

Chapter Two

In the beginning: 1956 – 1966

Mildura, McCullough and Davis

Sculpture is young in this country; it came of age after WW II. Before that, there were a few artists practising modelling and carving, but most of these were trained overseas – indeed, the well-known practitioners were born overseas.¹⁰³

Introduction

This chapter and the following chapter, reveal how the necessary preconditions for the development of an autonomous field of artistic practice can be tracked through the development of the Mildura Art Gallery and its national sculpture prize. It was during the late 1950s and throughout the 1960s that the components necessary for the genesis of an autonomous field of artistic practice emerged in Australia. Art education was redefined in terms of its professional status: who was qualified to teach it, the new employment opportunities it offered to artists and the consequent need for an alternative system of exhibition and validation for artist-teachers and their students. The fundamental precondition of this redefinition was the rapidly expanding educational sector driven by the demands of the baby-boom generation. By the late 1960s there was the beginning of the development – most noticeably in Victoria – of a new, parallel, national, tertiary system of colleges of advanced education or institutes incorporating vocational art

¹⁰³ Sturgeon opened his history of the Mildura Sculpture Triennials with a quote by Lyndon Dadswell, who was head of Sculpture at East Sydney Technical College (or National Art School as it was known from the 1930s) from 1955 to 1967. The quote is from Dadswell's catalogue essay, 'The prospect for sculpture', *Mildura Prize for Sculpture 1961*, Mildura Art Gallery, sponsored by Mildura Winery, Mildura, Vic., 1961, p. 22.

schools that had previously been under the control of each state education department's technical education division. Although the late 1960s represented the beginning of a difficult transition period from technical schools to autonomous colleges of advanced education, nevertheless the expanding employment opportunities for part-time teachers provided a form of state subsidy enabling sculptors, in particular, to maintain their own art practice without dependence on an external market.

New exhibition venues, most importantly, the Mildura Art Gallery and its inaugural triennial sculpture prize of 1961, provided sculptors with exposure to an informed audience and a platform for a contemporary discourse on sculpture to develop. The commitment by the Victorian Government to fund cultural infrastructure was a significant factor in enabling this development. The pressing need for places to exhibit the work of this growing population of emerging sculptors was also reflected in the rising number of sculpture prizes that emerged in the mid 1960s. The post-war idea of the need for sculptors to undertake professional development and the rise in the status of sculpture as an artform began in this period.¹⁰⁴

These morphological changes – the expansion in the number of paid part-time teaching positions, the increasing enrolment numbers of students and the expanded opportunities for them to exhibit and seek validation – constitute a 'precondition of the process of autonomisation of the ... artistic field'.¹⁰⁵ Subsidisation of art practice through part-time teaching led to a gradual shift in the definition of 'professional'. No longer referring to a person fully devoted to their practice and exhibiting and selling in the market, an 'artist' was now being defined according to the status of a teaching position in the new tertiary art schools, with an exhibition history based on invitation and selection in exhibitions and

¹⁰⁴ Although there was a flourishing tradition of Edwardian sculpture between the wars and some commissions for commemorative sculpture after the Second World War, developments in sculpture did not match those in painting. As Margel Hinder observed of her experiences in the interwar period: 'We had, up until this time [c. 1938], been living more or less in a vacuum as the Society of Artists was very firmly entrenched in academic-cum-modernish types of art ... There was only a small group of us who shared the same concerns ... Painting was the dominant art at this period and there seemed to be little understanding of, or desire for, the three dimensional. In exhibitions, sculpture was usually placed to finish off a line of paintings.' Quoted in Sturgeon, *The Development of Australian Sculpture 1788–1975*, op. cit., pp. 117–18.

¹⁰⁵ Bourdieu, *The Rules of Art*, op. cit., p. 55.

prizes and not dependent on sales or commissions; in other words, a person recognised and acknowledged by a network of peers, not by an external determination by the market. The genesis of an alternative market, not based on sales, and its viability (in which it differed significantly from previous decades) was founded on the employment opportunities offered to artists, as teachers, in the rapidly expanding educational sector.

This chapter focuses on activities in the state of Victoria during the decade from 1956 to 1966 and, more specifically, on Mildura, the primary case study of this thesis and site of the triennial sculpture events. Also introduced in this chapter are two important protagonists and their relationship to the Mildura Sculpture Triennials, which will be explored throughout the thesis: Thomas McCullough, the director of the Mildura Arts Centre from 1965 to 1978 and director of five consecutive Mildura triennials; and John Davis, a significant Australian sculptor, based in Melbourne, whose trajectory as a sculptor began in 1961 at the 1st Mildura Sculpture Prize. The Mildura Sculpture Prizes and their organisation provide an important insight into this emergent process and Davis is an exemplar of the new professional path for sculptors.

Victoria provides a useful model to examine post-Second World War growth in sculpture and sculptural training in Australia because it had a more developed technical education sector than other Australian states, particularly in sculptural training. The quick uptake and implementation of the Commonwealth's tertiary education recommendations, and those it initiated in the states (specifically in regard to art education) which required significant federal-state funding allocations, ensured that the new Victorian Institute of Colleges (VIC) was legislatively in place by 1965. The commencement of Commonwealth triennial funding allocations from 1967 meant that several of the technical colleges where sculpture was taught were now part of a transition phase towards their incorporation into autonomous tertiary institutes, or colleges of advanced education.

The Bolte Government's ongoing commitment to funding cultural infrastructure expansion throughout Victoria was particularly evident in its support of developments at

the Mildura Art Gallery. The links between Melbourne and Mildura may, at first glance, seem tenuous. However, examination of the institutional links – political, educational and cultural – that aligned and remained powerfully bonded until 1978 revealed otherwise. What is evident in the emerging relations between the Mildura Art Gallery and the National Gallery of Victoria in the late 1950s and early 1960s is the existence of a powerful cultural oligarchy in Melbourne with strongly expressed interests in Mildura. The Victorian art world at that time was small; virtually all players were known to one another and connections to power and influence were an essential condition of being able to realise cultural enterprises.¹⁰⁶ This synergy of political and economic will, committed to raising the status of the arts and education in Victoria, was an important underlying factor in the successful realisation of the Mildura Sculpture Prizes and the gallery's future development as an arts centre. It is also an important precondition for the genesis of an autonomous field of cultural practice; the autonomy of which will always be relative or subordinate to the field of power, its economic base.

This was also a period of generational shift and conflict in Melbourne. The election in 1955 of Henry Bolte as Liberal premier heading a Liberal-Country Party coalition government, and Bolte's appointment of English-born and trained Eric Westbrook as the new director of the NGV in 1956 (just prior to the opening of the Olympic Games), heralded a new broom wielded through the powerful Melbourne cultural elites. The tensions of Westbrook's initial years erupted during the NGV centenary celebrations

¹⁰⁶ 'Westbrook and his band of men – Roy Grounds, Ken Myer, Ian Potter, Hugh Williamson, Henry Bolte and Joseph Burke – were all now central to Melbourne's arts', in Sheridan Palmer, *Centre of the Periphery: Three European Art Historians in Melbourne*, Australian Scholarly Publishing, Melbourne, 2008, p. 222. The links between business and politics, the arts and education (University of Melbourne) is evident in this list. Many also had roles as NGV Trustees, Felton Bequest Advisory Committee members, and the National Gallery and Arts Centre Building Committee. Mildura Shire Councillor Reginald Etherington was an inaugural member of the Victorian Public Galleries Group (VPGG) with Eric Westbrook, and also sat on the National Gallery and Arts Centre Building Committee, which eventually appointed Roy Grounds as architect for the project in 1959. The links to Victorian political and cultural power are evident in the Victorian notables asked to open the Mildura Triennials: 1961, The Hon. Arthur Rylah, chief secretary; 1964, Dr Bernard Smith, University of Melbourne; 1967, Dick Seddon, NGV trustee and chair of BP Australia; 1970, Colonel Aubrey Gibson, NGV trustee, arts patron and collector; 1973 and 1975, premier Rupert Hamer. 1978 was the exception: Sydney based Elwyn Lynn, artist, critic, curator of the Power Institute Collection at the University of Sydney and chair of the Visual Arts Board of the Australia Council, was invited to open the Mildura Sculpture Triennial. In choosing Lynn, McCullough was consciously promoting the triennial as a national event and acknowledging the funding support of the Australia Council as a primary sponsor.

(1961) when Sir William Dargie and Sir Daryl Lindsay (both members of Menzies' CAAB), in response to complaints from the National Gallery School's head teacher, attempted to politically censure Westbrook for his support of contemporary art.¹⁰⁷ The premier, the chief secretary Arthur Rylah (under whose portfolio the NGV was placed) and the NGV trustees 'valued his professionalism'; as Westbrook had revitalised the NGV's exhibitions, energised the cultural centre expansion plans and organised the regional galleries into an effective network.¹⁰⁸

This generational shift represented a move away from the champions of early Melbourne modernism, such as George Bell and William Frater, to the post-war modernists who comprised émigré artists with professional training in Europe and Britain, CRTS artists such as John Brack and Lenton Parr, and the beginnings of the baby-boom generation who were swelling the ranks of technical schools in Melbourne. It is this revitalisation and support for contemporary art, particularly for the under-valued category of sculpture, which is evident in the intention behind the planning for the inaugural Mildura sculpture prize. Given the favourable political will and the growing economy of the late 1950s, Westbrook, Etherington and van Hattum constituted a formidable force for its realisation.

In August 1962, Eric Westbrook convened a Conference of Victorian Sculptors at the NGV. The issue of what defined 'professional' practice and, by implication, the selection criteria necessary to recognise professional ability were considerations that were raised in the meeting and indicative of an attitudinal shift amongst a number of sculptors and administrators.¹⁰⁹ Driven by members of the Centre 5 group, a number of whom taught sculpture at RMIT, this 'professional' push signalled the eventual demise of the Victorian Sculptors Society (VSS), a collective membership organisation. Increasingly from the mid 1960s, young sculptors were more interested in organising solo exhibitions in the burgeoning commercial galleries and hire spaces, and being selected for major sculpture

¹⁰⁷ Christopher Heathcote, *A Quiet Revolution: The Rise of Australian Art 1946–1968*, Text Publishing, Melbourne, 1995, pp. 148–154.

¹⁰⁸ *ibid.*, p. 154.

¹⁰⁹ Interestingly, in 1969, the new director of the National Gallery School was the sculptor-educator Lenton Parr who, in consultation with the Victorian Institute of Colleges, would steer the school into a new multi-artform tertiary institution, the Victorian College of the Arts, in 1973.

prizes, rather than showing in the undifferentiated VSS annual members' exhibitions at the Victorian Artists Society rooms.

The expansion in the number of publications and exhibition catalogues which offered publishing opportunities for more art critics and writers was not only indicative of the growth in the market for artistic products but also that this developing discourse, particularly in regard to sculpture, was part of the 'conditions of production of the work'.¹¹⁰ Bourdieu's observation that 'the progress of the field ... towards autonomy is marked by an increasingly distinct tendency of criticism to devote itself to the task ... of providing a "creative" interpretation for the benefit of the "creators"' was evident from the mid 1960s onwards.¹¹¹ Writers such as Dr Donald Brook (sculptor/art theorist), Elwyn Lynn (painter/editor of the *CAS Bulletin*), Patrick McCaughey (academic/critic), Alan McCulloch (artist/critic) and Daniel Thomas (curator/critic) were writing frequently for metropolitan newspapers and specialist magazines such as *Art and Australia*, *Quadrant*, *Meanjin*, the *CAS Bulletin* and *Current Affairs Bulletin*, as well as overseas journals including *Art International*, *Studio International* and, in the case of Donald Brook, *Leonardo*. Increasingly during this period the reviewers highlighted the presence and excitement of 'new art' practised by young artists, of the elision between painting and sculpture. The availability of international journals, books, music and fashions, because of air freight, television coverage and cinema, increased the immediacy of the transmission of ideas, styles and modes. All these factors contributed to a growing pressure and focus on the 'new', the 'experimental' and the 'young' as the progenitors of the modernist concepts of progress and advanced art.

During the decade of the 1960s, three Mildura Sculpture Prizes (1961, 1964 and 1967) reflected the impact of the multitude of rapid changes on Australian sculptors and their work. The first in 1961 was a roll-call of sculptors of the immediate post-war decade and recorded the influence of the émigré sculptors; 1964 reflected some small shifts but was still pervaded by what Bernard Smith referred to as a 'time-lag' response to European

¹¹⁰ Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production*, op. cit., p. 35.

