caro, William Tucker, Philip King and others – in their use of industrial materials and finishes, their colourful whimsy, their impersonal ‘design’ finish which showed no mark of the individual maker and an engagement with the viewer which rendered the pedestal redundant. The impact of new publications on the participants and selectors marked a significant difference from the previous triennials, and indicated a growing contemporaneity with developments overseas. Works by Nigel Lendon, Mike Nicholson, Darcy Lange and Mike Kitching were particularly indicative of this new trend. None of the Centre 5 members who were Davis’s lecturers at RMIT participated in this prize exhibition.

McCullough had organised for the thirty-five sculpture and design students from Caulfield and Prahran to be billeted with students and teachers from Mildura Technical School. The involvement of students, both as a critical audience and as participants, was a harbinger of the radical changes and expansion that sculpture and the teaching of

255 There are no images of the work that was listed as ‘destroyed’ in Scarlett’s *The Sculpture of John Davis*, p. 193; however, there is a reproduction of the work in situ in the Caulfield students’ newsletter, which reported on the students visit to the 3rd Mildura Sculpture Prize, Davis Estate Archive, Melbourne.

sculpture were undergoing. For Davis and McCullough – tertiary sculptor-lecturer and regional art centre director respectively – their collaboration was to become one of the mainstays of future Mildura Sculpture events.

The specific importance to Davis and his colleagues and students of the 3rd Mildura Sculpture Prize (and by extension the three Alcorso Sekers exhibitions between 1966 and 1968) was the curatorial support of the public galleries for this ‘new art’, evident in the selection of a significant number of emerging and student sculptors. For students and staff involved in the new foundation course at Caulfield, the experience had been challenging and rewarding. The teaching group decided that the students’ work warranted an exhibition in a commercial gallery, The Argus, in the centre of Melbourne’s business district and from the mid 1960s, a gallery with a reputation for showing solo exhibitions by emerging artists. This unprecedented move prompted consternation from other members of the faculty. The chosen exhibition title, *Zetetic*, meaning ‘to proceed by enquiry’, encapsulated the pedagogical intention of the foundation course. It was favourably reviewed by Alan McCulloch and established Caulfield Technical College as ‘a force to be reckoned with in the art teaching profession’.257

These three events in 1967 – the radical and collaborative foundation course at Caulfield, the 3rd Mildura Sculpture Prize and the student exhibition *Zetetic* – summed up the determination of Davis and his colleagues to establish their professional identities in opposition to the remnant technical education credo of vocational, skills-based training. The foundation course’s aims, as expressed by Fred Cress, focused on thinking, problem solving and emphasised ‘criteria and methodology of creativity’. Carried through to *Zetetic*, it presented art, and the teaching of art, as an open-ended conceptual process. A subversive strategy on the part of the new generation of artist-teachers was necessitated as a way of distinguishing themselves from the traditionalists at Caulfield and other institutions that were now becoming affiliated with the VIC. The exhibition was a calculated risk, undertaken by the youngest teachers with the least seniority, in

Bourdieu’s words, ‘the least endowed with specific capital’, in an attempt to accrue symbolic capital to their new professional method and raise their status as lecturer/practitioners, independent of the Department of Education.\footnote{Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production*, op. cit., p. 58.} Competition was generated from within the emerging group of young sculptor-teachers as they struggled to establish their professional identities and ‘create new positions [for themselves] ahead of the positions already occupied’.\footnote{Ibid., p. 60.}

By the second *Zetetic* student exhibition in August 1968, also a critical success, it was clear that ‘the emphases fell firmly and openly on the deliberate subversion of the stereotyped conception of art and the art object’.\footnote{Patrick McCaughey, ‘Art’, *The Age*, 14 August, 1968, quoted in Scarlett, *The Sculpture of John Davis*, op. cit., p. 12.} This definitional challenge was an important part of the initial process of what would constitute the coming into being of an autonomous field of art practice.

