Chapter One

Setting the scene

Introduction

This chapter maps some of the key influences on the post-Second World War cultural landscape in Australia, including educational expansion, changing attitudes towards culture and the rapid institutional growth enabled through state and federal government funding. The 1950s and 1960s constitute a period of rapid population growth, growing relative prosperity and increased educational opportunities, a situation not unique to Australia amongst the developed Western democracies.

A detailed literature review gives voice to the visceral conflicts and ambiguities that underlie such rapid developments. It was an era of fiercely fought control of definitions: of what art is, how it is taught, what constituted professional practice and the changing definitions of ‘professional’ in terms of the identity and status of artists, particularly sculptors. The literature review also engages Pierre Bourdieu’s extensive investigation of the fundamental causal dependence of expansion in the educational field and the development of an autonomous field of cultural practice. Bourdieu’s field analysis provides an interpretative framework through which to challenge later teleological observations of the significance of the Mildura Sculpture Triennials and to reassess their importance as litmus tests of change and the evolution of an autonomous field of artistic practice. The emergence of a contemporary art discourse, essential to field development, is also mapped through the literature review.

The thesis methodology is qualitative and based upon extensive interviews with key participants and archival research. This detailed empirical research provides the material and evidence necessary to examine and test Bourdieu’s sociological theory of the genesis of an autonomous cultural field in Australia.
Literature review

As stated in the Introduction, there has been no recent scholarly reappraisal of the Mildura Sculpture Triennials and, between the early 1980s and 1990s, there was some confusion about the sequence of the events and their significance. Over the past decade there have been a number of major exhibitions and books, published in the United States, Britain, Japan and Europe, that have sought to re-examine and critically reappraise the radical art practices and movements of the 1960s and 1970s. These have included exhibition catalogues such as *Global conceptualism: points of origin; Zero to Infinity; arte povera 1962–1972; Beyond Geometry: Experiments in Form, 1940s–70s; Reconsidering the Object of Art: 1965–1975; Mono-ha – the School of Things*; and *Open Systems: Rethinking Art c.1970.* Open Systems included many of the artists whose works were reproduced in and who wrote for and were interviewed by the burgeoning international art magazines that were part of the cultural currency that circulated amongst many of the participants at the Mildura Sculpture Triennials, from the late 1960s onwards. As the title suggests – and it draws its substance from Willoughby Sharp’s 1967 dictum, ‘The old art was an object. The new art is a system’ – this was a period when organising frameworks, whether aesthetic, conceptual, technological, social, ecological or political and their interconnection became part of the function of artistic practice. It was also during this period that writers such as Arthur Danto and Lawrence Alloway began writing about the art world, with its various positions and participants, as a system of interconnected, yet highly differentiated and competing entities.

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A significant and unrecognised aspect of the Mildura events was their function as a site to map the evolution of a new art system. I was led to this view by the currency of the term ‘system’ at that time and the fragmentation and disparity between the interpretation of the experience of the Mildura Sculpture Triennials by Tom McCullough, key Mildura participants, Graeme Sturgeon, and later commentators – an echo of the Tate Modern director’s acknowledgement that ‘there are differences to be discovered, divergent viewpoints that remind us that art history is made up of multiple stories’.9

Initial primary source materials about the Mildura triennial sculpture events are the extant catalogues from the 1st Mildura Sculpture Prize for Sculpture of 1961, named after the primary regional sponsor Mildara Wines, and the 1964 and 1967 Mildura Sculpture Prize catalogues. With the format change of the event subsequent catalogues from 1970 onwards were titled the Mildura Sculpture Triennials, with the 1973 event specifically renamed Sculpturscape ’73 (Figures 1-9).10 The catalogues of the three events held during the 1960s are, by current standards, modest efforts, containing contextualising catalogue essays, alphabetical listing of artists, very brief biographies and details of works. There are few black and white photographs, usually of works in situ in the studio, shot prior to their installation in Mildura. However, at the time, given sculpture’s low priority in the hierarchy of visual art media and its relative lack of a market compared with painting, the catalogues hold their own as important documents.

In 1961, following the first Mildara Prize catalogue, Lenton Parr published his slim but nonetheless important booklet on post-war sculpture in Australia, simply entitled Sculpture. Like the 1961 Mildara Sculpture Prize catalogue there are few black and white

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10 This thesis covers the period from 1961 to 1978 in which there were seven Mildura triennial events. However, there are nine catalogues of these seven events. See Figures 1-9. The VAB funded two post-event publications: the first funded the documentation of the successful Sculpturscape ’73, which is now regarded as the definitive catalogue of that event and second funded the post-1978, 7th Mildura Sculpture Triennial catalogue, Exhibition Exposition, which was burned by the Mildura City Council in January 1979. As McCullough recorded that only three copies remained extant – one was used by German artist, Klaus Rinke, in his protest-performance work for the 3rd Biennale of Sydney in 1979 – this catalogue was not publicly available until the Mildura Arts Centre released a reprint as part of their 50th anniversary celebrations in 2006. Details of the nine catalogues appear in the Bibliography.
illustrations. Professionally photographed works in situ were expensive for sculptors, and would only be undertaken when a commission was completed. For many sculptors at the time, and the early Mildura events attest to this, the works created were usually cast in plaster or clay, as casting in metal was expensive and until 1967, there was no professional foundry in Australia for casting in bronze. However, the 1960s was a period of rapid change. By 1963, with funds made from the extraordinary success of the book *They’re a Weird Mob*, published in 1957, publisher Sam Ure Smith was able to fund the establishment of Australia’s first colour art magazine, *Art and Australia*, since the demise of his father’s publication *Art in Australia* in the early 1940s. Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, the magazine increasingly carried articles on current international and Australian sculptural practices, including regular reviews, with photographs, of each of the Mildura Sculpture events. The established international art magazine *Studio* in Britain was revamped under the new editorship of Peter Townsend as *Studio International*, and art magazines such as *Art International* and *Artforum* (established in 1962) covered much of the ‘new art’ and new critical writing in Britain, Europe and the United States. By the later 1960s and throughout the 1970s, a number of Australian critics and academics, all closely associated with the Mildura Sculpture Triennials, began writing for these international journals; Donald Brook, Bernard Smith, Ian Burn, Terry Smith and Elwyn Lynn. With the transition of the art schools to colleges of advanced education and the expansion of art history departments in universities, the subscription and circulation of these magazines, as well as major texts and international exhibition catalogues, increased amongst sculptor-teachers and students. These publications provided a window into the works, new modes of presentation and the issues, keywords and their particular definitions that were important at that time.