¹¹¹ *ibid.*, p. 116.

developments; however, by 1967 there was a perceptible transition, with the inclusion of much younger sculptors, some either still at art school or just graduated, whose practice straddled the traditional fields of painting and sculpture. It was a period of the return of a number of younger Australian artists from overseas, or the brief emigration of British and American artists, who had trained and taught in the new art school systems in the UK and the US, and had lived and worked in the metropolitan art scenes of London and New York during the ‘swinging sixties’. Many of them took up teaching positions in the art schools of Sydney, Melbourne and Adelaide and their impact would be registered particularly by the 4th Mildura Sculpture Triennial of 1970.¹¹²

The Case Studies

This chapter, ‘A decade of change’, addresses the period from 1956 to 1966 by detailing developments in the three case studies – Mildura, McCullough and Davis. The development of the Mildura Art Gallery in its first decade was impressive. Opening in 1956 in a restored historic villa with a collection of mostly Edwardian English paintings managed by a curator, the Mildura Art Gallery, by 1966, emerged as the first Australian multi-arts centre. It had the largest staff of a regional gallery in Victoria, and was the successful initiator of a national triennial sculpture prize and exhibition.¹¹³ The immigrant draughtsman Tom McCullough (born in Belfast, Northern Ireland in 1936), arrived in Melbourne in 1956, undertook the Tertiary Secondary Teacher’s Certificate (TSTC) in Arts and Craft (1960–1961) and, from 1963, held the position of art coordinator at the Mildura High School. By 1965 he was appointed director of the Mildura Arts Centre where he oversaw the completion of the project development from art gallery to multi-arts centre. John Davis (born in Ballarat, Victoria in 1936) undertook a TSTC in Arts and Craft (1955–1957), taught at the Mildura High School and assisted the Mildura Art

¹¹² They included sculptors, painters and ceramicists. In Adelaide, from the South Australian School of Art were Charles Reddington, Bill Clements, Bill Gregory, Milton Moon and Sydney Ball; in Melbourne, James Doolin, C. Elwyn Dennis and Clive Murray-White; in Sydney, at the National Art School Sculpture Department after the departure of Lyndon Dadswell, Robert Klippel (briefly) and Ron Robertson Swann; in Auckland, New Zealand, William (Jim) Allen.

¹¹³ Interview with Tom McCullough for *Women’s Day*, 23 January 1967, pp. 34–5, NGA Research Library, Mildura Arts Centre box.

Gallery director Ernst van Hattum in setting up the 1st Mildura Sculpture Prize. The chance to see contemporary Australian sculpture and meet those sculptors who attended was sufficient to confirm for Davis his need to return to Melbourne to undertake training as a sculptor at RMIT. He became friends with McCullough and introduced McCullough to Ernst van Hattum at the Mildura Art Gallery in 1962.

Mildura Art Gallery 1956–1966

The cultural enrichment of the Sunraysia region was a personal crusade for Mildura Shire Councillor and businessman Reginald Etherington. He was involved in raising funds for the purchase and restoration of the old Chaffey Brothers mansion, Rio Vista, which was opened in 1956 as the Mildura Art Gallery to house the Senator R. D. Elliott bequest collection.¹¹⁴ From 1957, Cr Etherington represented the Mildura Art Gallery on the Victorian Public Galleries Group, an initiative of the new NGV director Eric Westbrook, and he was also appointed as the country representative to the National Gallery and Cultural Centre Building Committee. This particular appointment ensured his continuing connection to significant political, business and cultural leaders in Melbourne and also provided him with the inspiration and contacts for proposing the future development of the Mildura cultural centre.

In Mildura, Etherington chaired the North West Ballet Guild and the Mildura High School Advisory Council as well as the Mildura Art Gallery Advisory Council. In

¹¹⁴ The possibility of an art gallery in Mildura was raised in 1944 by prominent Melbourne businessman and regional newspaper magnate R.D. Elliot, owner of the *Sunraysia Daily* newspaper. He was a fierce rival of Sir Keith Murdoch and, at one time, both had been trustees of the NGV. The proposed bequest of Senator and Mrs Elliot's collection of primarily English Edwardian works by Frank Brangwyn and William Orpen was conditional upon the Mildura City Council providing a proper gallery space for their exhibition and storage. The Mildura Art Gallery, previously known as Rio Vista and the former home of the irrigator founders of Mildura, the Chaffey Brothers, was opened on 25 May 1956 by Sir Dallas Brooks, Governor of Victoria. Artist Rex Bramleigh was appointed curator from 1956 to 1958. His replacement, Dutch painter Ernst van Hattum, was appointed as director. In '1955 ... the Victorian Government made a grant of \$60,000 to acquire Rio Vista ... and convert it into a gallery', George Tilley, *Mildura into the '70s: Yesterday and Today. Mildura District in Words and Pictures*, Sunraysia Daily, Mildura, Vic., c. 1970, n.p. Mildura's close political ties with Victorian state governments are linked through the original Elliot bequest. According to Tom McCullough, in 1944 the then Mayor of Mildura Arthur Mansell (later a Victorian MLC from 1952-1973) on a bus trip between Robinvale and Mildura, accepted R.D. Elliot's offer of his painting collection on behalf of the city of Mildura.

relation to John Davis and Tom McCullough, it was Etherington's position as the chairman of the Mildura High School Advisory Council that was most influential, specifically his support of the art department in the school. It may well have been Etherington who introduced Davis, as the new art coordinator at Mildura High School, to the Mildura Art Gallery director, Ernst van Hattum, in 1961.

Eric Westbrook had first suggested the idea of an open-air sculpture exhibition on the lawns of the Chaffey Mansion, Rio Vista, to Reg Etherington and Rex Bramleigh on a visit to the recently opened Mildura Art Gallery (Figure 13).¹¹⁵ Westbrook had been inspired by the Battersea Park Open Air Exhibitions of Sculpture in London, particularly the first in 1948 and the Festival of Britain in 1951, both of which he would have visited.¹¹⁶ Credited as the first of its kind and the catalyst for many similar events in Europe, the Battersea Park Open Air Exhibition in 1948 presented forty-three sculptures by major British and European sculptors. Given that it was presented as a celebration in the still bomb-blasted and ration-ravaged capital and that commentators at the time noted that 'British cities had less public sculpture than anywhere else in Europe', one of its objectives must have been the promotion of sculpture as a civilising and necessary part of London's regeneration: sculptural commissioning as part of the massive public rebuilding programme.¹¹⁷ Eric Westbrook, in his role as chief exhibitions officer for the British Council, had been responsible for sending a major exhibition of the British sculptor Henry Moore's small sculptures and drawings to Australia to tour to five cities in 1947–1948.¹¹⁸ That exhibition was a stimulus to Australian sculptors and one of the first of a

¹¹⁵ Eric Westbrook, Foreword, and Graeme Sturgeon, 'The Mildura sculpture exhibitions 1961–1982', in Sturgeon, *Sculpture at Mildura*, op. cit., pp. 7, 11 respectively.

¹¹⁶ In 1948 Sir Kenneth Clark appointed Westbrook as chief exhibitions officer at the British Council in London. He held this post until 1952, when he accepted the position as director of Auckland Art Gallery in New Zealand. Philip Jones, 'Driven by an artistic passion', Obituary: Eric Westbrook 1915–2005, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 15 November 2005 at <http://www.smh.com.au/news/obituaries/driven-by-an-artistic-passion/2005/11/10/1131578167621.html>, viewed 12 November 2008.

¹¹⁷ Tom Maxwell, 'Sculpture in the park: part 3', *The Review: Friends of the Battersea Park*, issue 50, autumn/winter 2000, p. 12. The original exhibition committee comprised sculptor Henry Moore; Sir Kenneth Clark; Frank Dobson, Professor of Sculpture at the Royal College of Art; and the directors of the Tate Gallery and the National Gallery of Art. The first exhibition ran from May to September 1948.

¹¹⁸ Palmer, *Centre of the Periphery*, op. cit., p. 121. In the first post-war Venice Biennale of 1948, Henry Moore was awarded the international sculpture prize. By 1952, the British Council presented Moore, along with six young British sculptors, to great acclaim in Venice. Britain, it was claimed was, 'a country with no

series of major post-war international touring exhibitions that would visit Australian state galleries throughout the 1950s and 1960s.

Melbourne's successful hosting of the 1956 Olympic Games and the new Liberal-Country Party State Government's expansionist policies in terms of infrastructure development, including cultural infrastructure, offered tremendous scope to the new director of the NGV. It also heralded a new phase of state government support for the arts. His annual meetings with his state gallery peers at the conference of interstate gallery directors, his establishment in 1957 of the Victorian Public Gallery Group (of which there were only six in 1957) and dealings with the Royal Australian Institute of Architects in the development of the tender for the proposed new National Gallery and the Victorian Arts Centre, ensured that Westbrook had the contacts to broker relationships for van Hattum in the survey he conducted into the viability of a national sculpture exhibition at the Mildura Art Gallery.¹¹⁹

Van Hattum's focus on contemporary Australian sculpture – through a national triennial non-acquisitive prize – was a strategy that enabled the Mildura Art Gallery to distinguish itself within the hierarchy of the regional galleries network in Victoria. Although the Mildura Art Gallery was established on the basis of the R.D. Elliott bequest, the principal works in the bequest were by British Edwardian painters Frank Brangwyn and William Orpen. Bendigo and Ballarat Fine Art Galleries, the senior regional galleries, were established in the late nineteenth-century on the strength of gold rush prosperity in Victoria. Both galleries had annual and well-endowed art prizes, principally for painting, that had been established in the 1938 and 1927 respectively, at a time when there was an ever-expanding number of prizes for painting and few if any for sculpture.

previous traditions in sculpture to speak of ...now had a remarkable number of highly gifted sculptors'. See David Thompson, Introduction, *Recent British Sculpture, an Exhibition Organised by the British Council for Canada, New Zealand and Australia, 1961–1963*, London, n.p. The lack of a previous tradition was a sentiment echoed in Australia during the 1950s and early 1960s.

¹¹⁹ Ernst van Hattum, Preface, *Mildara Prize for Sculpture 1961*, Mildura Art Gallery, sponsored by the Mildara Winery, Mildura, Vic., 1961, p. 6. In 1958, the NGV in consultation with the Victorian Sculpture Society curated an exhibition entitled *Sculpture Now*, which then toured under the auspices and management of the Council of Adult Education to regional centres during 1959–60, including to Mildura Art Gallery.

Sponsorship for the sculpture event was a key issue as there was no government funding available for such a program at that time. The Victorian State Government had been generous in infrastructure funding for the establishment of the gallery and in its planned extensions. The touring Council of Adult Education sculpture exhibition provided an introduction to contemporary Victorian sculpture and the example and national success of the first Adelaide Festival of Arts in 1960, sponsored entirely by local companies with the backing of Adelaide City Council, was sufficient encouragement for van Hattum and Etherington to propose sponsorship arrangements for the planned Mildura sculpture prize. The arrival of the Victorian State Government Cabinet in Mildura in March 1960, led by premier and farmer Henry Bolte, provided the appropriate promotional opportunity to announce the confirmed major sponsor – Mildara Wines – for the forthcoming prize.¹²⁰ Freight sponsorship was provided by the Buronga Transport Company, which would return transport entries to Melbourne, Sydney and Adelaide. There was just over a year to organise the event. Etherington's and Westbrook's negotiations ensured that the chief secretary of Victoria, the Hon. Arthur Rylah, MLA, was invited to be the official guest to launch the 1st Mildara Sculpture Prize on Easter Saturday, 22 April in 1961.¹²¹

The decision to focus on contemporary sculpture through a prize format and as part of the future collection development of Mildura Art Gallery ensured a unique, distinctive position for Mildura within the hierarchy of regional galleries and, further, positioned it favourably in relation to the state art galleries' directors and their curators.¹²² In relation to Australian sculpture, Mildura's commitment to a national triennial prize and exhibition

¹²⁰ Headline: 'Cabinet here by air', *Sunraysia Daily*, 7 March 1960, p. 1, followed by 'National Contest for Sculpture', *Sunraysia Daily*, 8 March 1960, p. 2. Premier Bolte is quoted as saying: '[T]he competition would do much to spotlight Victoria as the progressive state and would be a great benefit to Mildura.' Bolte also announced that Mildara Winery Ltd would commit £750 for a Mildura Sculpture Prize. The competition sponsorship was to be divided into groups: Group A, small indoor sculpture, £100; Group B, monumental work, £400 and Group C, Mildura Art Prize, acquisitive, £250. At the time the Mildara sponsorship was a very generous amount for sculpture.

¹²¹ The NGV came under the chief secretary's administrative portfolio.