The influence on Davis of these two years (1967–68) teaching at Caulfield Technical College was significant. The need to belong, to be identified as a professional amongst his Melbourne peers, to be stylistically up-to-date, was a sufficiently powerful motivation to change his working method. His first solo exhibition was not until October 1969, when he exhibited a body of work made between late 1968 and 1969 revealing a fundamental shift away from the previous organic, expressive, carved wooden sculptures, such as the work he exhibited at the 1967 Mildura Sculpture Prize.

**1968: Tumultous Melbourne**

The major stylistic change that Davis brought to his works in 1968 was made in response to the increasing critical prominence given to ‘new art’, particularly sculpture at the new NGV premises, and its elision with the ‘professional’ identification of the new sculpture-lecturers. Davis abandoned an instinctual method of working that was successful for him...
and adapted an approach that reflected the emergent prestige of a kind of cool, minimalist abstraction that was exerting its dominance in both painting and sculpture. The evident exclusion in the NGV’s opening exhibition, *The Field*, of the kind of organic carved works that Davis had exhibited at the previous Mildura Sculpture Prize in 1967, and the elevation of the works termed ‘new abstraction’ by artists such as Nigel Lendon and Mike Kitching who had both exhibited in Mildura, was a confirmation of the new direction his work was beginning to take in 1968.261 The consecration of this ‘new art’ in the high citadel of Australia’s major art galleries had significant impact on the expectations of what art was and how it was taught.

Two works, created a year apart, exemplify the extent of the shift in Davis’s work. *Bent on Mayhem*, a two-metre long carved wooden wall-relief was exhibited in 1967 in what would be Davis’s last showing with the Victorian Sculptors’ Society. In his review, Alan McCulloch regarded it as ‘probably the major work in the exhibition’ (Figure 33).262 It is a tremendously physical work, not just in scale and conception but also in its execution: the presence of the maker and his marks are evident in its compressed and taut energy. *Drop out*, made in 1968, like many of the new works that would appear in Davis’s first one-man exhibition at Strines Gallery in 1969, was domestic in scale. However, its imagery drew from inner-urban industrial workshops rather than from an organic source. Handmade was revoked in favour of a standardised industrial ‘finish’ using highly polished reflective surfaces and materials such as fibreglass, aluminium and high-gloss automotive paints. The spatulate aluminium form emerging like a drop of heavy machine oil from the top cube form would emerge as an important serialised motif in his later works to 1971.

For Davis, the evidence of a shift in the dispositions within ‘agents of consecration’, a shift that indicated preferences for ‘new art’ and reinforced the dispositions for

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261 Kitching’s work, *Phoenix II*, 1966, exhibited in *The Field*, was on loan from the Mildura Art Centre. It had been exhibited at the 3rd Mildura Sculpture Prize in 1967 and purchased for the Mildura Art Centre collection with funds provided by BP Australia. Nigel Lendon’s work was part of a series entitled *Slab Construction* and was similar to the work he had exhibited at the 3rd Mildura Sculpture Prize.

‘professional’ that had been hinted at in the 3rd Mildura Sculpture Prize, was brought clearly into focus with two major sculpture competitions held at the NGV, and which followed on from the impact of The Field exhibition. On 23 September 1968, the first Comalco Invitation Award for Sculpture in Aluminium was launched at the new premises. Both McCulloch and Sturgeon in their respective publications noted that although the Comalco Invitation Award was only extant for four years from 1968 to 1971, it was nonetheless a very important and successful rival to the Mildura Sculpture Prize, and exerted an influence in encouraging sculptors to consider using aluminium, in a variety of ways, in their work.263

The Comalco Award was an innovative nexus that addressed a number of agendas. The award’s expressed aims of encouraging ‘public appreciation of sculpture and of sculptors working in Australia … specifically by strengthening and broadening the link between sculpture and architecture’ embraced the Centre 5 group’s objectives in a more succinct manner and realised the original commissioning aims of the Mildura Sculpture Prize.264 For Centre 5, the award was a realisation of one of their core objectives; peer recognition by a professional architect of their ‘undoubted professional competence’.265 Of the five sculptors selected to participate in the inaugural award, four were members of Centre 5 and of those, two had been Davis’s lecturers at RMIT (Parr and Jomantas).266