Graeme Sturgeon emerged, from the mid 1970s, as a writer and commentator on contemporary Australian art practice and as the chronicler of the history of Australian sculpture with the publication in 1978 of his book, *The Development of Australian Sculpture 1788–1975*. In this publication, Sturgeon covered the phenomena of the Mildura sculpture events from 1961 to 1975, concluding that ‘viewed in retrospect, the
Figure 1: Top left, *Mildara Prize for Sculpture, 1961* catalogue cover. Cover image: Inge King, *Bush Family* 1960, plastic metal on steel, 268 cms.

**Figure 2:** Top right, *Sculpture Mildura 1964*, catalogue cover. Cover image: Norma Redparth, *Dawn Sentinel* 1962, bronze, 280.5 cms. Collection NGV.

**Figure 3:** Bottom left, *Mildura Prize for Sculpture 1967*, catalogue cover. Cover image: Margel Hinder, *James Cook Memorial Fountain* 1966, copper sheet, granite and bronze. Interestingly, the first three catalogue cover images were of major sculptures by women.

**Figure 4:** Bottom right, *Sculpture 1970 Mildura*, catalogue cover. Cover image: Tony Coleing, *Wind Construction* 1970, painted steel, 7.32 x 6.10 x 6.10 m.
Figure 5: top left, Sculpturscape ’73: The Mildura Sculpture Triennial, catalogue cover.
Figure 6: top right, Sculpturscape ’73: an exhibition in Mildura, Australia, catalogue cover. This was printed and launched at the 6th Mildura Sculpture Exhibition in 1975.
Figure 7: bottom, 6th Mildura Sculpture Exhibition: An opening feature for Arts Victoria 75, catalogue cover.
Figure 8: top, *Seventh Sculpture Triennial* [1978], catalogue cover.

Figure 9: bottom, *Exhibition Exposition* catalogue cover [1978]. Cover image: Klaus Rinke, *Manipulation* 1978, performance using guy ropes, harnesses. This was the post-exhibition catalogue, funded by the Visual Arts Board of the Australia Council that was burned by the Mildura City Council in January 1979. Subsequently in 2006, at the 50th anniversary celebration of the opening of the Mildura Art Gallery, the Mildura Arts Centre reprinted the catalogue and issued it in brown paper bags.
Mildura sculpture exhibitions can be seen to have conferred very positive benefits on Australian sculpture and to have represented far more than a sculptural supermarket or showroom in which the latest models have been offered for appraisal’.  

The Mildura City Council commissioned Sturgeon to write the history of the Mildura Sculpture Triennials from 1961 to 1982 in what I believe was an attempt by the council to reclaim the triennials and their prestige after previous director Tom McCullough’s inauguration of the 1st Australian Sculpture Triennial, in Melbourne, in 1981. Sturgeon’s commission followed his appointment in 1982 as the director of the 2nd Australian Sculpture Triennial – scheduled for 1984 at the National Gallery of Victoria (NGV) – with the proposed publication to be launched at the 1985 Mildura Sculpture Triennial. Sturgeon’s resulting publication, *Sculpture at Mildura: The Story of the Mildura Sculpture Triennial, 1961–1982*, reflected a changing attitude towards the openness to new media and hybrid sculpture practices that had characterised the later Mildura events, clearly articulated in his catalogue essay for the 2nd Australian Sculpture Triennial.  

*Sculpture at Mildura* is a tightly written, well-illustrated, chronological account of the events as a series of survey exhibitions, which diplomatically dealt with the major controversies. However, as Tom McCullough pointed out on reading the final draft of the manuscript, Sturgeon had missed both the ‘electricity’ of the events and ‘the significance of Mildura as a national think-tank for artists’.  

Three essays, written between 1982 and 1985, by Robert Lindsay, Graeme Sturgeon and Noel Hutchison, who had all been actively involved in the Mildura Sculpture Triennials during the 1970s, reveal the conflicted viewpoints, reinterpretations and erasures that accompanied sculpture, and specifically the record of the Mildura events, within the reordered curatorial hierarchy of the 1980s. Robert Lindsay’s essay, ‘An assembled view

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13 Tom McCullough, letter to Graeme Sturgeon, dated 10 January 1985, Tom McCullough archive, PA 97/33 Box no. 16, State Library of Victoria.
of Sculpture’, published in *Australian Art Review 2*, was written in 1982. He clearly positioned the 1st Australian Sculpture Triennial within the ambit of the Mildura Sculpture Triennials of the 1970s and their ecological, arte povera inclinations, thereby demonstrating ‘the demise of sculpture as the radical cutting edge of Australian art … conservative as the Mildura exhibition itself. An old idea is still an old idea, no matter how recently superseded’, and therefore ‘irrelevant to the new mood of the 1980s, a mood more effectively presented in the new figurative narrative painting’. This declaration of the return of figuration and the domination of painting as the leading edge artform claimed the high ground, and informed Graeme Sturgeon’s catalogue essay, ‘From then to now’, and his exhibition rationale, ‘The best as enemy of the good’, for the 2nd Australian Sculpture Triennial, *Australian Sculpture Now*. Sturgeon sought to reclaim the definition of sculpture where object making was central, and to reject the previous decade’s incursions by ‘inter-media adventuring’ into the sculptural domain, which he rather polemically described as ‘the cuckoo in the nest of sculpture proper, usurping its identity and diminishing its vitality’. In both these articles, Lindsay and Sturgeon had effectively rendered Tom McCullough and the Mildura Sculpture Triennials irrelevant to contemporary concerns. Noel Hutchison’s review of Sturgeon’s selection and curatorial premise of the 2nd Australian Sculpture Triennial drew together both Lindsay’s and Sturgeon’s keywords for the dominant and dominated definitional dialectic: contemporary versus conservative; painting versus sculpture; metropolitan, institutional selectors-curators, such as Lindsay and Sturgeon versus regional, consultative selectors like McCullough. Bourdieu recognised this phenomenon: ‘The fate of groups is bound up with words that designate them: the power to impose recognition depends on the capacity to mobilise around a name’ and by implication,

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16 ibid., pp. 18, 4.  
17 Although McCullough had moved to Melbourne, and the 1st Australian Sculpture Triennial was held in Melbourne between the campuses of La Trobe University and Preston Institute of Technology, within the hierarchy of Melbourne cultural institutions the Triennial was very much in a diminished, regional position to the mainstream centre.
control the definition. Hutchison sensed a rewriting of history to satisfy a curatorial premise: ‘the history of Australian sculpture during the 1960s and 1970s is not as Mr Sturgeon would have it’… ‘it [a better selection] would have required a broader awareness of the issues than was evidenced by the selection’.