¹²² The state art gallery directors, or their delegated curators, were actively involved in the selection of sculptors for the Mildura sculpture prizes from their respective states. Van Hattum's or the director's role was strictly as organiser and coordinator. This continued for the three triennial prizes during the 1960s: 1961, 1964 and 1967.

conferred value on the neglected category, sculpture, thereby legitimising and giving prominence, nationally, to the participant sculptors.

The 1st Mildara Sculpture Prize 1961

In his catalogue essay, Professor Joseph Burke led with his estimation of the value of this inaugural sculpture event:

The Mildura Art Gallery is to be congratulated on its brave proclamation of faith in perhaps the toughest of the imaginative arts and therefore one of the most influential, by its policy of collecting and exhibiting contemporary sculpture, and by launching a competition which future students of Australian art may well regard as something of a landmark in its history.¹²³

Van Hattum and his Advisory Board consciously aimed their sights nationally in terms of positioning the Mildura Art Gallery and enhancing its reputation:

The Board of Management, when deciding to organise a sculpture competition, did not consider this was just another opportunity to acquire additions to its collection, but it deliberately went to the maximum of its possibilities to fulfil its obligations to the arts of Australia.¹²⁴

Implicit within these statements was the belief that Australian sculptors, like their British counterparts a decade earlier, could, with support, develop a tradition of sculptural practice. Van Hattum issued a further challenge to the hierarchy of metropolitan versus provincial cultural values by claiming:

The role of the country galleries in the process of cultural and artistic development is in many instances only very small or non-existent. [However] the fact that in many major galleries much improvement is urgently desired should not deter the 'small' gallery to make, under expert guidance, an effort to take a share in this task of national importance.¹²⁵

¹²³ Joseph Burke, 'Tradition and innovation in Western sculpture', *Mildara Prize for Sculpture 1961*, op. cit., p. 14.

¹²⁴ Ernst van Hattum, Preface, *Mildara Prize for Sculpture 1961*, ibid., p. 7.

¹²⁵ ibid., p. 6.

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Figure 10: top left, Norma Redpath, *Dawn Figure* 1961, plaster, 213 cms. Winner of 1st Mildara Prize for Sculpture, Monumental Work.

Figure 11: top right, Clement Meadmore, *Steel Form 14* 1961, welded steel, 91.5cms.

Figure 12: bottom left, installation view of the 1961 inaugural Mildara Sculpture Prize exhibition, interior of either the Bolte Gallery in Rio Vista house or the Mural Hall (building on the right in Fig. 13).

Figure 13: bottom right, exterior view of Rio Vista house containing Mildura Art Gallery and museum, 1961.

He clearly saw his role as one of active engagement in contemporary cultural development, not as a keeper of a museum. Given the successful launching of the biennial international Adelaide Festival of the Arts in 1960, van Hattum was aligning the Mildura Sculpture Prize with another regional festival that had achieved national success.¹²⁶ Mildura Art Gallery aimed to ‘make its mark’ by determining its uniquely different position in relation to the hierarchies of the regional galleries and more importantly, in relation to the most consecrated institutions, the state galleries, through inviting the directors and their nominated curators to select the works for inclusion in the national sculpture prize.

Van Hattum’s and Etherington’s intentions for the Sculpture Prize – a professional presentation of a range of contemporary sculptural works by established sculptors to commissioning agents – echoed the objectives expressed by the Centre 5 group in Melbourne.¹²⁷ The accompanying catalogue listing 165 works by sixty-nine sculptors was a significant undertaking.¹²⁸

Not only was the Mildura prize aimed at supporting the development of an Australian sculptural tradition, it was also committed to building and promoting a market for Australian sculpture. Van Hattum indicated in his Preface that he was keenly aware of post-war developments in European government policy such as ‘a percentage ... of the building costs [were allocated for the commissioning] of monumental arts (murals,

¹²⁶ The inaugural Adelaide Festival of 1960 included a small exhibition of sculpture at the National Gallery of South Australia as part of the festival program. Held in Gallery 4, *Contemporary Australian Sculpture* included twenty-two works by sixteen sculptors: from NSW, Vincent Arnall, Gordon McAuslan, Lorraine Boreham, Milan Vojsk and Owen Broughton; from Qld, Kathleen and Leonard Shillam; from SA, Paul Beadle, Alexander Leckie, John Dowie and Berend van der Struik and from Vic., Karl Duldig, Lenton Parr, Clifford Last, Tina Wentscher, Andor Meszaros and Teisutis Zikaras. Most of these sculptors were included in the 1st Mildura Sculpture Prize in 1961 at Mildura.

¹²⁷ Centre 5 objectives and members, see Chapter 1, p. 36 (members), footnote 90 (objectives) in this thesis.

¹²⁸ As Cr Etherington noted in his Foreword: ‘This catalogue provides the first collective presentation of Australian works of sculpture and an illustration of the talent that exists here, talent that today can be encouraged by the greater use of sculpture in buildings as well as smaller decoration. Australia is passing through a period of important development; buildings are being constructed that are fashioning the aesthetic as well as the utilitarian character of our cities. The opportunity exists for planners to embody sculpture in design so that it will be a continuing source of inspiration and admiration to the present and succeeding generations.’ See *Mildura Prize for Sculpture 1961*, op. cit., p. 5.

mosaics, sculpture)'.¹²⁹ The prizes reflected the concern to promote sculpture within a domestic interior as well as monumental outdoor works suitable for commissioning within public buildings. Westbrook's awareness of a series of British post-war exhibitions, *Sculpture in the Home* (1945–1959), which aimed to present 'contemporary sculptures in gallery installations suggestive of modern domestic interiors', is implicit.¹³⁰

The 1961 prize catalogue fulfilled an important and vital function: it was the most comprehensive listing of contemporary Australian sculptors and the essays contributed to the first significant discourse on the subject of Australian sculpture. It included a selection of black and white photographs of works, many of which were completed commissioned works, such as Lenton Parr's commission for the Chadstone Shopping Centre and Gerald Lewers's AMP Fountain. The four essays included van Hattum's Preface, Professor Joseph Burke's 'Tradition and innovation in Western sculpture', the critic Alan McCulloch's 'Contemporary sculpture in Australia' and sculptor Lyndon Dadswell's 'The prospect for sculpture'. Burke's essay acknowledged the participation of women sculptors – sixteen, or thirty-one per cent of the total number – which would be the highest participation rate for any of the future triennials. He listed the familiar difficulties for sculptors in Australia: lack of collections and exhibitions of Australian and overseas works to provide stimulus; material and transport expenses; no professional foundries or trained assistants; limited opportunities to acquire new technical skills; a reliance on reproductions which give no sense of scale; no identifiable Australian school or style of sculpture. His concluding assessment was that 'At the present moment the situation is deplorable but not hopeless', presumably saved from ignominy by the initiative of the Mildara Sculpture Prize.¹³¹ His essay betrayed a lack of awareness of developments in the United States and also of the achievements of the middle generation of post-war sculptors in Britain, indicative of the general paucity of information about contemporary art available in Australia. Lyndon Dadswell's essay acknowledged that a

¹²⁹ van Hattum, Preface, *ibid.*, p. 8.

¹³⁰ *Sculpture in the Home: Re-staging a Post-war Initiative* exhibition, http://www.henry-moore-fdn.co.uk/matrix_engine/content.php?page_id=6597, viewed 5 December 2008. The first *Sculpture in the Home* exhibition toured in 1946 to Wakefield Art Gallery in Yorkshire, where Eric Westbrook was the director.

¹³¹ Burke, 'Tradition and innovation in Western sculpture', *op. cit.*, p. 14.

significant factor in the awakening of sculpture in Australia was the post-war influx of immigrant sculptors. Of the total of 122 works presented by fifty-one sculptors, almost half (twenty-four sculptors or forty-eight per cent) were overseas born and trained.¹³²

The prize format with its arbitrary ranking was not van Hattum's preferred option; however, given the lack of government support generally for the arts, and specifically for sculpture, 'the drawbacks of a competition [we]re outweighed by the final result.'¹³³ Sponsorship was essential and the prize format offered the appropriate trade-off of publicity and cultural cachet to the sponsoring organisation.

The chief secretary of Victoria, Arthur Rylah, opened the exhibition on 22 April 1961. According to van Hattum's report to his gallery advisory council, two commissioned ballets were performed to an audience of 800, many of whom were from interstate.¹³⁴ One hundred-and-seventy sculptures were sent to the five state art galleries, of which 122 were selected for inclusion in the prize exhibition. Judging of the prizes and selection for the gallery acquisitions was undertaken by Melbourne architect Raymond Berg, sculptor Lyndon Dadswell and, from the NGV, Eric Westbrook and Gordon Thomson. The monumental award of £400 was won by Norma Redpath for her more than two-metre high plaster work, *Dawn Figure*, 1961, listed as 'model for casting' (Figure 10). The small sculpture award of £100 was shared between Jean Likic's plaster head, *Young Man*, 1960 and Margaret Adams's, *The Third Eye*.¹³⁵

Many of the works conformed to the accepted definition of sculpture: three-dimensional forms created through the processes of casting, moulding or carving. Because of the lack of professional facilities and the time and costs involved, only eleven of those selected were cast in metal. Redpath's winning monumental entry was a plaster cast. The prize money would allow her to return to Italy to have the work cast in bronze. Clement

¹³² Sturgeon, *Sculpture at Mildura*, op. cit., p. 15.

¹³³ Hattum, Preface, op. cit., p. 7.

¹³⁴ Mildura Art Gallery, *Director's Report to the Mildura Art Gallery Advisory Council*, 1961, p. 2, Mildura Art Centre Archive, 1961 File.

¹³⁵ Sturgeon observed that Jean Likic did not exhibit again and Margaret Adams did not exhibit after the 1964 triennial, see his *Sculpture at Mildura*, op. cit., p. 16.

Meadmore's welded flat-sheet steel forms were the most reductive and abstract of the work exhibited (Figure 11). A number of sculptors such as Margel Hinder, Gerald Lewers, Lenton Parr, Stanley Hammond and Frank Lumb exhibited maquettes of recently completed public commissions. Figurative and organic references predominated.

Sculpture in Australia was still firmly anchored in its viewing perspective: all works required plinths – in this case, configurations of cement Besser bricks (Figure 12). Compared with catalogues of contemporary sculpture exhibitions in Britain, Europe and the United States at that time, the Mildura exhibition was a conservative presentation. However, its value as a first survey exhibition of the state of sculpture in Australia and its bringing together of sculptors, students, critics, curators and collectors created the basis of a network of information exchange and recognition that would become a hallmark of future events. Its very success secured the commitment to a second prize event in 1964.

The cost of organising the event and producing the catalogue totalled £3000, a significant sum in 1961.¹³⁶ The breakdown of sponsorship was as follows: Mildara Wine Company – prize and acquisition funding £750, plus £350 towards the cost of the catalogue production – total contribution £1100; Buronga Transport Company – freight valued at £450; and £350 was contributed towards the cost of the ballet commissions by the A.E. Rowden-White and Kilburn Family Trusts.¹³⁷ Thus the total value of the sponsorship provided amounted to £1900, or almost two-thirds of the total cost of the event. Van Hattum announced to his advisory council that 'purchases with a list price of near to £2000 have been made making the gross total of direct benefit to the sculptors of £2500 [includes the non-acquisitive prize money]'.¹³⁸ For a regional town and gallery, this was a sophisticated achievement.

For Australian sculpture, 1961 was a watershed year: the first national sculpture exhibition, prize and accompanying catalogue had been successfully launched and

¹³⁶ In today's currency this is equivalent to \$67,094, see *Director's Report to the Mildura Art Gallery Advisory Council*, 1961, op. cit.

¹³⁷ *ibid.*

¹³⁸ *ibid.*

Lenton Parr's small book, *Sculpture*, was published in Longmans' 'The Arts in Australia' series. The Centre 5 group and its proactive professional mandate, also launched in 1961, would have a major impact on the Melbourne art scene, through its exhibitions, educational programs and the teaching appointments of various members at RMIT. The publicity and critical acclaim garnered by the 1st Mildura Sculpture Prize and exhibition put Mildura and its art gallery on the national art stage.

Towards a cultural centre

The momentum for professional recognition was raised at the Conference of Victorian Sculptors convened at the NGV in August 1962, 'to discuss the present situation and problems of the Victorian Sculptors'. Sculptors, public and commercial galleries' representatives and architects attended. Director Ernst van Hattum reported to his Mildura Art Gallery Board that: 'Committees were formed to draw up recommendations on publicity actions, public relations programmes, code of ethics for sculptors' commissions etc. to be submitted for approval for a next meeting.'¹³⁹

Van Hattum's presence at the meeting acknowledged not only Mildura's position as an important, nationally representative venue for sculpture but was also confirmation that the Mildura Sculpture Prize was committed to improving educational standards and to raising the status of sculptors. The link between the Mildura sculpture events and education was established at the outset and was an important distinguishing feature for Mildura in relation to other prize exhibitions. Van Hattum also announced to the meeting that the second Sculpture Prize would take place in 1964.