For Davis, the Comalco Award represented the validation of the ‘professional’ disposition of his mentors and teachers within the Centre 5 group. The highly selective nature of the award, its endorsement and exhibition at the NGV, Melbourne’s brand new,

264 Comalco’s commitment to ensuring the widest possible access and promotion of sculpture to architects was outlined in its 1970 catalogue: ‘Every effort will be made to bring the models submitted each year to the attention of architects. This will be by public display in Melbourne, Sydney and elsewhere … and this brochure … distributed to architects throughout Australia. This publication will … become a growing source of reference for architects …’. The Comalco Invitation Award for Sculpture in Aluminium 1970, n.p.
266 The selected sculptors were: Mike Nicholson (senior tutor, School of Architecture, University of New South Wales, Sydney) and the remaining four were all members of Centre 5: Lenton Parr (head of art division, Prahran Technical College and Fellow of RMIT), Vincas Jomantas (senior lecturer, RMIT), Inge King and Norma Redpath, all from Melbourne.
internationally profiled modernist cultural icon, and the commensurate economic incentives for each participant, ensured its unique and prestigious position within the competitive world of art prizes. The nature of the selectivity ensured that in order to be considered, one had to be recognised as part of a group whose dispositions were compatible with and recognised by the ‘agents of consecration’, in this case NGV director Eric Westboork, AGNSW deputy director Tony Tuckson and Melbourne architect Roy McCowan Simpson of Yuncken-Freeman architects. This very selectivity increased the competition and anxiety amongst those sculptors who considered themselves, or aspired to be considered, ‘professional’.

Vincas Jomantas was the winner of the Comalco Award with a geometric aluminium screen. His design won him the commission at the Australian Chancellery in Washington. Jomantas’s win was instructive for Davis and other younger sculptors.\(^{267}\) He had won the acquisitive prize at the 2nd Mildura Sculpture Prize for his work *Guardant*, a cast bronze monumental work with ‘organic-symbolist’ references.\(^{268}\) Since 1967 he had begun to use new materials such as pastel coloured plastics. As Noel Hutchison noted of Jomantas’s Comalco maquette and his use of aluminium: ‘[H]e has apparently moved towards complete geometric formalism … [which] may be seen in his winning *Sculpture Screen* with its appearance of being made up from precision-machined components for industry.’\(^{269}\) For the emerging group of sculptor-teachers, Davis included, the pressure to be ‘stylistically up-to-date’ within the crowded crucible of Melbourne’s art world, particularly amongst the sculptors, was more than subtly present.

In November 1968, the third Alcorso-Sekers Exhibition and Scholarship for Sculptors opened at the NGV. Participants included Bert Flugelman, Mike Kitching, Kevin Mortensen, Ron Upton, Tony Coleing, Michael Young and John Davis. Flugelman’s highly polished, aluminium, geometrically precise tetrahedrons diverged from the

\(^{267}\) Vincas Jomantas, a member of the influential Centre 5 group, had been one of Davis’s lecturers in sculpture at RMIT.


\(^{269}\) ibid., p. 14.
anthropomorphic cast iron work, *Equestrian*, with its classical references, that had won him first prize at the 3\textsuperscript{rd} Mildura Sculpture Prize in 1967.

Davis exhibited *Maquette for Prize* in the 1968 Alcorso-Sekers exhibition. The work consisted of two rectangular prisms constructed with aluminium, fibreglass, laminex and wood. Davis’s use of colour was restrained (Figure 35). *Maquette for Prize* is an unresolved, prototypical work. Davis was concerned to move away from wood as a medium, and carving as a practice, and their association with expressiveness: ‘The wood carving took a lot of energy and a lot of time … I spent hours sandpapering trying to get the quality not unlike the surface quality of aluminium and fibreglass and it became a waste of time actually.’\textsuperscript{270} His quote reveals that it was not an inner necessity that was driving Davis’s change in his practice. What the work does exemplify is Davis’s intention that the formal properties of the work should articulate a rational investigation through a deductive working process, explicit in the new and experimental pedagogy that he was involved in at Caulfield Technical College.\textsuperscript{271}