Further slippages, displacements and erasures occurred. In Paul Taylor’s edited publication, Anything Goes: Art in Australia 1970–1980, which contained several essays and articles mostly written during the 1970s, the reprint of Terry Smith’s article, ‘The provincialism problem’, which had originally appeared in the magazine Artforum in 1974, had replaced the original images with two images from the 1977 Museum of Modern Art exhibition of Fred Williams’s gouaches; one of wall text and the other, a couple looking at the works. Interestingly, three of the original images were from Sculpturscape’73, with Ross Grounds’s Ecology Well the prominent introductory image over which the article title appeared. The original, selected images were of contemporary Australian art at the time and were contemporaneous with the writing of the article. Ironically, in the same publication, Margaret Plant’s article, ‘Quattrocentro Melbourne: Aspects of finish 1973–1977’ referred to the images from Sculpturscape ’73 as indicative of ‘our swift assimilation of non-monolithic modes of seventies sculpture’.

However, it was Charles Green’s observation of the Mildura Sculpture Triennials as ‘encyclopaedias of confusion’ in his book Peripheral Vision: Contemporary Australian Art 1970 – 1994, which needed a closer scrutiny. Green’s account was written following the rather spectacular demise of the 5th Australian Sculpture Triennial in Melbourne in 1993. Originally conceived by its guest director, David Hansen, as a 20th anniversary homage to Sculpturscape ’73, the event was hampered by lack of sponsorship

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as a result of the deepening financial crisis following the 1989 stockmarket crash. The pattern that seemed to emerge from these disparate appraisals of the Mildura events was of three very different interpretations: a series of survey exhibitions that followed an institutional logic; an intimation of the Mildura events being part of a new art world system (something McCullough sensed in his critique to Sturgeon); and finally, irrelevant and vaguely embarrassing jamborees which, by 1994, were themselves the subject of confusion, verging on erasure. A ‘Rashomon effect’ that begged further investigation.

The final footnote in Sturgeon’s account of the Mildura triennials referred to Beryl Donaldson’s doctoral dissertation on cultural legitimacy in the Australian art world. Donaldson, a friend of Sturgeon, had completed much of her primary research in Melbourne during the late 1970s. Her observation of the existence of ‘the rather paradoxical phenomenon of a state supported “avant-garde”’ where experimental art was sold ‘to state institutions, particularly public galleries … and most of the venues in which it is first displayed are financed by the state through Visual Arts Board or Ministry for the Arts grants and university or college affiliation’ mirrored what had been developing at the Mildura Sculpture Triennials, particularly from 1970 onwards, when the ‘defining power’ of McCullough’s personally chosen selectors became paramount in terms of who and what was exhibited and purchased for the collection. Donaldson’s research also noted the elision between the state sponsored, innovative, and encouragement of a ‘more theoretical research orientation’ allowing greater artistic freedom or autonomy as compared with public patronage, which was viewed as conservative, limiting and directed towards ‘applied’ research, or in the case of sculptors, commissions (of which there were few) and objects for sale. This fits the new definition of ‘professional artist’, trained within the new tertiary art education system and recognised by peers.

22 David Hansen, interview with the author, 3 August 2006. It rang the final death knell for the Australian Sculpture Triennials.
24 ibid., p. 368.
25 ibid., pp. 368–9.
The significance of the opportunities offered by the new and rapidly expanding tertiary art education system, its links to the new government arts subsidies, and the evolution of a new system of autonomous art practice, explicit in Donaldson’s thesis, were best explored in relation to Mildura through the sociologist and cultural theorist, Pierre Bourdieu’s theoretical model of the genesis of an autonomous field. Bourdieu’s ‘thinking tools’ – habitus, capital and field – underpin his methodological approach to the study of the role of art, culture and education in social reproduction. These ‘thinking tools’ are important concepts that elucidate the systems of cultural socialisation implicit within the emergent field of autonomous art practice. I have used them to clarify the argument that the logic of conception of a professional identity within the visual arts in Australia was symptomatic of the genesis of an autonomous field of artistic production that emerged in response to concurrent rapid institutional expansion in education and the arts between the 1960s and through the 1970s.

Bourdieu understood that the more ‘natural’ the ‘fit’ of the habitus to a particular field, the more effective the economy of exchange between the various types of capital that can be translated into positions of influence and advantage within the specific field; these can cumulatively change the orientation of the field itself. Although an autonomous field of restricted artistic practice – such as the position claimed by the ‘avant-garde’ of the 1970s in Australia – eschewed economic reward through the art market, the sustainability of its position within the art world was dependent upon a complex and competitive economy of exchanges between the various types of capital, habituses and structural positions in the field in order to gain positions of power, authority and to claim artistic legitimacy.

Fundamental to the development of an autonomous field of artistic practice in Australia was the rapid expansion in tertiary education, principally art schools in the new colleges of advanced education, and art history and curatorship departments in universities. The fundamental dependence of this new autonomous field of art practice upon the autonomy of the education system, and their combined relative autonomy in relation to their

financial and policy dependence upon the field of economic and political power, is delineated in key Bourdieu journal articles and texts listed in the bibliography.

Bourdieu described his theory of practice as a ‘genetic theory of groups’. The reference to ‘genetics’ is deliberate; Bourdieu’s concerns are with the mechanisms by which characteristics or dispositions are reproduced. Adaptations and modifications to species are the results of the selection and passing on of successful characteristics. The selection process is aimed at identifying what will not be selected, therefore what will be excluded. The economic patronage provided by the state through these expanded institutions, combined with the redefinition of what constituted professional practice – the creation of ‘their own criteria for legitimation [thereby] … securing control over their own reproduction’ – is the key to the growth in cultural autonomy in Australia. The impact upon sculptors and the expansion of teaching opportunities for sculptors of these new, cashed-up institutions (given the relative paucity of sustained free market interest in new sculptural practices at that time) is particularly evident. The triennial Mildura sculpture events offer detailed snapshots of this evolutionary process; Tom McCullough and John Davis provide case studies through which to monitor the interplay of Bourdieu’s thinking tools in their processes of negotiating their positions within this rapidly changing new environment.

Although published in 1988, the key text for John Davis remains Ken Scarlett’s monograph, The Sculpture of John Davis: Places & Locations, as well as a number of exhibitions catalogues including Survey 1 for the National Gallery of Victoria (NGV) and the catalogue produced for the 1978 Venice Biennale, Venice Biennale 1978: From Nature to Art, from Art to Nature: Australia: John Davis, Robert Owen and Ken Unsworth. Although it is not a scholarly text, Scarlett’s Australian Sculptors, published

28 ibid., p. 77.
in 1980 but current up to 1978, provides detailed information on each sculptor, including reviews, interviews and commentary and other references. These proved invaluable to providing a sense of immediacy of the period under investigation. In order to capture the intensity and impact of Davis’s international tour in 1972, references to the writings of Robert Morris and Sol LeWitt in *Arforum*, the interviews in *Avalanche* magazine, exhibition catalogues, particularly *Anti-Illusion: Procedures/Materials* and *Systems*, were important references. There have also been a number of recently published journal articles on the militancy of artists in SoHo in New York in the late 1960s and early 1970s, and new publications such as *From Margin to Center: The Spaces of Installation Art* that provided detail and texture to a reading of the impact on Davis of his encounter with New York community of artists of the early 1970s. Like a number of his colleagues, Davis was closely associated with the creative ferment centred on the Carlton area near the University of Melbourne and Ewing Gallery. These cultural crossings and Davis’s memories of his childhood experiences along the Murray River, documented in Paul Sinclair’s book, *The Murray: A River and Its People*, were a formative part of his artistic milieu.