In September 1962, at the instigation of the Mildura Art Gallery Advisory Committee chairman, Cr Etherington, 'an appeal was launched ... to raise £75,000 to extend and

¹³⁹'Director's report, Mildura Art Gallery and Cultural Centre Board of Management', 24 August 1962, City of Mildura Minute Book, no.41, 29/8/62-22/8/63, Mildura City Council, Mildura, Vic., Mildura Arts Centre archives.

develop the Art Gallery and Cultural Centre'.¹⁴⁰ However, the genesis of this idea went back to 1961 when, at the recommendation of van Hattum, the Mildura Ballet Guild became affiliated with the Art Gallery. In his report to the Advisory Committee, following the success of the 1st Mildara Sculpture Prize, van Hattum revealed his vision for the gallery:

[I]t became clear from 1958 onwards that this gallery should not only remain and function as a gallery but that it should grow into a body that could promote, foster, coordinate and house all forms of art and allied cultural movements ... All planning is made with this aim in mind.¹⁴¹

It is evident that the vision for the development of a major cultural centre in Mildura was driven by a powerful partnership between the director and the Advisory Committee, led by Cr Etherington. Toward the end of 1961, as a result of financial hardship, two other shire ballet guilds amalgamated with the Mildura Ballet Guild to become the North West Ballet Guild, which itself became affiliated with the Mildura Art Gallery. With a stronger financial basis for the future, and cognisant of the push to develop and fund a major cultural centre in Mildura, the North West Ballet Guild was able to secure the appointment of Harcourt Algernon Leighton Essex (Algeranoff) as ballet master.¹⁴² Cr Etherington was the chairman of the North West Ballet Guild.

¹⁴⁰ Alice Laphorne, *Mildura Calling*, Mildura Gallery Society, Mildura, Vic., 1965, p. 46. Discussions on the establishment of a cultural centre were already underway as indicated in Cr Etherington's Chairman's Report to the Mildura Art Gallery and Cultural Centre Board of Management on 24 August 1962: 'The Chairman ... reported on the progress of the Appeal. Everything was working up to the planned schedule. He had spoken to the Wentworth Shire Council and that Council had commended Mildura City Council for the enterprising planning regarding the Gallery and Cultural Centre. Correspondence has been opened with some people who might become principal givers to the appeal.' City of Mildura Minute Book, No. 41, 29/8/62 – 22/8/63, op.cit.

¹⁴¹ *Director's Report to the Mildura Art Gallery Advisory Council*, 1961, op. cit. No other date is provided other than the year, 1961; however the report post-dated the 1st Mildara Sculpture Prize.

¹⁴² The worldly and sophisticated Harcourt Algernon Leighton Essex, almost sixty when he accepted the appointment of ballet master of the North West Victoria Ballet Guild in Mildura in 1962, toured internationally with Anna Pavlova's dance company, studied Japanese and Indian dance forms, and visited Australia when the company toured in 1926 and 1929. Following Pavlova's death, he toured with a number major ballet companies including a tour with the Ballets Russes to Australia during 1938 to 1940. In 1953 he and his wife returned to Australia. He taught at the National Theatre Ballet School in Melbourne and studied Aboriginal music and legends. In 1957 he was ballet master with the Norwegian Opera Ballet and then returned to Australia as ballet master for the Borovansky Ballet in 1959. This is a paraphrase of a narrative biography, "Australia Dancing – Algeranoff (1903–1967)", <http://www.australiadancing.org/subjects/441.html>, viewed 9 September 2006.

The introduction of the well-connected and highly respected Harcourt Essex – an experienced art professional, like van Hattum – further enabled the cause of pursuing Victorian Government subsidies, on a dollar-for-dollar basis, for the development of a multi-arts cultural centre in Mildura. Shortly after his appointment as ballet master for the North West Victorian Ballet Group, Essex expressed in a letter to an associate in Melbourne: ‘It is a great opportunity to develop a splendid Culture Centre.’¹⁴³

Essex had also accepted the position in Mildura on the understanding that he would be given time to choreograph ‘Coppelia’ for the newly established Australian Ballet at the second Adelaide Festival scheduled in autumn 1962. Adelaide was the nearest metropolitan city to Mildura and its nascent biennial arts festival was an important stimulus for those interested in promoting cultural activities and exchanges in Mildura. There was a whiff of a cultural renaissance in the air. The two festivals – Mildura and Adelaide – would overlap in 1964 ensuring an exchange of visitors and art networks. By early 1963, Cr Etherington had secured the agreement of the Victorian Public Galleries Group to hold their annual general meeting in 1964 at the second Mildura Sculpture Prize.

Throughout 1963 an exhibition of contemporary English sculpture, organised by the British Council through the Institute of Contemporary Art (ICA), London, toured in all state galleries of Australia.¹⁴⁴ According to the young art critic Robert Hughes, *Recent British Sculpture* ‘is the best collection of sculpture ever shown in Australia. Indeed, it is the only major sculpture show seen here ... and so it is crucial.’¹⁴⁵ The exhibition was planned during 1960 for touring to Canada, New Zealand and Australia between 1961

¹⁴³ Letter from Algeranoff to Signor Bruno, 18 January 1962. Further in a ‘Note for Mr Algeranoff’ attached to the Mildura Guild Confidential Report, prepared by Joyce Lester in May 1962, it states: ‘owing to the timely intervention of Mr. E. van Hattum, Director of the Mildura Art Gallery, who arranged the amalgamation of the three Guilds, thus forming the North West Ballet Group, the financial situation was relieved ... At the same time, the Mildura & District Ballet Guild was affiliated with the Art Gallery, thus gaining the interest and support of the City Council.’ Both documents located in Harcourt Essex Algeranoff MS 2376/14/1, NLA, Canberra.

¹⁴⁴ The exhibition had toured to Canada and New Zealand between 1961 and 1962 before proceeding to Australia. The nine participating sculptors were Robert Adams, Kenneth Armitage, Reg Butler, Lynn Chadwick, Hubert Dalwood, Barbara Hepworth, Bernard Meadows, Henry Moore and Eduardo Paolozzi.

¹⁴⁵ Robert Hughes, *Nation*, 10 August 1963, quoted in Sturgeon, *Sculpture at Mildura*, op. cit., p. 24.

and 1963 and included works by the generation of British sculptors who had come to prominence at the 1952 Venice Biennale, as well as works by Henry Moore and Barbara Hepworth. Many of the works in the exhibition were completed during the 1950s, thus were not indicative of the current direction of a number of the sculptors. These were the first generation of British sculptors, after Moore and Hepworth, who had gained national and international reputations. For these sculptors, the recognition of sculpture and the rhetoric of the genesis of a sculptural tradition in Britain was a very recent, post-war development.

However, while the exhibition toured Australian state art galleries, at the same time, in London, a 'new wave in sculpture' was being heralded in an exhibition by the 'London Group' (including a young Ron Robertson Swann), which rejected the 'cryptic and figure-sculpting of the 1950s'; it also announced the presence of the first of the Caro-generation of young sculptors from St Martin's School of Art.¹⁴⁶ Although the *Recent British Sculpture* exhibition provided Australian sculptors and students with first-hand observation of the works by this important generation of post-war British sculptors, it was not contemporaneous with British developments, including the impact of two major reports on art education in Britain, the Coldstream Reports of 1960 and 1962.¹⁴⁷

Dr Bernard Smith's time-lag theory (which formed part of the theoretical basis of Graeme Sturgeon's accounts of the Mildura Triennial exhibitions in the 1960s and 1970s) sought to explain the delay in reception and transference of overseas metropolitan styles amongst Australian artists. Sculpture was doubly handicapped as certain kinds of

¹⁴⁶ John Russell, 'The new wave in sculpture', *Sunday Times*, London, quoted in Scarlett, *Australian Sculptors*, op. cit., p. 566. Interestingly, Sir Herbert Read, art critic and co-founder of the Institute of Contemporary Art, who had written the catalogue essay for the 1952 British participation in the Venice Biennale and christened the style of the young sculptors as a 'Geometry of fear' and, who was a champion of this group, was in Australia in 1963 to attend a UNESCO conference on art education in Canberra. He also toured various cities giving lectures. See Bernard Smith, *Australian Painting 1788–1990*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1991, p. 341.

¹⁴⁷ In February 1956, the NSW Society of Sculptors and Associates organised an annual members exhibition at the David Jones Art Gallery in Sydney, which included works by seven international sculptors, six of whom were British: Kenneth Armitage, Reg Butler, Lynn Chadwick, F.E. McWilliams, Henry Moore and Edward Paolozzi. Two works were loaned with the assistance of the British Council (Armitage and Moore); however, the National Gallery of South Australia lent the Butler, McWilliams, Paolozzi and Chadwick works from their own collection.

materials, their ease of use or otherwise, as well as their availability and cost, dictated what could be done. The lack of technical skills and support, particularly a professionally staffed foundry, hampered growth, as did the lack of professional training for sculptors. One of the keys to growth of sculpture in Britain was the expansion and upgrading of art schools in the post-war period, aided throughout the 1960s by the various Coldstream and Summeston Reports with their recommendations of the appointment of younger graduates as lecturers. Part-time teaching was acknowledged as a form of government subsidy that allowed artists, particularly sculptors, to maintain and develop their own practice.¹⁴⁸

The 2nd Mildura Sculpture Prize 1964

The second Mildura Prize for Sculpture (April) followed the 3rd Adelaide Festival (March). State gallery directors and their curators, who were the pre-selectors for the Sculpture Prize, attended, as did art critics, academics such as Dr Bernard Smith, dealers and collectors, many of them doing the circuit from Adelaide to Mildura. Smith, in his review in *The Age*, confidently stated:

This exhibition, like the Adelaide Festival, may well become an event of national significance in the Australian art calendar ... In order to emerge from a provincial situation sculptors and artists in general ... must gain strength from a local as well as a metropolitan tradition ... there is nothing at all provincial about the idea which had brought the Mildura Sculpture Triennials into existence.¹⁴⁹

The director of the AGNSW, Hal Missingham, who was also one of the judges, reviewed the event for the new national art journal, *Art and Australia*, which was launched in June 1963. He opened his review with the admission that:

¹⁴⁸ John Russell: 'In no other country can it be more or less taken for granted that every artist has been getting a state subsidy in return for one or two days' teaching a week for eight or nine months of the year.' John Russell, Bryan Robertson and Anthony Snowdon (eds), *Private View: The Lively World of British Art*, Thomas Nelson and Son, London, 1965, p. 146.

¹⁴⁹ Bernard Smith, 'Australian sculpture gathers strength' [review of 1964 Mildura Triennial], *The Age*, 25 April 1964.

[F]or years the directors of the State galleries have discussed the possibility of staging an Australia-wide exhibition of sculpture, but the difficulties of organising and the high cost of mounting such a show combined to defer the project year after year.¹⁵⁰

Such an admission of inertia and restraint concerning Australian sculpture by the directors of the state galleries highlighted the significance and enterprise of the regional Mildura Art Gallery initiative. The event was launched by Bernard Smith, senior lecturer in art history at the University of Melbourne, art critic for *The Age* newspaper and author of the significant new textbook, *Australian Painting*, published in 1962. The issue of Australia's cultural isolation from the metropolitan cultural centres had much currency during the 1950s and 1960s. Smith was keenly concerned with the cultural polarities of provincial versus metropolitan debates in which the provincial and, by implication, debased and secondary situation described Australia's cultural isolation in relation to the metropolitan centres of Europe and the United States. This situation was especially magnified within sculpture in Australia, given its marginal status. By the 1960s he perceived the 'emergence of a metropolitan situation in Australia' due in part to the influence of the post-war émigré artists, increased and improved travel, increasing cosmopolitanism of the expanding cities and 'the emergence of provincial communities ... that look to the metropolis for standards and styles... [and] make use of art ... as a means toward regional and national self-identification'.¹⁵¹ The arts communities in Sydney, Melbourne and Adelaide were beginning to flex their muscles and Adelaide had initiated a biennial arts festival that was gaining a national and international reputation.