This was the first important public exhibition of Davis’s new work in a high-profile national sculpture prize. The selection of works was based on the same process used in the Mildura Sculpture Prizes: state based selections by the state art galleries. For the Victorian participants the selections were made by some of the same curators who had selected the artists and works for *The Field* exhibition. The intention within the work *Maquette for Prize*, and its selection and visibility at the NGV, was also clearly directed towards building Davis’s professional credentials. The change in his practice revealed an awareness of the imminent importance of selection criteria, implemented by peer review, as the competitive determinants for positions within the emergent tertiary teaching system. The internal pressure Davis felt to establish himself as a sculptor, and be

\textsuperscript{270} John Davis interviewed by Graeme Sturgeon, c. 1975. Sturgeon MS Box 7, NGV research library.

\textsuperscript{271} The new foundation course objectives at Caulfield Technical College were: 1. emphasis on criteria and methodology of creativity, 2. the drive to think rather than discover, 3. emphasis on answer to problem rather than personal expression, as the latter is always and automatically present, 4. a contained and controlled development, 5. state art area of interest and ask open-ended questions, 6. do not envisage end products – leave students free to astonish both themselves and us!, 7. free flow integration’, Fred Cress, ‘First Year Art at Caulfield Technical College’, *ATAV Journal*, Melbourne, September 1968, cited in Scarlett, *The Sculpture of John Davis*, op. cit., p. 13.
identified with a modernising, professional group of lecturer-practitioners who would take on the challenge of the tertiary training of professional artists, was significant. The ‘look’ of the work, its sophistication of ‘finish’, would become a significant point of differentiation between the ‘old guard’ of the Department of Education and the new professionals. It was this ‘new work’ that was increasingly included in and winning the burgeoning national sculpture awards. Amongst the sculpture teachers, those advocating for a professional, autonomous system were already being selected to participate in exhibitions and awards.

1968 in Melbourne was a tumultuous transition year for sculpture: the Victorian Sculptors Society ceased to operate; younger sculptors were managing their own solo exhibitions at galleries such as The Argus and Strines Gallery, and organising group shows at new commercial galleries like Tolarno and Pinotheca; the opening of the NGV with The Field exhibition, followed by two prestigious sculpture awards, showcased contemporary sculpture practice to an extent not seen before in Australia. As the Sydney critic Elwyn Lynn noted: ‘Those who saw The Field and Alcorso exhibitions should be aware that the new sculpture is well and truly among us; some may ask why cities like Melbourne and Adelaide are now the centres of the new sculpture.’\(^{272}\) What was happening in the expanding sculpture departments in the art schools held the key.

The year ended with the art schools at Caulfield and Prahran technical colleges in disarray as the principals tried to regain control of the curriculum; it was too late to stem the incoming tide of change. The principal of Caulfield Technical College Cliff Tyndale had become too ill to continue. The Victorian Department of Education’s appointments were based upon seniority, so Harold Farey was transferred from Sale Technical School into the principal’s position. Farey and a number of older colleagues at Caulfield did not support the open-ended enquiry approach to teaching taken by Fred Cress, Ken Scarlett, John Davis, Vic Mazjner and Sandra Weaver in the foundation year for both art and design students. The collaborative and cooperative approach was regarded as a threat to

Farey’s bureaucratic authority of the college. At the end of 1968, as part of Caulfield Technical College’s transition to autonomy under the VIC, all positions were readvertised and staff required to re-apply for their positions. However, Farey’s will prevailed and Fred Cress was informed that his contract would not be renewed; Ken Scarlett, shortly afterwards, resigned.