Through detailed empirical research, underpinned by Bourdieu’s theoretical analysis, this thesis has attempted to reinscribe the triennial Mildura sculpture events from 1961 to 1978 as important events in recent Australian art history, not only as significant surveys of sculptural development, but also as important indicators of the genesis of a new autonomous field of artistic production in Australia.

**Methodology**

The thesis employs a qualitative methodological approach drawing on extensive interviews with participants, key artists and curators in the Mildura Sculpture Triennials of the period under review. This investigation is further supported by archival research at the Mildura Arts Centre, the manuscripts of Thomas McCullough at the State Library of Victoria, and interviews with participants in the Mildura Sculpture Triennials of the period under review.

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Victoria and the John Davis Estate archives. The information sourced from the archives of Thomas McCullough and the Davis Estate provide the basis of two case studies which inform chapters two and five specifically and provide important evidential support to chapters three and four. McCullough and Davis are intimately linked with the history of the Mildura Triennial. Both began as secondary school art teachers based in Mildura and the nearby town of Merbein in the early 1960s. McCullough was Director of the Mildura Art Centre from 1965 to 1978 and of the Sculpture Triennials from 1967 to 1978. John Davis participated in the inaugural Mildura Sculpture Prize of 1961 and from 1967 to 1978 participated in the Sculpture Triennials as a sculptor, lecturer and key Melbourne artist contact for McCullough. The main literature sources supporting the case studies are covered in the literature review in this chapter.

The rationale for drawing upon Bourdieu’s sociological method is to postulate and clarify the under-recognised significance of the Mildura Sculpture Triennials, up to 1978, whose function as major nodal networks for Australia’s visual arts community was critical to the genesis of an autonomous field of artistic production. Bourdieu’s recognition of rapid expansion in the educational field – specifically, in this thesis, the development of tertiary art schools and university art history departments – as the genesis of the autonomous ‘field of competition for artistic legitimation’ of which education is the ‘indispensable means of its [autonomous field] reproduction and growth’, is crucial to understanding the importance of developments at the Mildura Sculpture Triennials during the period under review.\(^{32}\)

**Background: Australian post-World War II cultural landscape**

**Government support for the arts**

The cultural landscape in Australia underwent rapid and profound changes in the thirty years from 1945, the end of the Second World War, to 1975, when the Australia Council for the Arts Bill was passed in Federal Parliament. However, significant changes in

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\(^{32}\) Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production*, op. cit., pp. 252, 123.
federal government support were concentrated in the seven years from 1968 to 1975, commencing with the establishment of an Australian Council for the Arts in 1968, which brought under one council a number of separate cultural advisory boards.\textsuperscript{33}

The council was given extra funding and expanded responsibilities, although it continued to operate in an advisory capacity to the prime minister. However, as executive officer Dr Jean Battersby observed, ‘deriving as they did from historic circumstances, these bodies contained functional and policy anomalies that made effective action difficult and prevented adequate servicing of the needs of artists’.\textsuperscript{34}

By 1970, a report by the Commonwealth Art Advisory Board (CAAB) noted:

> Until recently the attitude to the encouragement of artists had been that the market itself has operated as the most satisfactory supporter of the artist of ability, and that while it continued to function adequately in this way it was undesirable to interfere with the mechanism by introducing other forms of assistance to artists. However, it now appears that while this may be true with regard to painters it may not have the same validity when applied to certain other branches of the visual arts such as sculpture, and possibly to the truly ‘avant-garde’ artists of any generation whose work rarely has much initial appeal except perhaps to a very limited public.\textsuperscript{35}

Also in 1970, in an interview with The Age newspaper, Dr Battersby stated the council’s policy on funding experimental performance spaces, which echoed the report above:

> It’s absolutely vital to support experimental work. Unless you get people experimenting now you won’t get your great classics in a hundred years time. When you are supporting experiments in anything, you must be prepared for a great deal of wastage. You might support a hundred plays before you get a great play.\textsuperscript{36}

\textsuperscript{33} In 1968 the Gorton Government established a new Commonwealth agency, the Australian Council for the Arts, which incorporated within it the Commonwealth Literary Fund, the Assistance to Composers Advisory Committee (set up in 1967) and the Commonwealth Art Advisory Board. The Elizabethan Theatre Trust Fund also reported to the new Council.


\textsuperscript{36} Dr Jean Battersby of the Australian Council for the Arts interviewed in \textit{The Age} (no date given: c.1970–71) when the Australian Performing Group received funding of $9000 and La Mama received $5000. [http://www.pramfactory.com/pfhome.html](http://www.pramfactory.com/pfhome.html), viewed 12 October 2008.
Both these quotes indicate a council consensus that there was an acknowledged role for government in directing funding towards innovation and experimentation in arts practice, areas which may not have markets that would ensure their financial viability. As in the case of The Field exhibition at the NGV in 1968, this consensus promoted the ‘paradoxical phenomenon of state supported ‘avant-garde’… [which] provides artists with a “freedom” that a market which emphasises saleable objects that appeal to private taste cannot provide’. This emerging market with its appetite for ‘new’ experimental works was made up of curators, critics, writers, art historians, academics, art educators, artists and students. The existence of an alternative market was predicated upon the large baby-boom generation coming of age at a time of profound structural change and expansion in the education system and the subsequent expansion in infrastructure and intellectual capital in cultural and educational institutions. The status of the arts in Australian society was in the ascendant.

In early 1973, following the recent election of the first Labor Government in twenty-three years, an interim Council was appointed and seven new artform boards were created. The CAAB and other entities were dissolved. Construction of the national gallery began in Canberra and, with the financial backing of the new government, the acting director James Mollison began an ambitious collection development program. Prime minister Whitlam declared the importance of the arts to his vision of Australia and to his government:

In any civilised country the arts and associated amenities must occupy a central place … Of all the objectives of my Government none had a higher priority than the encouragement of the arts, the preservation and enrichment of our cultural and intellectual heritage … all the other objectives of a Labor Government … have as their goal the creation of a society in which the arts … can flourish … Support for writers and artists had been dispersed for generations with notable frugality by ageing committees notorious for their political and social biases.’