For the assembled sculptors at the opening of the second Mildura Sculpture Prize, Smith's reference to 'provincial' to describe Australian sculpture in his opening speech caused some consternation.¹⁵² In his review, he clarified the use of the term when he stated that there was 'nothing provincial about the idea' behind the Triennials and acknowledged that these gatherings, like the Adelaide Festivals, were an important means

¹⁵⁰ Hal Missingham, 'Mildura Prize for Sculpture', *Art and Australia*, vol. 2, no. 2, September 1964, p. 131.

¹⁵¹ Smith, *Australian Painting 1788–1900*, op. cit., p. 334.

¹⁵² Missingham, 'Mildura Prize for Sculpture', op. cit., p. 132.

towards the development of a national cultural identity.¹⁵³ It was an idea that reflected the tension of the times in terms of who controlled the definition of cultural identity. Smith had been a critic of the 1961 Whitechapel Exhibition *Recent Australian Painting* (and the curator's rejection of Smith's exhibition proposal for *The Antipodeans*) and there was general critical disquiet in the Melbourne art scene at the Menzies Government's (through the CAAB) selection of works for the Tate Gallery exhibition entitled *Antipodean Vision*, which had previewed at the 1962 second Adelaide Festival.

Enhanced by the proximity of the Adelaide Festival (which in 1964 had a program of nine art exhibitions from 7 to 21 March at the Art Gallery of South Australia), the Mildura Sculpture Prize began to develop the momentum of an important network, enabling a nascent recognition of a larger visual arts self-identification, most especially within and inclusive of sculpture. As Hal Missingham reported: 'Sculptors and students from Melbourne and Adelaide had driven three hundred and more miles to be present ... and there were a number of interstate critics, gallery directors and visitors testifying to the growing importance and seriousness of the exhibition'.¹⁵⁴ The South Australian School of Art was well represented with the inclusion of works by three sculpture lecturers and two students.¹⁵⁵

Hal Missingham, Melbourne art critic Bill Hannan and Ernst van Hattum judged the prize winners and made the selection of acquisitions. First prize of £400 for a monumental work was awarded for the second time to Norma Redpath for *Dawn Sentinel*, 1962, which was cast in bronze in a professional foundry in Milan, Italy (Figure 17). Interestingly, this work had already been exhibited late in 1963 at Gallery A in Melbourne and received several favourable reviews. Alan McCulloch revealed his surprise at the fact that 'such a full scale monumental sculpture requiring great physical

¹⁵³ Smith, 'Australian sculpture gathers strength', op.cit.

¹⁵⁴ *ibid.*

¹⁵⁵ The lecturers included the recently appointed Max Lyle, Owen Broughton and Aina Jaugietis; the students were Geoff Sharples (whose work was acquired for the Mildura Art Gallery collection) and Sandy Taylor.

strength and stamina, should have come from a woman'.¹⁵⁶ McCulloch's comment revealed more about the lack of professional technical support and skills in Australia than necessarily the surprise of a woman undertaking monumental work. Redpath, in a number of interviews, acknowledged her development as a result of working with a professional team of artisans at the foundry in Milan and that this was an important factor in the 'the high production level of work and fast development of young sculptors' in Italy.¹⁵⁷ Supported by a lively and highly experienced casting tradition and exposed to the influence of sculptors such as Francesco Somaini, Redpath's technique and vocabulary of forms revealed the expanded possibilities of what could be achieved by Australian sculptors and for monumental commissions. *Dawn Sentinel*, 1963, was subsequently purchased at the Mildura Sculpture Prize for the NGV collection.

For many of the participating sculptors, the focus was still very much on Italy and Britain as the leading metropolitan sources for Australian sculptors. However, for Robert Klippel and Clement Meadmore, the United States offered the greatest stimulus and reception for their work.¹⁵⁸ Robert Hughes, in his article on sculptor Robert Klippel in 1964, acknowledged his surprise that 'five years ago it would have been unthinkable to propose that one of the two or three most gifted artists at work in Australia was a sculptor'.¹⁵⁹ Klippel, who exhibited only once in the triennial Mildura sculpture exhibitions, in 1964, had returned from five years in the United States the previous year in the hope of being able to earn a living from his sculpture. Klippel's work, *Steel Junk Sculpture*, 1963, won the prize for small sculpture at the triennial exhibition but was not acquired for the Mildura Art Gallery collection (Figure 15).¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁶ Alan McCulloch, 'Impact of a work in bronze', *Herald*, Melbourne, 16 October 1963, p. 27.

¹⁵⁷ 'Norma Redpath: Casting the relief fragment', *The Western Australian Art Gallery Bulletin*, vol. 1, no. 20, June 1966, quoted in Scarlett, *Australian Sculptors*, op. cit, p. 542.

¹⁵⁸ Although a work by Meadmore was included in the exhibition, he had already emigrated to New York where he was to live permanently.

¹⁵⁹ Robert Hughes, 'Robert Klippel', *Art and Australia*, vol. 2, no. 1, June 1964, p. 18.

¹⁶⁰ Klippel returned to Australia in 1963 with the hope of earning his living from his sculpture. In 1965 he was quoted as saying: 'Australian sculpture? Most of it is awful – fashionable, but dead ... I don't think there are any good sculptors working in Australia at the moment. Everybody has gone mad with commissions instead of developing their own particular vision. They are just designers, adding something decorative to a building ...', Craig McGregor, 'Australian sculpture comes of age – or does it?', *Sydney*

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Figure 14: top, Victorian Premier, Henry Bolte in Mildura discussing the new Mildura Arts Centre model with Mayor of Mildura, Neil Noyce. ‘Premier interested in culture centre’, *Sunraysia Daily*, 23 May 1964: “Last year Mr Bolte promised a Government grant of £50,000 toward the cultural centre.”

Figure 15: bottom, Robert Klippel in his studio with *Steel Junk Sculpture* 1963, in the background. This was the work which won the Mildura Prize for Small Sculpture in 1964. Photographer: David Moore, silver gelatin photograph.

Morning Herald, 6 May 1965, quoted in Scarlett, *Australian Sculptors*, op. cit., p. 331. In 1966 Klippel returned to the US for a year to work as a visiting professor of sculpture at the Minneapolis School of Arts.

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Figure 16: left, Vincas Jomantas, *Guardant* 1963, bronze, 138 x 56 x 28 cms. Special Acquisition Prize at the 2nd Mildura Sculpture Triennial, 1964. Collection Mildura Art Gallery (now Mildura Arts Centre).

Figure 17: right, Norma Redpath, *Dawn Sentinel* 1962, bronze, 280.5cms. Collection, NGV. First Prize Winner, Monumental work, 2nd Mildura Sculpture Triennial, 1964.

The major sponsor for the 1964 event was the Mildura Art Gallery Advisory Council, chaired by Cr Reginald Etherington and backed by the Mildura Shire Council, with the freight sponsored by local company, McGlashan's Transport. The funding amount for the non-acquisitive prize was maintained as in 1961: £400 for a monumental work and £100 for a small work; however, the funds available for the gallery's acquisition were doubled to £500. In total, six sculptures, including the special acquisitions prize of £500 for Vincas Jomantas's monumental *Guardant*, 1963, were purchased for the gallery's collection (Figure 16).

Some of the purchases in 1964 reflected a preference for works that showed an affinity with the works in the exhibition *Recent British Sculpture*, which toured New Zealand in 1962 and Australia during 1963. The New Zealand sculptor Greer Twiss's bronze cast work, *The Acrobat*, 1963, clearly drew on post-war humanist style exemplified in early 1950s works of Reg Butler. Geoff Sharples, a young student at the South Australian School of Art (SASA), had his pitted copper work, *Figure*, 1964, which drew on the abstracted figure forms of Henry Moore, purchased by the Mildara Wine Company and donated to the Mildura Art Gallery collection. Noticeable in 1964 was the presence of lecturers from RMIT and SASA and young, recently graduated sculptors and students from SASA as participants in the prize exhibition.

Owen Broughton's work, *Welded Form No. 6*, 1963, followed an increasing preference amongst Australian sculptors for welding, used iron rods to create a vertical skeletal-structured winged form. Broughton's colleague in SASA's sculpture department, Max Lyle, had his new work, *Firebird*, 1964, purchased for the collection. At twenty-four years of age, George Baldessin was one of the youngest participants. He had recently returned from studying under the Italian sculptor Marino Marini at the Brera Academy of Fine Arts in Milan and was now a part-time lecturer in painting at RMIT. All the Centre 5 members were well represented in the second Mildura Sculpture Prize, with Norma Redpath and Vincas Jomantas gaining significant recognition

In 1964 the Mildura Sculpture Prize was still the only national survey of contemporary sculptural practice in Australia. Its emerging reputation for talent spotting was evident in Gordon Thomson's selection of works for *Recent Australian Sculpture*, a touring exhibition to all state galleries during 1964 and 1965.¹⁶¹ The first and second Mildura Sculpture Prizes (1961, 1964), Lenton Parr's little book on sculpture published in 1961 and Thomson's exhibition featured many of the same names and clearly reflected the teaching styles in art schools in each state.

New directorship

The national success of the second Mildura Sculpture Prize provided further impetus for the push to develop the Art Gallery into the first regional arts centre in Victoria (Figure 14). Competition for control of the design of the proposed cultural centre resulted in a deterioration in the relationship between Ernst van Hattum and Cr Reg Etherington.¹⁶² Although control remained within the political field of power (local council and state government), which provided the economic backing for the project, the fall-out for the two protagonists was indeed severe. At the Mildura Council meeting of 28 January 1965, van Hattum's resignation letter (effective from 1 April 1965) was regretfully accepted. He had held the position of gallery director since July 1958. The *Sunraysia Daily* reported:

He was instrumental in organising the first Australian sculpture contest ever held and its presentation in 1961 in Mildura was hailed by art circles throughout Australia and overseas. A second successful sculpture contest was held here in 1964. He was a great supporter of the Arts Centre project on which work began this week. The £193,000 Arts Centre with a new art gallery and 400 seat little

¹⁶¹ *Recent Australian Sculpture* was 'proposed by the Conference of Directors of State Galleries and sponsored at their request by the Commonwealth Art Advisory Board' and curated by Gordon Thomson at the NGV. It drew on the two Mildura Sculpture Prize exhibitions and catalogues of 1961 and 1964. Thomson acknowledged that: 'without the Mildura Sculpture Competition ... we might still be unaware of it [sculpture]. For it requires some catalyst to produce new sculpture, and this notable event, which may soon reach international importance has provided just such a device.' See Gordon Thomson, *Recent Australian Sculpture*, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, 1964, n.p.

¹⁶² According to McCullough, van Hattum had wanted control of the design process and had actually had a scale model built with his design preferences. Mildura City Council appointed Douglas Alexandra, a qualified architect, to design the extensions.

theatre was basically modelled on ideas Mr van Hattum brought back from a special overseas tour.¹⁶³

Reg Etherington was defeated in the Mildura Council elections of 1965 as an outcome of the poisonous rift with the previous director and the gallery society, as well as community concerns about the cost of the project.¹⁶⁴ Etherington had been primarily responsible for securing the funding for the new centre from regional gallery capital grants through his relationship with the political and cultural elite in Melbourne. However, he remained on the board of the Mildura Arts Centre Advisory Committee. In the ensuing public debate, a consultative meeting was organised by the Mildura City Council in which professionals such as Eric Westbrook, NGV director, the architect David Alexandra (of the firm Berg and Alexandra), director of the Council of Adult Education Colin Badger and John Sumner, manager of the Elizabethan Theatre Trust, were invited to outline the proposed plan for the gallery extension and theatre and support the project costs in terms of community benefits.¹⁶⁵

Van Hattum's resignation came at a crucial stage in the development of the project and threatened the realisation of the Advisory Council's vision for the cultural enrichment of Mildura. In response the Mildura High School art coordinator and voluntary gallery assistant, Tom McCullough, was made honorary director. Following interviews in August 1965, he was appointed as the next director of the Mildura Art Gallery with management responsibility of the new arts centre development project (Figure 18). It was important that control remained with the Mildura Shire Council and the Mildura Arts Centre Advisory Committee. McCullough, through his relationships with Etherington, van Hattum and Harcourt Essex, and his experience in assisting with the second Mildura Sculpture Prize, was cognisant of the vision for the arts centre shared by these key people. Reg Etherington would be his political mentor through this process.

¹⁶³ 'Mr Van Hattum to study overseas. Resignation of two city leaders', *Sunraysia Daily*, 28 January 1965, p. 1.

¹⁶⁴ 'Controversy raged about the plans and Mr Etherington lost the seat he had held on the council. The city was divided on whether it could afford an arts centre complex', see George Tilley, *Mildura into the 70s: Yesterday and Today. Mildura District in Words and Pictures*, Sunraysia Daily, Mildura, 1970, n.p.