Alan Warren, the principal at Prahran Art and Design School, had outlined his attitude to art education: ‘The least concern of an art school – to my mind – is to produce artists (by that I mean oil painters). Creative designers, craftsmen and draughtsmen, Yes. Artists in a vacuum, No.’ Warren and Lenton Parr (head of sculpture at Prahran from 1966) held differing views as to the purpose and nature of art education. Parr was accused of pursuing an ‘art for art’s sake’ or ‘artists in a vacuum’ agenda in opposition to Warren’s pursuit of training artists for vocational occupations. This enmity reached a crescendo in October 1968 with the dismissal of Parr and a number of younger lecturers that Parr had appointed. Davis recalled a ‘full scale student revolt against prevailing educational philosophies at Prahran’. One of the young sculpture-lecturers, Clive Murray-White, held classes in the local Town Hall and, with some of his students, established the fictitious Independent Sculpture School. Ironically, Warren invited Fred Cress to become head of painting, encouraging him to teach the same foundation course structure that Cress had developed at Caulfield. However, the fallout over the dismissals at Prahran damaged Warren and when the VIC announced that the principal’s position was to be upgraded and readvertised in preparation for the transfer to a college of advanced education, he did not reapply. Parr was hired as head of the prestigious National

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275 John Davis, handwritten notes (a memoir of his time as an art school lecturer), Davis Estate Archive.
276 Clive Murray-White, interview with the author, 4 August 2006, Melbourne.
Gallery of Victoria School; he was the first sculptor to hold this position. The avalanche of change that was now coursing through the education system could not be held back.

In both these instances, a dialectic of distinction was played out between the older vocationally based technical education and the newer affiliated tertiary institutes. The tension this created revealed the shift from teaching art as a set of vocational functions controlled by a hierarchical and centralised education department to the increasingly independent technical colleges.

Though highly critical of Harold Farey’s direction at Caulfield Technical College, Davis continued as lecturer of Three Dimensional Design and Sculpture until 1971. With the cessation of the experimental foundation-year course that had been developed between 1967 and 1968, Davis concentrated on developing new work for his first solo exhibition at Strines Gallery in 1969. Noel Hutchison, writing in 1970, observed:

What was to be important to the quickening process of the revitalisation of art education in Victoria was the relative autonomy of each technical college and its art department … By 1967, the type of course and the encouragement of innovation depended on each individual college and its staff. Thus one may argue that the sculptor-teachers were more influential on the direction of art education in Melbourne. Sculptor-teachers with similar persuasions were inclined to group together at one college.279

With the increasing autonomy of each art school under the new system, Hutchison’s observation revealed the beginnings of a field of competition where no single ultimate authority controlled the definition of what art was; where, rather than a fixed hierarchy, there were now a number of positions all competing with one another to gain prominence. Hutchison acknowledged Lenton Parr who, because of his senior positions in a number of art schools, was able to give encouragement and employment to younger sculptors as lecturers as ‘spearhead[ing] the movement for reorientating the training of sculptors in Victoria’.280 Parr and his approach to teaching sculpture as a profession

280 loc. cit.
influenced Davis when he was a student at RMIT; and he was inspired by the teaching innovation initiated by Fred Cress at Caulfield between 1967 and 1968. In the late 1960s and throughout the 1970s, Davis was part of a close-knit group of artist-teachers that included Lenton Parr, Fred Cress, Ken Scarlett, Geoff La Gerche, Clive Murray-White, Ti Parks, David Wilson and Alun Leach-Jones, who lived and socialised in the Melbourne bayside suburbs of Hampton, Brighton and Sandringham. It was a lively network with links across Melbourne’s contemporary art scene.

In 1969, aged thirty-three, Davis held his first solo exhibition at Sweeney Reed’s Strines Gallery from 5 to 17 October in the inner-city suburb of Carlton. The six works revealed a new development in his use of industrially produced materials and highly stylised forms. Interest in serialisation and grid formats was present in the paintings of Dale Hickey and Robert Rooney, both young Melbourne painters who exhibited in The Field and were associated with Pinacotheca Gallery. Three of Davis’s works indicated the impact of The Field and, more specifically, Davis’s relationship within the close Melbourne contemporary art world. Three Thirds, Sixteen or 16 and Hanging Three were all serialised variations of an earlier moulded spatulate form, made from polyester resin and fibreglass (Figure 34).