However, as the Australia Council Annual Report 1975–1976 acknowledged, the government’s support had not been based upon recommendations from a broad based

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37 Donaldson, op.cit, pp. 368–69.
38 Labor was voted into power on 5 November 1972.
inquiry such as the Massey Commission in Canada, instead ‘the Council structure … with a pattern of Boards dealing with separate art forms, was largely inherited from an earlier system of advisory Boards … it was plain by 1974 that separate Board interests and loyalties tended to override corporate objectives.’\textsuperscript{40} The Visual Art Board (VAB) stated its priority ‘as improving the conditions and status of Australian artists’ and its range of interests included art education.\textsuperscript{41}

The new artform boards retained significant autonomy within the new council structure, with the majority of members of each board being practitioners or associated with the particular artform. They were responsible for policy development within their respective areas. The combination of selection processes based upon a system of peer review within each board and the government’s acceptance that the preferred council model be an independent statutory authority, at arms-length from government, backed by significant increases in government funding (thereby creating an alternative economy), confirmed the autonomy of the arts. This increase in funding and status was controlled not by an uncomprehending public or Minister, but by ‘the peer group whose members are both privileged clients and competitors … [which begin to] form a closed field of competition for cultural legitimacy’.\textsuperscript{42}

Within the visual arts this government-sponsored support was doubled in effect through the expansion of the education system and the careers on offer in art school lecturing, arts administration and curatorial positions in the expanding art institutions. The institutionalisation of an avant-garde and the symbiotic production of a set of discourses that competed for artistic orthodoxy confirmed the emergence of a field of restricted cultural production. The Australia Council Act was passed in 1975. However, the commission of the Act with its expansive intentions came at a time of major global recession caused by the oil shock of 1974, which would contribute to the demise of the Whitlam Labor Government in November 1975. Between 1975 and 1978, the impact of diminishing financial resources – ‘stagflation’ – upon an expanding arts and education

\textsuperscript{42} Bourdieu, \textit{The Field of Cultural Production}, op. cit., p. 115.
sector would lead to increased competition for those resources, and the need for tighter selection criteria. Significantly, pressure on governments to limit spending marked a change in attitude from a general consensus on increased growth in government spending in areas such as the arts to one of fiscal restraint and accountability. In a period of high unemployment and thus increased competition, selection criteria increasingly favoured symbolic forms of capital such as ‘cultural capital in the form of educational credentials and social capital in the form of networks’.  

Changes in art education in Australia

In the 1950s, post-secondary education in Australia offered two options: the universities and the technical training sector, including teachers colleges. In the educational hierarchy, universities were in the most prestigious position as the training ground for the professions. Although universities ‘were incorporated under state legislation and substantially funded by state governments, [they] were largely autonomous’.  

Technical training was funded and administratively controlled by the various state education departments and ranged from secondary school extension programs in trade apprenticeships to advanced technical training in disciplines such as engineering at higher technical institutes.

Apart from the National Gallery School in Melbourne and the private art schools or academies, which were mostly directed towards painting and printmaking, the training of artists in Australia was principally vocational and aimed at producing art and craft teachers, or skilled artisans.  

Royal Melbourne Technical College (RMTC, later RMIT) and East Sydney Technical College (previously known as the National Art School, under Rayner Hoff) both offered training in sculpture. In 1954, the Melbourne sculptor Lenton

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43 Schwarz, Culture and Power, op. cit., p. 74.
Parr was the first student to complete a Diploma in Art, majoring in Sculpture, at the RMTC. In Sydney and Melbourne, a number of suburban ‘feeder colleges’ of the technical institutes offered vocational art training, some including sculpture, to certificate level. Trainee secondary school teachers in arts and crafts would complete their practical sessions at the technical colleges as part of their coursework. Into this rather conservative set of educational systems, the combination of the post-Second World War introduction of returned serviceman taking up opportunities to study art under the Commonwealth Reconstruction Training Scheme (CRTS), the influx of professionally trained émigré artists, many of them teachers, and the rapid post-war expansion in numbers of students and their increased expectations at all levels of the education system, was bound to have a destabilising impact on the status quo. What emerges from the different debates within the sculpture and art societies, and amongst art and craft teachers and art administrators, is the need to improve the status of artists, art teachers and the art curricula in schools and technical colleges.

The distinction between secondary school art and craft teachers, and teachers in other subjects, was one of qualification and of the relative status of the subject area within a highly stratified syllabus. For subjects such as science, mathematics and English, qualifications for teaching were based upon the completion of a specialist three-year undergraduate degree at university with a one-year teacher training extension. For art and craft teachers, the training was principally undertaken within an art or technical school run by the state department of education with courses dedicated to teacher training. The resultant technical qualifications varied from state to state.

There were several UNESCO sponsored seminars on art education in Australia beginning in the late 1940s. These seminars provided the opportunity for a wide range of interested parties – academics, artists, teachers, administrators – to gather nationally to discuss shared issues. Bernard Smith, senior lecturer at the School of Fine Arts, University of Melbourne, noted that at the 1954 UNESCO conference held in Melbourne, it was agreed

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46 The diploma was a necessary qualification for anyone wishing to teach art within a Victorian technical school and its specific intention was to relate to the needs of commerce and industry. Hammond, op. cit., p. 393.
that ‘Art should be accorded equal status in the schools with all other subjects … Teachers in the visual arts should enjoy the same standing as other teachers in the matter of prestige and in the matter of opportunities for promotion.’

Gordon Thomson, who had started at the NGV in 1950 as an education officer (he had been transferred from the Department of Education), presciently identified that the lack of status was based upon ‘the exclusion of art teachers from educational studies at university level’ and that this had not only ‘adversely affected their promotional opportunities’ but ‘also reduced their potential capacity to influence educational thinking in general’; in other words, to have any contribution towards curriculum development in their subject area.