¹⁶⁵ 'Cultural leaders accept invitation', *Sunraysia Daily*, undated clipping, c.late May 1964. Mildura Arts Centre archives.

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Figure 18: top, Director of Mildura Arts Centre, Thomas McCullough shows Donald Webb, Chairman of the Public Galleries Association of Victoria, the new Mildura Arts Centre gallery under construction, c. 1965. Photo: Mildura Arts Centre archives.

Figure 19: bottom, View of the new Mildura Arts Centre, incorporating Rio Vista museum, c.1966. Photo: Mildura Arts Centre archives.

Opening of Mildura Arts Centre

The cultural investment by the community of Mildura and the state of Victoria in this new regional art centre was a radical development and represented a tectonic shift in government attitudes to funding cultural activities, particularly contemporary arts practices. It reflected the relative prosperity and security of the mid 1960s, an expansive mood where funds were made available to encourage the development of the arts (Figure 19). It was also a matter of prestige for Sir Henry Bolte and his government that Victoria was seen to be the most sophisticated and advanced of all the Australian states.

The new Mildura Arts Centre, the first of its kind in Victoria, was opened on 12 November 1966 by Sir Henry Bolte, who was accompanied by an entourage of senior members of the cultural elite: Dr H.C. Coombs, in his capacity as chairman of the Australian Elizabethan Theatre Trust; Sir Ian Potter, in his capacity as a member of the National Gallery and Arts Centre Building Committee; Colonel Aubrey Gibson, in his capacity as NGV trustee; and Eric Westbrook, director of the NGV. In the hierarchy of regional galleries in Victoria, the oldest and most impressive in terms of collections, buildings and bequests for annual prizes (mostly painting) were Ballarat (established in 1884), Bendigo (established in 1887) and Geelong (established in 1894). Of these three, in 1967, only Ballarat had a full-time director. James Mollison was appointed as the inaugural Ballarat director in 1967 and, since 1964, Geelong had had an education officer, G. W. Binns. Bendigo Art Gallery at this time was administered by a committee of twelve members with a curator, Mr John S. Henderson, appointed in the mid 1960s. By comparison, the staffing at the new Mildura Arts Centre with its new purpose-built gallery and 400-seat theatre comprised six full-time staff including the director plus one part-time, seconded teacher as education officer; the largest staff for a regional art centre outside the NGV.

The avowedly national aspirations of the two Mildura Sculpture Prizes as outlined by the director and Mildura Art Gallery Advisory Council (later known as Mildura Arts Centre Advisory Council or MACAC) in the exhibition catalogues were the result of events that

were not driven by the local Mildura community needs but rather by frustrated metropolitan aspirations. Hal Missingham's admission of the failure of consensus by the Conference of Interstate Directors to organise a touring national sculpture exhibition, its prohibitive costs and the lack of funding for its realisation confirmed this analysis.

Westbrook, given his immediate post-war experience of sculpture in Battersea Park and his exhibition touring experience with the British Council, had identified the Mildura Art Gallery and its lawns as an ideal location. With the appointment of Ernst van Hattum as director, a facilitating network was established between Westbrook, Etherington and van Hattum that enabled the project to be realised. In essence, the Mildura Art Gallery, through its commitment to a major national sculpture event, became a kind of regional annexe of the NGV, which brought it within the realm of metropolitan political and cultural influence.

The success of the first event, when combined with the well-developed political and cultural networks between Mildura and Melbourne, guaranteed the commitment of further state government funds, and loans, to Mildura for the realisation of a cultural centre. However, it is in this complex web of shifting alliances between the metropolitan centre of Melbourne and the regional centre of Mildura that issues of control, and thus the possibility of ruptures, began to become apparent. Implicit in this transitional decade from museum-gallery to contemporary arts centre was a growing tension between the community, the Mildura Shire Council, MACAC and the director over the direction and function of the art centre. It is this competition for the control of the centre and its direction (national versus local) that became an underlying dialectic.

John Davis 1955–1966

John Davis's journey from being a high school art teacher in the regional town of Mildura to a lecturer in charge of Sculpture at Prahran College of Advanced Education in Melbourne, in just over a decade (1961–1973), is emblematic of the journeys of many young artists during this period. For sculptors, with virtually no commercial market for their work, the impact of the creation of a new parallel tertiary education system and its

expansion, coupled with expansion within other art world institutions, was especially pronounced. This section will outline Davis's trajectory from secondary-school teacher training to the completion of his associate diploma in sculpture at RMIT at the end of 1966.

Davis was a product of the post-Second World War education expansion. During the 1950s, in response to a demand for secondary art teachers that had outstripped supply, a fast-track, three-year certificate course (TSTC) was developed, combining basic training across a number of artforms with teacher training. Davis completed his certificate in 1957 and taught woodwork and art in his secondary school postings from the late 1950s and into the mid 1960s.

Davis had a personal and professional commitment to the Mildura Sculpture Triennials and was linked to them through institutional networks that were the bedrock of the Mildura experience. He both participated in the first event and assisted in the unpacking and installation of the works in the gallery and on the lawn. It was this experience of seeing a national selection of then contemporary sculptural works in one place, and meeting and talking to those sculptors who attended the opening, which confirmed for him his decision to become a sculptor. In essence, Davis's sculptural career was made in Mildura, and through the future development of the Mildura Sculpture Triennials from 1967 to 1978.

Background

John Francis Davis was born in 1936 in Ballarat but spent most of his childhood and teenage years in Swan Hill, on the Murray River, 218 kilometres east of Mildura. In a 1997 interview with Paul Sinclair, Davis recounted his experience of living in Swan Hill as a boy:

I grew up and lived like Huckleberry Finn and biked everywhere. [It was] wild, freedom ... [I] knew all the birds eggs, what to do about snakes ... We'd get out on our bikes and fish and come back with half a sugar bag full of fish ... When I lived there ... we had rabbit, locust, mouse plagues, dust storms every summer: a

rhythm in the landscape and balances in nature that one learned to live with. *I have taken that with me* [my italics] ... I understand that things will pass ... When it was hot I used to dream of the ocean, days of 40 degrees ... I swam in certain parts of the river and the pool. I think it knocked my parents around a bit. It was hard.¹⁶⁶

In his book *The Murray: A River and its People*, Sinclair observed that ‘memory and emotional attachment are as much a part of the Murray as fish, irrigation and floods’.¹⁶⁷ He drew on the reminiscences of people, both settler and Indigenous, whose lives had been shaped by the river; many of them older fisherman who recount with respect their catches of Murray cod. Local lore decreed that each fish’s swim bladder was inscribed with a map of its birthplace symbolising the symbiotic relationship between the cod and specific places on the river. The recollections describe boyhoods, like Davis’s, spent putting up makeshift camp shelters of cut saplings and wattle branches. Davis’s statement ‘I have taken that with me’ encompasses these memories and experiences; they were deeply etched into his being. His triennial visits to Mildura for the sculpture exhibitions reacquainted him with this formative experience and increasingly, from 1973 onwards, begin to shape the direction of his work.¹⁶⁸

Davis completed his high school matriculation in 1954 and planned to become a secondary school art teacher. The urgent demand for secondary school teachers, caused by the baby boom of the post-war years and the rising educational expectations of the new generation, led to a shortfall in the number of graduate teachers available for the expanding positions. The Department of Education’s response was to establish secondary-school teachers colleges where fast-tracked three-year certificate courses were delivered.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁶ Paul Sinclair, interview with John Davis, 3 February 1997, John Davis Estate.

¹⁶⁷ Paul Sinclair, *The Murray: A River and its People*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 2001, quoted on back cover.

¹⁶⁸ Swan Hill was a major horticultural centre, similar to Mildura. Like many parts of south-eastern Australia, it had weathered the withering drought of 1940–45 with its Armageddon-like plagues and dust storms, followed a decade later by the Murray River flooding in 1955 and the catastrophic flood of 1956, caused by the banked-up floodwaters of the mighty Murray-Darling river systems.

¹⁶⁹ Malcolm Abbott & Chris Doucouliagos, ‘The changing structure of Higher Education in Australia, 1949–2003’, School Working Papers – Series 2003, SWP 2003/07, Deakin University, Burwood, pp. 7–8. Located at URL: http://www.deakin.edu.au/fac_buslaw/sch_aef/publications/default.htm, viewed 2 December 2007.

Although these shorter, non-degree, teacher-training courses were criticised in the Federal Government's Murray Committee (set up in 1957 to investigate the crisis in Australian universities), given the pressures in the secondary sector, they were maintained. Most of the teacher trainees were on 'a form of competitive scholarship, which included a living allowance, but also an employment bond' which required that on completion of the certificate course, the new teachers would undertake three years teaching at various country secondary schools in the state.¹⁷⁰

Davis commenced his three-year training in 1955. Like most students, the course which would furnish him on completion at the end of 1957 with a TSTC (Arts and Craft), required that he complete courses across four institutes: Caulfield Technical School (CTS), Royal Melbourne Technical College (RMTC), Melbourne Secondary Teachers College and the University of Melbourne. Training in a variety of art mediums was conducted at CTS and RMTC, teacher training at the Teachers College and Art History studies at the Department of Fine Arts at the University of Melbourne. This was the same certificate course undertaken by McCullough when he commenced training in 1960.

The earliest carved-wood sculptures by Davis were *Standing Figure I*, completed in 1956 and *Cry Out*, 1958. In 1960 Davis submitted a work for the Council of Adult Education Prize for Sculpture. Although there is no documentation as to which work Davis submitted, one work listed in his catalogue raisonné, *Standing Figure II* (now destroyed), was created in 1960. The sculpture would have been produced while he was teaching woodwork in Numurkah, a town on the Murray River about 233 kilometres downstream of Swan Hill. He won the prize.

In 1956 Davis met Shirley Heberle, also training for a TSTC (Arts and Craft) in Melbourne; she would complete her certificate at the end of 1958. During 1958 Davis completed one year at Queenscliff on the Bellarine Peninsula south of Melbourne. From

¹⁷⁰ Polesel & Teese, op. cit., pp. 8–9.

1959, both young teachers secured a two-year teaching post at Numurkah High School: she taught arts and he taught woodwork. This posting re-aquainted Davis with the familiar climate and landscape of the Murray River. He and Shirley married in January 1961, prior to their being transferred to Mildura High School, where he would be the art coordinator for the next two years.

The Mildura experience

Davis arrived in Mildura in early 1961 during the preparations for what would be the inaugural Mildura Sculpture Prize, named in honour of the principal sponsor, Mildura Wines. This was the first and, at that time, only national prize for sculpture; it represented a major undertaking for the Mildura Art Gallery and its Advisory Committee and was already being heralded as a landmark event in Australian art history.¹⁷¹ Davis's sculptural ambition, for him to even conceive of a career in sculpture, was ignited as a direct result of his involvement in the preparation, installation and participation in the inaugural Mildura Sculpture Prize. This was the result of his introduction to and association with the director of the Mildura Art Gallery, Ernst van Hattum and the well connected Mildura City Councillor (in his dual roles as chairman of the Mildura High School Advisory Council and chairman of the Mildura Art Gallery Advisory Council) Reg Etherington.

The chance to participate in a national exhibition of works by major Australian sculptors was serendipitous. Davis submitted three carved works in wood: *Standing Figure I*, 1956, *Standing Figure II*, 1960 and *Cry Out*, 1958; their making predated his arrival in Mildura. However, for Davis, the most inspirational work in the prize exhibition was the multi-figured, carved work by Melbourne sculptor Julius Kane. Kane's *Group Organism*, 1960, included six totemic columns of carved wood supported by a long, low, slab base (Figure 20).

¹⁷¹ 'The Mildura Art Gallery is to be congratulated on its brave proclamation of faith in perhaps the toughest of the imaginative arts and therefore one of the most influential, by its policy of collecting and exhibiting contemporary sculpture, and by launching a competition which future students of Australian art may well regard as a landmark in its history'. See Burke, 'Tradition and innovation in Western sculpture', op. cit., p. 14, and Parr, *Sculpture*, op. cit., p. 28, 'the small Mildura Art Gallery in Victoria which in 1961 conducted the most important exhibition in Australian sculpture yet seen here'.

Images removed for copyright reasons

Figure 20: left, Julius Kane, *Group Organism* 1960, wood, 253.5 cms.

Figure 21: right, John Davis, *Murray Form I* 1962, Murray pine on wooden base, 137cm.

Images removed for copyright reasons

Figure 22: top, John Davis, *Mallee Form* 1961, Murray red gum, 22x 19 x 35 cms.