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281 The Age’s young art critic and Greenberg protégé, Patrick McCaughey, was a regular associate and referred to this artistic grouping as the ‘Hampton or Bayside mafia’. Noel Hutchison, interview with author, 25 June 2007, Melbourne.
282 The opening of the new NGV premises in 1968 and international exhibitions such as MOMA’s Two Decades of American Art, Aspects of Recent British Art (organised by the ICA and toured by the British Council) and Marcel Duchamp: The Mary Sisler Collection (from the US and managed by Auckland City Gallery, NZ) which all toured Australian state galleries during 1967 and 1968, and the visit by Clement Greenberg in 1968, would have been dissected and argued over in their social gatherings.
283 Strines Gallery (which opened in 1966 and closed in December 1970) was just down the road from the experimental theatre workshop, La Mama (opened in 1967) run by Betty Burstall and near the University of Melbourne. The inner city suburb of Carlton was the cheap student quarter of Melbourne and this strip between Strines and La Mama was a meeting point for alternative and experimental performers, young filmmakers, musicians, visual artists and students.
284 In an email exchange with the author, 27 February 2008, Ken Scarlett indicated that Strines Gallery space was very small and that he had a photograph that included all the works Davis exhibited which would have been completed in 1969. Although there is no extant exhibition list, in his review of the exhibition Alan Warren indicates that there were six works, all of which were fabricated in 1969. Alan Warren, ‘John Davis: Premeditation takes the place of instinct’, The Sun, Melbourne, 8 October 1969, p. 28 quoted in Scarlett, Australian Sculptors, op. cit., p. 162.
In a notebook including drawings and notations for the works *Sixteen or 16* and *Three Thirds or 3/3*, Davis indicated the direction of his thinking: ‘Art as deliberate acts … expression interferes with deliberate decisions in the making of art.’ He referred to the above works as ‘Modular pieces [where] segments [are] deliberately placed in obvious relationships to eliminate expression as much as possible.’ His equating of modular repetition, seriality, with ‘deliberate’ ‘elimination’ of ‘expression’ had a strident quality that demarcated this new work, and Davis’s attitude, from his previous expressive works (which perhaps too closely identified with woodwork and the manual arts of secondary school art teaching). The stridency implied a sublimation of the very set of dispositions that had led him to pursue a practice in sculpture. These descriptors also indicated that Davis’s work was informed by an emerging, critical discourse necessary in order to establish a ‘degree of recognition within the peer competitor group’ of sculptor-lecturers in the hothouse of the Melbourne art world.

Davis’s extensive use of synthetic plastics represented a complete break with his previous working methods. The tactile, reflective process of carving wood was replaced by a series of quick-reacting chemical processes that dictated the method and rate of application, and were highly toxic. Polyester resin and fibreglass were suited to producing modular, repeated forms; as materials they produced durable, lightweight artworks that did not require specialised or heavy machinery. The adoption of industrial techniques – repeated processes of moulding, fast application of resin or fibreglass and chemical catalyst, followed by sanding the surface till smooth and, finally, spray-painted with car duco – produced works which emulated the ‘impeccably smooth curves and swells of the car body, the perfectly straight lines, the high-gloss lacquer and bright colours and chrome, the absolutely identical repetition of forms’.

Process, finish and the photogenic qualities of seriality were important; the slight imperfections and variations of the

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285 Davis’s artist notebooks, Davis Estate Archive, Melbourne.
286 ibid.
handmade were regarded as flawed. His new work seemed to resonate with Donald Judd’s comment from his, by 1969, much quoted essay, ‘Specific objects’, that ‘art could be mass-produced’.

The exhibition was a critical success, though no sales were made. Davis’s deductive approach to working produced highly finished, stylised forms; a kind of industrial perfection ‘effect’ where, as Bourdieu observed of the French Academy, ‘all marks of work, of manifattura’ are removed. Davis’s work distinguished him as a contemporary professional sculptor within the now competitive and increasingly crowded Melbourne art scene and this recognition brought him further notice within critical and curatorial networks. Solo exhibitions were the mark of a professional artist and essential in terms of increasing his social and cultural capital as a professional art school lecturer. Clearly, Davis’s audience was his Melbourne peers and students where the emergent field itself was becoming its own market.