At the 1963 seminar convened by the Australian UNESCO committee for visual arts, held in Canberra, the Australian Society for Education through Art (ASEA) was established with aims ‘to encourage and advance education through art in Australia and its Territories’ and was committed to ‘improved professional standards’. Calls for the professional training of artists, for art schools to be autonomous entities with control of their own curricula, not under the direct control of the various departments of education, were mounted by arts administrators, educators and academics. In August 1967, the Australian National Advisory Committee for UNESCO held a seminar dedicated to the theme of the ‘Professional Training of the Artist’. As the report announced in its introduction, the seminar drew on the findings of the conference proceedings of the International Association of Art, covering the same topic, and held in London in 1965, and invited Fred Walsh, secretary to the Coldstream and Summerston Committees, ‘which were responsible for the reorganisation of the art school system in the United Kingdom’, to participate as co-chairman. No mention appears in the report proceedings

48 According to his entry in Alan McCulloch’s Encyclopaedia of Australian Art, Gordon Thomson had been an education officer at the NGV from 1950 to 1952; an assistant curator from 1952 to 1958; and assistant director from 1958 to 1966. In 1966 he was the first curator for the Power Gallery of Contemporary Art at the University of Sydney. From 1967 to 1973 he returned as assistant director at the NGV and from 1973 to 1975 was director of the NGV. Thomson is quoted in Hammond, ibid., p. 399.
50 Fred Walsh was also secretary to the professional accreditation body, The United Kingdom National Council for Diplomas in Art and Design. See ‘Professional training of the artist’, National Gallery of Victoria, September 1967, Australian National Advisory Committee for UNESCO, Canberra, 1970, p. 4.
of the Commonwealth Government’s (then) recently released Martin Report into tertiary education in Australia and its recommendations for the creation of a parallel tertiary system of colleges of advanced education – more vocationally focused than universities but with higher status and qualifications, and autonomy, than state department technical institutes. However, the seminar did advocate for improved interstate cooperation and acknowledged the ‘possible future role of the Commonwealth … in relation to … the general organisation of art training’. The report announced the establishment of a national organisation that would encourage greater interstate cooperation and represent their concerns to state and federal governments: the National Association of Art and Design Education in Australia. A significant number of the fifty attendees to this UNESCO seminar had, and would continue to have, extensive links with the Mildura Sculpture Triennials as sculptors, trustees, critics, curators, academics and teachers.

The developments in each state in the late 1960s, in response to the Commonwealth Government’s recommendations to establish a new tertiary system of colleges of advanced education, was mediated through their respective departments of education and the processes of establishing boards of advanced education. A 1974 survey report on tertiary art education in Australia, commissioned by the VAB, revealed that of the twenty-six institutions surveyed that offered full-time art and design courses and those teachers colleges that offered specialist art teacher training, twelve were in Victoria (NSW was next with six), and of full-time students who attended in 1973 and 1974, Victoria was ahead with 2276 and 2639 respectively, compared with NSW as the next in line with 1287 in 1973 and 1412 in 1974. The report also noted that a school of art

This highlights the significant post-war influence of British developments in art education on Australian art school systems and curricula. Herbert Read (who was guest speaker at the 1963 UNESCO conference on art education), through his text *Education through Art* (published in 1943) had a significant influence on Dr Bernard Smith. The findings and recommendations of the Coldstream Reports of 1960, 1962 and 1964 were very quickly disseminated and discussed in Australia.

51 ‘Professional training of the artist’, ibid., p. 3.
52 The UNESCO conference also drew on the discussions developed at the 2nd Biennial Australian Society for Education through the Arts conference held in Adelaide in 1967, just after the opening of the Mildura Sculpture Prize. Dr Donald Brook acted as a judge at Mildura before attending the ASEA conference.
53 Margaret Wookey, ‘Tertiary art education: A survey of some aspects of tertiary art and design education and specialist art teacher education in Australia 1974’, Visual Arts Board, Australian Council for the Arts, Sydney, 1974, p. 2. Of the 26 institutions, the allocations by state were: Victoria 12, New South Wales 6, Queensland 3, Tasmania 2, South Australia 1 and Western Australia 1. The National Art School at
would be established in 1975 at the Alexander Mackie College in Sydney and that the painting, sculpture and art education diploma courses offered at the National Art School (NAS) would be transferred; another art school, presumably what would be known as the Sydney College of the Arts, was planned for 1976.

Importantly, with the election of the Whitlam Labor Government, the Commonwealth assumed full funding responsibility for the colleges of advanced education and the universities and, at the same time, abolished tuition fees for students. In 1974, the Commonwealth extended its responsibilities by incorporating the state teachers colleges into the colleges of advanced education network. However this major federal government expansionary commitment to tertiary education became operational just as the global oil crisis began to impact upon Australia’s economy. It marked the end of a period of sustained post-war growth in government revenues. For the rapidly expanding art school sector, the resulting period of austerity and uncertainty impacted as the productive capacity of the system was reaching its peak.

**Art in universities**

Bernard Smith noted that the introduction of art history as a discipline into Australian universities was initially and importantly fostered through two private benefactions: Sir Keith Murdoch in Melbourne and Dr J.W. Power in Sydney. Both men hoped that through education the Australian public might come to better understand modernism.\(^5^4\)

The appointment of Professor Joseph Burke to the Herald Chair of Fine Arts at the University of Melbourne in 1947 announced the first such department of fine arts in Australia. It would be another twenty years before the next major professorial chair of fine arts would be established at the University of Sydney. In 1966 at Flinders University in Adelaide, a discipline of fine arts was established within the School of Languages and Literature while in 1972, the first Chair of Art History was established at La Trobe.

Canberra was counted in the NSW figures. It should be noted that the South Australian School of Art ‘was nominated by the national tertiary education body as the first College of Advanced Education in Australia’. [http://www.unisa.edu.au/art/historyproject/maxlyle.asp](http://www.unisa.edu.au/art/historyproject/maxlyle.asp), viewed 18 December 2008.

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University under the direction of Professor Peter Tomory. By 1974 the foundation Chair of Visual Arts at Flinders University was created with the appointment of Professor Donald Brook; in the same year, at Monash University, a Department of Visual Arts was established with the appointment of Patrick McCaughey. By 1977 the Australian National University (ANU) established a Fine Arts unit and the University of Queensland set up a Department of Fine Arts in 1978.

The status of artists in Australian society was boosted with the advent of the VAB in 1973. One of its initiatives was to advocate for artists to be given residencies in universities and colleges of advanced education. The program rationale, developed by Professor McCaughey (a VAB Board member), aimed to ‘make educational institutions more responsive to the needs of artists’. Furthermore, ‘the combination of challenge and stimulus with a financially secure position and a well equipped studio [wa]s in keeping with the Board’s ambition “to stimulate the production of new works of art”’. The program also acknowledged that those students studying fine arts at university had little knowledge of or exposure to practicing artists, and that the residency programs would be beneficial to students as well.