Figure 23: bottom, Mildura Arts Centre, c.1967 during the 4th Mildura Sculpture Prize exhibition. Photo: Mildura Arts Centre archives.

In his decade review of Australian sculpture, Noel Hutchison observed: ‘Yet one feels a strange rightness in speaking of this sculpture as being peculiarly “Australian” ... perhaps this was as a result of Kane’s own view, for he wrote: “The purpose of art is not to beautify but to signify the intuitive impressions of the surrounding world.”’¹⁷² Davis sourced the wood for his sculptures from twisted roots of Murray Pine that he found by the river (Figures 21 & 22). He described his work as ‘fairly naïve ... modelled from organic forms that one found along the river and bones of dead animals’, seeming to echo Kane’s axiom.¹⁷³

Julius Kane, Inge King, Clifford Last, Vincas Jomantas, Norma Redpath, Teisutis Zikaras and Lenton Parr, all members of Melbourne’s Centre 5 group, had made an important contribution to the success of the 1st Mildara Sculpture Prize, with Norma Redpath’s *Dawn Figure* winning first prize for a monumental work. The intention of the sculpture prize mirrored the professional aims of the Centre 5 group and it is certain that Davis met various sculptors – possibly Lenton Parr and other members of the Centre 5 group – and was inspired to undertake further training as a sculptor at RMIT in Melbourne.¹⁷⁴

Due to its marginal status, sculpture was relatively free of the concerns that defined Australian cultural identity, clashes of styles and threats of provincialism versus internationalism, which had burdened painting since the late 1950s.

¹⁷² Noel Hutchison, ‘Australian Sculpture in the 1960s’, *Other Voices*, vol. 1, no. 3, Sydney, 1970, p. 13.

¹⁷³ Graeme Sturgeon interview with John Davis, undated, from ‘Interviews with Australian artists on cassette tapes 1976–1989’, Graeme Sturgeon Papers Box 7, NGV Research Library. I deduced that this interview was conducted in 1975 prior to the *Artists’ Artists* series of exhibitions, based on an exchange of letters between John Davis and Graeme Sturgeon in preparation for the exhibition. Letters located in John Davis Estate Archive, Correspondence.

¹⁷⁴ The following quote from Lenton Parr encapsulated the optimism and aspiration of Australian sculptors and the intention behind the Mildara Sculpture Prize: ‘Contemporary sculpture in Australia has almost no foundation in our past. If there is little of national character in the earlier work is there then something distinctively Australian in the contemporary sculpture of today? ... Films, art books and magazines tend to keep the artist closer to what is happening abroad than was possible in the past. The result is that artists all over the world are working in styles that belong to no one country in particular but to all. This internationalism need not cause us concern ... there are contributions to this world culture that only we can make ... Perhaps someday a youthful sculptor will show us these things through his eyes and hands, and that time may not be so far distant when the native artists of New Guinea and Australia will join the mainstream of the world’s art as living contributors.’ See Lenton Parr, *Sculpture*, op. cit., p. 4.

Lenton Parr had direct experience of working with and meeting a number of the middle generation British sculptors who came to prominence in the early 1950s, such as Eduardo Paolozzi and Reg Butler, and he would have met some of the members of the Independent Group through Paolozzi, including the architects Alison and Peter Smithson. It was these experiences that informed Parr's generous and open statement that was included in his book on Australian sculpture, published in 1961, after the successful 1st Mildura Sculpture Prize. As a sculpture teacher at RMIT, Parr would become an important influence on Davis.

Sculptural training in Melbourne

By 1963 Davis had transferred to Highett, a Melbourne suburban high school on the Nepean Highway near Hampton and Sandringham, which enabled him to study part-time for an Associate Diploma in Sculpture at RMIT. He undertook night classes in the first year, and then three years part-time, completing his course at the end of 1966. Fellow students included Les Kossatz, Ron Upton and Kevin Mortensen who would all be involved in future Mildura events.

Davis's return to further education and formal sculpture training at RMIT coincided with the beginnings of major state and national changes to tertiary education that would have far reaching effects on his future career as a sculptor and on the Mildura Sculpture events. On a more direct level, RMIT at that time was a higher technical institute controlled by an independent council, which gave it a degree of autonomy within the state Department of Education. The art school was the largest in Victoria and was held in high regard. Within the sculpture department his lecturers included Lenton Parr (Head of Sculpture), Teisutis Zikaras and Vincas Jomantas, who were all active members of the Centre 5 group of sculptors in Melbourne.

Centre 5 was externally focused on public education and proactive representation to art institutions for inclusion in exhibitions and acquisitions as well as to architects and specifiers in order to improve and expand opportunities for sculpture to be commissioned

at the planning stages of major public projects.¹⁷⁵ Lectures and demonstrations, through an open studio program to architecture and sculpture students, began in earnest in 1963. As Margaret Plant noted:

The group set out to inform potential patrons of the existence of sculptors working as *professional artists* [my italics] in Melbourne; to educate students, particularly students of architecture; to consider sculpture as part of architecture; and to encourage patrons to give equal emphasis in prizes and art exhibitions to the art of sculpture.¹⁷⁶

Echoing the Bauhaus philosophy that united architecture, painting, sculpture and craft into the service of a radical modernisation, the Centre 5 group advocated that sculpture be considered as an important complement to architecture, not an aberrant afterthought. By reinforcing sculpture's close association with architecture, the group aimed to elevate the status of sculpture to that of a professional practice. This challenging, new pedagogical milieu underpinned Davis's formal induction into sculpture at RMIT and would have been further reinforced with the very successful participation of Centre 5 members at the second Mildura Sculpture Prize in 1964.

By 1965, the results of both the Martin and Ramsay government-commissioned reports on tertiary education were made public and legislation was drafted in the Victorian Parliament in order to institute the recommendation for the new VIC. Updating one's qualifications in preparation for the VIC regime was an imperative particularly if, as in many cases, the only previous art training gained had been as a trained secondary arts teacher. Davis's completion of an Associate Diploma in Sculpture at RMIT at the end of 1966 had prepared him to move from secondary teaching to tertiary teaching: his professional career as a sculptor was about to begin.

There was already at this time a developing autonomy in discussions concerning the new tertiary system of colleges, evident in the definitional circularity and linkage of the terms 'well-qualified' and 'professional' dispositions:

¹⁷⁵ For details of the Centre 5 program, see footnote 90, Chapter I of this thesis; also Introduction to catalogue, Centre 5, Geelong Gallery exhibition, quoted in Scarlett, *Australian Sculptors*, op. cit., p. 303.

¹⁷⁶ Margaret Plant, 'Centre Five: A note on a decade of activity', in C.B. Christesen (ed.), *The Gallery on Eastern Hill*, Melbourne, 1970, p. 107.

If training institutions were autonomous and adequately resourced, they would attract well-qualified staff, who in turn would impart to students dispositions which were truly professional.¹⁷⁷

For Davis the disposition of a professional artist was imparted through his training as a sculptor at RMIT, particularly through his sculptor/lecturers – Parr, Zikaras and Jomantas. Lenton Parr, who had taught sculpture at RMIT since 1958, became head of sculpture for two years from 1964 to 1965. His belief that ‘art is education’ and that the pursuit of ‘research and communication through art’ was the ‘real business’ of artists, contradicted many of the older generation of teachers schooled in the Department of Education’s practical, vocational model.¹⁷⁸ However, this philosophy, combined with Centre 5 group’s professional and educational mandate, was the sculptural milieu that was absorbed by Davis and his fellow students at RMIT.

Davis’s exhibiting history on his return to Melbourne began slowly. He had a full-time job as a secondary school art teacher at Highett High School and undertook evening classes in sculpture during 1963 at RMIT, followed by a further three years’ part-time study for an Associate Diploma. His wife had ceased full-time teaching and in 1963 and 1965 respectively their two children were born. Until 1973, when Shirley Davis would resume teaching, Davis’s was the sole income for the young family.

Throughout 1963 a touring exhibition of contemporary English sculpture (organised by the British Council) circulated in all state galleries of Australia.¹⁷⁹ According to art critic Robert Hughes, *Recent British Sculpture* ‘is the best collection of sculpture ever shown in Australia. Indeed, it is the only major sculpture show seen here ... and so it is crucial’.¹⁸⁰ The members of Centre 5 gave educational lectures on sculpture at the NGV during the

¹⁷⁷ Polesel & Teese, op. cit., p. 9.

¹⁷⁸ Lenton Parr, ‘The artist teacher’, *Art Teachers Association of Victoria News Sheet*, Melbourne, March, 1967, cited in Scarlett, *Australian Sculptors*, op. cit., p. 516.

¹⁷⁹ The exhibition had toured to Canada and New Zealand between 1961 and 1962 before proceeding to Australia. The nine artists were Robert Adams, Kenneth Armitage, Reg Butler, Lynn Chadwick, Hubert Dalwood, Barbara Hepworth, Bernard Meadows, Henry Moore and Eduardo Paolozzi.

¹⁸⁰ Robert Hughes, *Nation*, 10 August 1963, quoted in Sturgeon, *Sculpture at Mildura*, op. cit., p. 24. Of the nine artists whose works were exhibited, two were personally known to Lenton Parr: Moore, with whom he had worked as an assistant, and Paolozzi. These were the artists whose works Parr had seen, and admired, in the mid 1950s in Britain.

exhibition and in order to contextualise Australian works within an international framework, slides of Australian works were also shown and discussed.¹⁸¹ A number of young sculptors who had trained at RMIT, including Davis, began working in the mid 1960s in a style termed biomorphic abstraction, and seemed to draw inspiration from works in *Recent British Sculpture*, particularly those by Kenneth Armitage and Hubert Dalwood.¹⁸²

By 1963 these British sculptors and their works were already being challenged by a ‘new generation’ of young sculptors, many of whom were taught by Anthony Caro at St Martins School of Art in London. This new generation dispensed with the plinth, engaged with the spectator and used industrial materials such as welded steel beams, plastic and fibreglass. Bright industrial paints, including car duco, were also the preferred finishes on works that bore no trace of the artist’s hand. However, in Australia, indications of these influences would not begin to permeate until 1966. They gather momentum from 1966 onwards brought about by the publication of and access to new colour art magazines, the return or emigration of a number of younger artists from overseas, and the imminent changes to the art school systems brought about by the expansion of tertiary education in Australia under the federal government.

John Davis’s trajectory as a sculptor was indicative of these changes. From 1963 to 1966 whilst he was completing his training at RMIT, his work reflected the dominant practice of organic abstraction, in carved wood and occasionally cast works, though he was also exposed to working with a range of materials including cast aluminium, resins and fibreglass.

¹⁸¹ Jennifer Phipps, *I Had a Dream: Australian Art in the 1960s*, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, 1997, p. 44.

¹⁸² The young Melbourne sculptors referred to are Ron Upton, David Tolley and George Baldessin. John Davis is also included within this group after 1966, when he begins to exhibit in the Victorian Sculpture Society exhibitions. See alphabetical entries for David Tolley and Ron Upton in Scarlett, *Australian Sculptors*, op. cit. Baldessin, on the other hand, studied at the Brera Academy of Fine Art in Milan (1962–63) under the guidance of Marino Marini and Alik Cavaliere.

Davis did not participate in the second Mildura Sculpture Prize in 1964. Given that he was now based in Melbourne and was competing with other more established sculptors known to the NGV director and curator, it is likely that he may not have been selected, or elected not to send in any work. He joined the Victorian Sculptors Society and showed for the first time in their annual members exhibition in 1965. In 1966, the two carved wooden works he exhibited at the Victorian Sculpture Society gained some coverage and acknowledged his tribute to Julius Kane. The cruciform *Mandala* was constructed of four separate parts mounted on white board and made from welded steel, jarrah and plastic.¹⁸³ *Metamorphosis* consisted of two vertical, carved forms of kauri, painted green and mounted on a slab base.¹⁸⁴ Lacking the sophistication and confidence of Julius Kane's *Group Organism* that Davis had so admired at the 1st Mildura Sculpture Prize, *Metamorphosis* still earned him Alan McCulloch's notice that 'the wood carvings of the lesser known John Davis suggest a potential for possible development'.¹⁸⁵

Sculptors were also the winners in 1966 in two new, metropolitan national art prizes that would rival the Mildura Sculpture Prize, whilst increasing the profile of Australian sculpture as a contemporary artform. George Baldessin won the Alcorso Sekers Exhibition and Travelling Scholarship valued at \$2000 and Norma Redpath won the Transfield Prize, dedicated to sculpture for the first time, and valued at \$2000.¹⁸⁶ Davis had witnessed the rapid shift in five years from the groundbreaking national Mildura Sculpture Prize, which had inspired him to return to Melbourne to study sculpture, to a situation in 1966 of a plethora of national metropolitan sculpture prizes, offering more money than Mildura and raising the profile of sculpture within the visual arts, thereby transferring symbolic and economic capital to a previously marginalised artform. He had

¹⁸³ Ken Scarlett, *The sculpture of John Davis: Places and Locations*, Hyland House, Melbourne, 1988, p. 7.