In November 1969, Davis worked as an assistant to the European artist, Christo, who was commissioned to produce a wrapped work at the NGV. The wrapped wool bales were exhibited inside the gallery building, a miniaturised and emasculated work compared to the major environmental and ephemeral installation project, Wrapped Coast, Little Bay in Sydney, the primary reason for his being in Australia. Having none of the scale or public impact, and lacking the extended contact with Christo of the artists and student assistants in Sydney, Davis’s participation might have been little more than an interesting addition to his curriculum vitae and valuable in terms of his reputation in the staff room and with students. However, Christo’s interest in impermanence, the visual and performative impact of his works and the mysterious aura created by wrapping an object and revealing the skeletal frame must have had some lingering impact, as Davis’s later works would reveal.

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289 ibid.
At the time of his participation in the 3rd Mildura Sculpture Prize, Davis had made the transition from secondary school art teacher to practising sculptor whose practice was supported by a part-time lectureship at the Caulfield Technical College. His Associate Diploma in Sculpture from RMIT was the professionally recognised credential required for the new tertiary system of colleges that would become fully integrated in the early 1970s in Victoria.

**Conclusion**

This chapter has demonstrated how the necessary preconditions for the development of an autonomous field of artistic production in Australia emerged during the late 1950s and 1960s and that these preconditions and their various influences can be tracked through the development of the Mildura Art Gallery and its national sculpture prize. The emergence of these preconditions resulted from the political and economic will of government – in the case of Mildura, three tiers of government from local, state and federal – to invest in the expansion of education and support cultural activities to an extent previously unknown in Australia.

Between 1967 and 1969 the issue of professionalism, as well as competition for resources and status were becoming increasingly contested. The inclusion of ‘new art’ by recent graduates and students in the 3rd Mildura Sculpture Prize in 1967 indicated new selector dispositions which presaged the definitional shift of ‘professional’ practice from a set of vocational skills evaluated by an external market to a set of credentials and criteria recognised by a peer group of which the sculptors, selectors and critics were a part.

In Bourdieu’s conception, the ‘morphological explosion’ caused by the sheer numbers of young people requiring tertiary education and the consequent demand for, and government-funded expansion in, the education sector, plus, in Victoria, the state-government funding of cultural infrastructure, ‘favoured the emergence of an
artistic…milieu which was highly differentiated’. The years from 1967 to 1969 were emblematic of this transitional phase of an emerging field. The ‘competition for the power to grant cultural consecration’ had shifted in favour of new set of cultural dispositions which favoured ‘new art’, manifested through the appointments of younger curators-selectors within the expanding gallery networks, and the rapid expansion and increasing status of art schools within the developing tertiary education sector – the system for reproducing producers – offered employment opportunities to younger sculpture graduates whose dispositions favoured a new definition of professional practice.

At the end of the decade, Davis’s focus was clearly on establishing his professional credentials amongst his Melbourne peers. His identification with the ascendant professional group of sculptor-teachers within the increasingly autonomous technical institutes and the elision of the concept of ‘professional’ with ‘new art’, revealed conscious and sub-conscious adaptations and sublimations of some of the dispositions within his artistic habitus that were necessary adaptations to fit the requirements of the rapidly evolving autonomous field of art education, which would have major impacts upon the emergence of an autonomous field of visual art production.

By 1969, ‘autonomy’ was a word in common usage in association with ‘professional’ dispositions applied to artists, sculptors in this case, teaching in the new tertiary art school system. It was implied in McCullough’s proposal for an invitation-only and acquisition event format for the 1970 Mildura Sculpture Triennial. It was this disposition for autonomy which shaped all the participants and which was an essential disposition in defining how ‘professional’ was understood. It was the introduction of these new sets of cultural dispositions that 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’.

\[^{292}\text{ibid., p. 238.}\]
\[^{293}\text{ibid.}\]
\[^{294}\text{ibid., p. 61.}\]