In early 1975, prior to attending the 6th Mildura Sculpture Triennial, Terry Smith, a protégée of Bernard Smith and the University of Melbourne’s Department of Fine Arts, and a recently returned Harkness Scholar, gave a paper at the Conference on the Art Association entitled ‘Official culture and the Visual Arts Board’, in which he acknowledged that:

The various Boards [of the Australia Council for the Arts] are peopled by individuals who have emerged, as we here have, from cultural institutions in this

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55 Peter Tomory followed a somewhat similar trajectory to Eric Westbrook. Following his war service he studied art history at Edinburgh University, then had two curatorial positions in northern regional galleries in the UK followed by a stint of touring exhibitions for the British Council. He replaced Eric Westbrook as the director of the Auckland City Gallery in New Zealand when Westbrook accepted the position of director of the NGV in 1956. He also taught art history at the University of Auckland and remained director at Auckland City Gallery until 1964. Between 1965 and 1972, he held an associate professorship at Columbia University in New York and was senior curator at the Ringling Museum in Sarasota, Florida.


country, the places where ‘excellence’ is determined. And the Boards instinctively support those institutions because values are shared, structures are parallel.\(^{58}\)

Bernard Smith, writing about elitism in the arts, was more direct: ‘There is something circular about the elitist theory of excellence … we must encourage those who have already achieved a measure of excellence. But … who chooses the judges? The practiced answer is the elite that seeks to perpetuate its own values.’\(^{59}\) It was a clear observation that power resided with those who defined and bestowed the criteria of ‘excellence’ in a contested and rapidly expanding field of competition for diminishing resources.

In considering the thesis timeline constraint of 1978, the key universities with art departments and galleries are University of Melbourne, University of Sydney, Monash University in Melbourne and Flinders University in Adelaide. In the following section, a brief assessment of the significance of these institutions and their personnel is given as background to the larger issue of the significance of educational expansion to the development of an autonomous field of cultural production and specifically, in relation to their importance in the Mildura Sculpture Triennials.

**Melbourne**

The appointment of Joseph Burke as the foundation Chair of Fine Arts at the University of Melbourne initiated an important nexus between the university, the NGV and the state’s Department of Education and art education curricula. Burke was appointed as Chair of the Arts and Crafts Standing Committee of Schools Board which had responsibility for overseeing the art syllabus in schools.\(^{60}\) His advocacy of improved art teaching contributed to raising the status of the subject within Victorian secondary education. The new Trained Secondary Teacher’s Certificate (Arts and Craft), a three-
year course, included the history of art as a subject ‘taken in the first two years at the technical school and at Melbourne University in the final year’. The Department of Fine Arts at Melbourne University had assembled an impressive emigré group of scholars, including Dr Ursula Hoff who was also Keeper of Prints at the NGV, and Franz Philipp. The access for secondary school art teachers to the University’s art history department was unique in Australia, and contributed to the rise in status of the subject and its teachers in Victoria. There was also an active two-year secondment program of secondary school art teachers from the Department of Education to training as education officers at the NGV. Short courses in gallery administration were established at the Department of Fine Arts which offered support to Victoria’s burgeoning regional galleries in the 1960s and prepared NGV staff for their expanded roles when the new building opened.

Professor Burke was active in setting up a Society of Collectors, was a trustee of the NGV between 1952 and 1956, appointed as a member of the National Gallery and Cultural Centre Building Committee and, from 1956, was a Felton Bequest committee member until 1985. With the appointment of Dr Bernard Smith to the Department of Fine Arts in 1954, studies in Australian art, principally painting, were included in the course curriculum. Smith’s publication of Australian Painting in 1962 confirmed Melbourne as the centre of authoritative visual arts discourse in Australia.

Both Joseph Burke and Bernard Smith were highly supportive of the early Mildura Sculpture Triennials. Both wrote catalogue essays and Smith favourably reviewed the Triennials in the early 1960s in his capacity as art critic for The Age. Patrick McCaughey replaced Bernard Smith in 1966 as The Age’s art critic and later accepted a Harkness Fellowship in New York. On his return to Melbourne he lectured at the Fine Arts Department of Melbourne University before accepting his new appointment as

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61 Hammond, ibid., p. 394.
63 Professor Burke’s membership of the Building Committee ensured that he met and knew Cr Reg Etherington, a member of the Mildura City Council who was also on the Committee. Burke was a great supporter of the Sculpture Prize in Mildura and wrote a catalogue essay for the 1st Mildura Sculpture Prize in 1961.
foundation Professor of Visual Arts at Monash University in 1973. A member of the newly formed VAB, McCaughey was an enthusiastic supporter of the Mildura Sculpture Triennials; the first artist-in-residence appointments at Monash University were both triennial participants: Peter Tyndall in 1975 and John Davis in 1976.

**Sydney**

Although a Chair of Fine Arts was established at the University of Sydney in 1961 in part fulfilment of the J.W. Power Bequest, it was not until 1967 that Dr Bernard Smith was appointed as foundation Professor at the Power Institute of Fine Arts. Dr Power’s will expressly directed that the institute ‘make available to the people of Australia the latest ideas and theories in the plastic arts by means of lectures and teaching and by the purchase of the most contemporary art of the world’. The Power Institute comprised a department, research library and collection of contemporary art. The insistence on delivering ‘the latest ideas and theories’ ensured that the undergraduate and postgraduate studies of contemporary art were developed within the curriculum. In 1966 the deputy director of the NGV, Gordon Thomson, was appointed as the inaugural curator for the Power Collection of Contemporary Art, although he returned to his position as deputy-director at the NGV within a year. Until the appointment in 1969 of Elwyn Lynn (painter, critic and editor of the CAS Broadsheet NSW branch) as curator of the Power Collection, Professor Smith carried this responsibility as well. In 1968 the Power Department of Fine Art expanded, with Dr Donald Brook appointed to lecture on the history of sculpture and art theory and Dr David Saunders on the history of architecture.

Donald Brook was a sculptor and philosopher who had trained at Durham University in the United Kingdom in the late 1940s and early 1950s. He completed his doctorate in philosophy at the Australian National University in 1965 entitled ‘The criticism of sculpture’ and, as the art critic for *The Canberra Times*, had been contacted by Tom McCullough with regard to the Mildura Sculpture Prize (which Brook attended in 1967 as a judge). Brook was keenly aware of the inadequate state of the training of artists and art teachers by the Department of Technical Education in NSW, and argued

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64 Smith, ‘Art historical studies in Australia’, op. cit., p. 46.
unsuccessfully with Professor Bernard Smith that an art school attached to the Power Institute would be an important innovation and within the terms of Power’s will.