¹⁸⁴ *ibid.*, p. 6.

¹⁸⁵ Alan McCulloch, 'Parade of black rhythms', *Herald*, 5 October 1966, quoted in Scarlett, *The sculpture of John Davis*, op. cit., p. 5.

¹⁸⁶ Davis was also selected to exhibit in the first Alcorso-Sekers exhibition in 1966, which was held at the AGNSW. This prize, which continued for three years (1966–68), used the same model for selection as the Mildura Sculpture Prizes and probably posed the most serious challenge to Mildura, given that it was a metropolitan-based prize that alternated between the two most important state galleries in Australia (AGNSW and NGV). It is highly probable that these issues were discussed between John Davis and Tom McCullough in the lead up and preparations to the 3rd Mildura Sculpture Prize in 1967, McCullough's first solo management of this triennial event.

also seen the touring exhibition *Recent Australian Sculpture* and, with the publication of *Art and Australia*, would have had access to articles about Australian and overseas exhibitions and events. He was an exhibiting member of the Victorian Sculptors Society, which had introduced him to a wider network of Melbourne sculptors, including Ken Scarlett. He had also moved to live in the bayside suburb of Hampton, which had become a mecca for many artists and their young families. It was through these networks that Davis was introduced to the rapidly expanding, vibrant and highly competitive Melbourne art scene.

Davis's originating artistic dispositions, inspired through his introduction at the 1st Mildara Sculpture Prize to the idea of a future practice as a sculptor, was moulded at RMIT through his induction into a set of practices with a theoretical basis in the redefined concept of 'professional'. At the end of 1966, John Davis graduated from RMIT with an Associate Diploma in Sculpture, part of a young and active group of sculptor/teachers eager to participate in 'Melbourne's resurgence in sculpture, unequalled, as a movement, elsewhere in Australia', a situation of rapidly expanding opportunities, within an economic and social market, that had not existed before.¹⁸⁷

Tom McCullough 1956–1966

Background

Born in Belfast, Northern Ireland in 1936, Thomas McCullough worked at Queens University, Belfast in the Geology Department. He had always wanted to be an artist and undertook part-time evening classes at the Belfast Technical School. At the age of twenty he migrated to Melbourne in 1956, the year of the Olympic Games, with the assistance of Australian sponsorship and shortly after accepted a position as a senior draughtsman in a mining company. After three years in this position, he decided to train to become an Arts and Craft teacher, undertaking the three-year Victorian Trained Secondary Teacher's

¹⁸⁷ Elwyn Lynn, 'Art [review of George Baldessin's first exhibition at Rudy Komon Gallery in Sydney]', *The Australian*, 13 November 1965, in Scarlett, *Australian Sculptors*, op. cit., p. 30.

Certificate (TSTC). The course required him to undertake courses at the Caulfield Technical College and Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT) and fine art history lectures at the University of Melbourne, and was similar to the course that John Davis had commenced two years earlier. Prior to commencing his TSTC course, he met and married his wife, Roma Dodds, an Arts and Craft teacher at Melbourne's Box Hill Grammar School.

During this early period, McCullough and his young family visited Mildura on a holiday and decided that this was where they wanted to live. By 1962, McCullough was teaching art at the Merbein High School, a town in the Sunraysia district sixteen kilometres from Mildura. It was here that he met the art teacher and coordinator at Mildura High School, John Davis. Davis and his wife Shirley, both Arts and Craft secondary school teachers, taught at Mildura for two years from 1961 to 1962. When McCullough arrived in Merbein in 1962, it was Davis who ensured that he had an introduction to Ernst van Hattum and the Mildura Art Gallery and when Davis left Mildura for Melbourne at the end of 1962, McCullough took over his position as art coordinator at Mildura High School.

From 1962 the McCullough family shared a rented house in Mildura with the ballet master of the North West Ballet Guild, Harcourt Essex and his son Noel (who would later become a sculptor). Cr Etherington, chairman of the Mildura Art Centre Advisory Committee, was also on the Mildura High School Board during the period that McCullough was the senior art teacher, and was chair of the North West Ballet Guild of which Harcourt Essex was the ballet master. Like John Davis before him, the Mildura High School art teacher, Tom McCullough also worked with the Mildura Art Gallery director van Hattum as a voluntary gallery assistant.¹⁸⁸ Thus he was closely linked into a group of professionals whose vision was the realisation of Mildura as a cultural centre.

¹⁸⁸ This involvement of local art teachers would later be formalised as official part-time secondments from the Victorian Education Department in the late 1960s, during McCullough's tenure as director at the Mildura Arts Centre and would provide essential, much needed staffing for the new centre. It was an adaptation of the NGV education officer model that began in the early 1950s at the instigation of Professor Joseph Burke.

All three protagonists were well connected to the Melbourne cultural elite: Etherington with his political ties to the premier and Cabinet, van Hattum to the NGV director Eric Westbrook and Essex to the Australian Ballet and its patrons.¹⁸⁹

McCullough was encouraged and supported by Etherington (through fundraising) in his expansion of the facilities for the art department at Mildura High School and in his involvement as van Hattum's voluntary gallery assistant at the Mildura Art Gallery. Like Davis in 1961, he was involved in the preparation for and installation of the second Mildura Sculpture Prize, and the introduction to artists and influential invitees at the opening provided him with important insights into the management of the gallery and the triennial prize. As an active participant within this Mildura cultural network, he was also privy to and cognisant of the developments towards a Mildura Arts Centre, of which the Mildura Sculpture Prize was an important component.

After the success of the second Mildura Sculpture Prize, McCullough witnessed the souring of the relationship between the van Hattum and Cr Etherington during the planning stages of the proposed cultural centre. He recalled that Etherington had been responsible for securing funding from the state government for the proposed centre: 'He was on first name terms with Sir Henry Bolte and Arthur Rylah [Victorian premier and deputy premier respectively] way back in the 50s and 60s. That was the way politics was done for regional gallery capital grants.'¹⁹⁰

New career

McCullough remained at Mildura High School as the art coordinator until mid 1965, when, at the instigation of Cr Etherington and the Mildura Arts Centre Advisory Committee, he was appointed honorary director of the art gallery following van Hattum's resignation. In August 1965, from a field of six applicants, selected and interviewed by

¹⁸⁹ Following the demise of the Borovansky Ballet in 1961, of which Essex had been a part, the Australian Ballet Foundation was established in 1961 by Sir Frank Tait of J.C. Williamson and Dr H.C. Coombs, in his capacity as chairman of the Australian Elizabethan Theatre Trust.

¹⁹⁰ Tom McCullough, interview with the author, 30 March 2006.

Mildura City Councillors, McCullough was the successful appointee for the directorship. His brief was to manage the building and fit-out of the new fully equipped Arts Centre – a gallery and theatre – and refurbish the local history museum, all of which would open in November 1966 at a total cost of \$400,000. McCullough had only been in the Mildura area for three and half years: ‘My life changed after that call’ (Figure 18).¹⁹¹ It was a position he would remain in for thirteen years.

Although Etherington and the Mildura Arts Centre Advisory Committee sought, in employing McCullough as director, to insure that there was as little loss of corporate knowledge as possible, the most important factor in his employment was in returning control of the centre and its functions to the Advisory Committee and Mildura Shire Council and away from the threatened autonomy of the previous director. The direction and function of the centre was firmly within the control of those responsible for its funding.

McCullough regarded Etherington as his political mentor; he had advised McCullough on matters relating to Council, the Mildura Arts Centre Advisory Committee and the management of the building process. Eric Westbrook was to be one of McCullough’s most important cultural mentors, as attested in the written communication between the two throughout McCullough’s directorship at Mildura.¹⁹² The festival of events for the opening celebrations included a special loan exhibition from the NGV, negotiated by McCullough directly with Westbrook and the symposium, ‘Adult Education through Arts Centre’, organised by Colin Badger of the Council of Adult Education (a close associate of Westbrook), who also arranged the gala musical performance following the official opening ceremony.¹⁹³

¹⁹¹ Tom McCullough, interview with author, 30 March 2006.

¹⁹² Eric Westbrook, Mildura Art Centre, NGV Directors Correspondence Files 1962–1971, VPRS 12731/P0002/6, Public Records Office Victoria.

¹⁹³ Cr Etherington had arranged sponsorship by the Mildura Rotary Club for the symposium and instructed McCullough to contact all other groups to ensure a full house at the theatre.

The opening of the new Mildura Arts Centre in November 1966 was a moment of great pride for McCullough. He had steered the building to completion, following a very poisonous and public wrangle between the previous director and Cr Etherington as chairman of the Advisory Committee. At 28 years of age, McCullough was now director of an important regional gallery and arts centre, which had a national focus on contemporary Australian sculpture.

McCullough's apparent lack of credentials was not unusual at this time. Most gallery directors, including the state art gallery directors, were or had been practising artists; and increasingly in the Victorian regional gallery system, appointments included secondary school art teachers who had been seconded as education officers at the NGV, as was the case with James Mollison at Ballarat Art Gallery. Following the model developed at the NGV, the link between education and the arts at the Mildura Arts Centre was strengthened through the formal seconding of the local high school art teacher to a part-time position as an education officer on the staff at the centre.

Conclusion

The review of the developments in the Mildura Art Gallery during the decade from 1956 to 1966 and the career changes for Tom McCullough and John Davis highlight some of the key preconditions necessary for the emergence of an autonomous field: a booming, post-war generation requiring expanded secondary and tertiary education opportunities, a period of growing national prosperity and consequent boom in the art market, a generational shift in attitudes to cultural enjoyment and expression, and an emerging political will to fund cultural infrastructure.

The close political and economic ties between Mildura and Melbourne enabled the realisation of a cultural vision that extended beyond the immediate Mildura community. It is evident that the interaction of Eric Westbrook, Reg Etherington and Ernst van Hattum engaged the right combination of political, economic and cultural capital in order to realise the first major national sculpture event in Australia in 1961. While significantly

raising the profile of the Mildura Art Gallery beyond that of a mere regional outpost, the Mildura Sculpture Prize amounted to a challenge to the perceived inertia prevalent in the state art galleries with regard to sculpture at that time.¹⁹⁴ Specifically, the inauguration of the Mildura Sculpture Prize was evidence of a commitment on the part of a powerful elite to transfer money and prestige into the creation of a market for Australian sculpture.

By the end of 1966, John Davis had completed his Associate Diploma in Sculpture at RMIT under the direction of a number of members of Centre 5 group, and was seeking employment as a lecturer in one of the newly VIC affiliated technical colleges where sculpture was taught. McCullough had made the transition from high school art teacher to the directorship of the largest and first regional multi-arts centre in Victoria and was a member of the newly formed national professional association for the employees of state and regional galleries – the Art Galleries Association of Australia – which was committed to the professional development of its members. In its transition from small regional art gallery to Victoria's first multi-arts centre, Mildura had also witnessed its first contest over the control of the direction and function of the centre. The tensions and shifting alliances over control, particularly in relation to national versus local focus, would remain a defining feature of the Mildura Sculpture events.

The events at Mildura in the 1960s provided an arena of activity where a triennial analysis of the various systems and networks that develop as a result of their own necessities become identified and interact. Their interactions at these events provide insight into the underlying developmental forces driving the rapid institutional expansion in visual arts production in Australia. The first decade of change for the Mildura Art Gallery, McCullough and Davis explores these expanding networks and possibilities.

Chapter three explores the three critical years from 1967 to 1969, which was a period of rapid institutional expansion offering new opportunities for sculptors, particularly in Victoria. It was also a period of intense competition: for the legitimacy to determine the

¹⁹⁴ Hal Missingham, 'Mildura Prize for Sculpture', *Art and Australia*, vol. 2, no. 2, 1964, p. 131.

definition of what art was, the redefinition of ‘professional’ within the new and expanding tertiary art school system and the ranking of new exhibitions and prizes. It is in the interaction between the new professional identities of the Mildura Arts Centre and its new director, and Davis, the sculptor-teacher, where the links between the rapidly expanding education system and the tensions underlying the changing definitions of art begin to become apparent at the 3rd Mildura Sculpture Prize. It is these tensions and interactions that lead to significant format changes for the 1970 Mildura Sculpture Triennial.