In an article from 1968 entitled, ‘What is wrong with art training in technical colleges?’, Brook was clearly drawing on his knowledge of the reviews of the British art education system. His language is instructive and founded upon a university-based, scientific, peer-review model: he sought autonomy for the schools from the Technical Education Department and envisaged them as ‘places of research, where a new sort of learning emerges … in which new forms and functions of art and new theories of excellence are emerging’.65 His model of the artist is one of an independent researcher working within a liberal arts discipline and engaged with theoretical discourse, whose value as an artist is accorded by peers and not by a client who values a set of specialised skills as an educational outcome. Brook was in a powerful position. As the Power Institute’s art history curricula began with contemporary art practice, it provided him with a leading position as an art theorist and critic, to articulate the ‘new art’ and promote young artists to a new generation of art historians and curators. Brook wrote regularly for peer-review journals including Leonardo and the British Journal of Aesthetics, and international art magazines such as Art International and Studio International; he also wrote for Art and Australia and was the art critic for the Sydney Morning Herald. His maxim ‘that to change the nature of art one must first change its institutions’ is a clear articulation of what Bourdieu identifies as contributing to the ‘critical phase of the constitution of an autonomous field’.66

In 1968 the Department of Architecture at the University of Sydney employed Marr Grounds as a lecturer in environmental architecture.67 Grounds had completed his art training at university under the famous Black Mountain ceramicist and teacher, Peter Voulkos. Grounds, like Brook, supported the idea that the practice of art was best taught

65 Donald Brook, ‘What is wrong with art training in technical colleges?’, Sydney Morning Herald, 30 January 1968.
67 Marr Grounds was the son of Sir Roy Grounds, the architect of the Victorian Arts Centre.
in a university environment, that artists’ development and professional practice was best served by a liberal arts education. The Sydney University Art Workshops (later known as The Tin Sheds), a joint initiative of Brook and Grounds, emerged innocuously at first from a shared need for architecture students to be taught drawing and art history students to be shown various old master techniques. Tin Sheds rapidly developed into an experimental centre, with links to other artist-run spaces such as the Yellow House, Inhibodress, the CAS Gallery (previously Central Street Gallery) and the innovative, commercial Watters Gallery. A variety of art classes was run, performances and political happenings regularly erupted and all faculties were invited to participate. By 1969 the potential for ‘post-object’ art was already being discussed by Brook in ‘Flight from the object’, the second Power Institute Lecture on Contemporary Art. It was a polemical riposte to Clement Greenberg’s first Power Lecture in 1968 entitled, ‘Avant garde attitudes: new art in the sixties’ and reflected the then current discourse on the search for new meaning in the visual arts: ‘the flight from the object is a flight away from the clearly defined, the well understood, the domesticated, the traditional and towards the stuff of fresh definitions, new understandings …’[my italics].

Brook’s concern with ‘fresh definitions’ was partly an attempt to introduce a more critical debate on the nature of art in response to the continuing stalemate between art that exhibited an Australian idiom and international style which raged in the pages of the CAS Broadsheet:

I was offering an alternative which depended on the theoretical view that what we needed to know was not so much who we are, not an identity question… we needed to know was what art is!

Donald Brook and Marr Grounds gathered around them a group of students from a variety of disciplines and artist-teachers who would become important participants and selectors in future Mildura Sculpture Triennials.

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70 At the 1970 Mildura Sculpture Triennial, Dr Brook took the first year art history and theory students from the Power Institute at the University of Sydney, along with two tutors and Bert Flugelman, a participating sculptor and part-time artist-manager at the Tin Sheds. Elwyn Lynn, curator of the Power Collection and art critic for The Bulletin, also attended the 1970 Mildura Sculpture Triennial.
Adelaide

The 1970s were known as the Dunstan Years in South Australia, a period of social reform and cultural expansion. In 1973, David Saunders was offered the Chair of Architecture at the University of South Australia and Donald Brook, the foundation Chair of Visual Arts at Flinders University. Sculptor Herbert (Bert) Flugelman had already left his position at the Tin Sheds and accepted a position as lecturer in sculpture at the South Australia School of Art (SASA). By the end of 1974, Brook and some members of the Adelaide art world applied for and received funding from the VAB to establish the Experimental Art Foundation (EAF), ‘to encourage new approaches to the visual arts, promoting the idea of art as “radical and only incidentally aesthetic”’. Brook saw it as a national organisation, a link between the university and the artistic community. Noel Sheridan, one of the key figures at the Tin Sheds at the University of Sydney, was asked to be the inaugural director.

By 1976 a national system of tertiary art schools, university art history and visual art departments together with Australia Council-funded and state arts department-funded alternative exhibition spaces such as the Mildura Sculpture Triennials, the Biennale of Sydney, the EAF, the Sculpture Centre in Sydney, the Institute of Modern Art in Brisbane, as well as the university-affiliated alternative exhibiting spaces of Ewing Gallery at the University of Melbourne and Tin Sheds at the University of Sydney, had been established. The combined impact was the production of a ‘constituency for alternative spaces … that grew out of graduate programs and student-run galleries … [and] continued the forums that in school had suggested or simulated an art world: lectures, meetings and visiting artists … Video, film and performance share with the spaces themselves certain roots within the [tertiary] structure.’ The availability of funding for projects and equipment for experimental practices, acquisition into developing gallery and university contemporary art collections and a supportive community of lecturers, students, theorists, curators and critics were part of this institutional constellation. The autonomous field now had control of the means of its

reproduction: a system in place for validation, exhibition and consecration with attendant rewards and punishments (or exclusions).

The Commonwealth funding of two autonomous national tertiary sectors – universities and colleges of advanced education commissions – created further opportunities for sculptor-lecturers and art history and theory academics, through paid visiting lectureships, exchanges and increased employment within this expanded national institutional nexus. Specifically, these new educational institutions, colleges of advanced education and universities became major sculpture patrons through purchases, awards, commissions and exhibitions. A new Australia Council program funded artists-in-residences in universities with the express objective of raising the status of artists as professionals amongst their tertiary peers. The development of the parallel tertiary systems of art education in the 1960s and 1970s can be seen, along with the Australia Council, as the establishment of a national system of government patronage – an alternative to the art market system – of the visual arts in Australia. The rapid expansion in numbers of art schools and university art history and theory courses produced the next generation of lecturers, technicians, arts administrators, curators, critics and artists that would manage and engage with the expanding institutional infrastructure.

Although the education landscape would change significantly between 1977 and 1981 – as a result of funding cuts due to economic recession, industry commission reviews and the amalgamation of the autonomous education commissions into one Commonwealth Tertiary Education Commission – the changes wrought upon art education in Australia during the decade from 1967 to 1977 were profound. Implicit within this development is the changing definition of professional practice, which becomes a marker for the shift from a vocational, skills orientation and client focus to a research-based methodology informed by critical discourses within the field.

Art education and training in Victoria

Art teacher education in Victoria was particularly well served by a soundly articulated system of technical colleges linked to teachers colleges; in Melbourne, art history components were taken at the University of Melbourne under Professor Joseph Burke and his Fine Arts Department. Artist education was served either by private art schools or the National Gallery School based at the NGV. Sculptors on the other hand were trained at the technical schools with RMIT offering the most prestigious courses and credentials.

As this thesis focuses on case studies and events specific to Victoria – Mildura, McCullough and Davis – and as the Victorian technical education sector was well advanced to take advantage of the Commonwealth’s tertiary education restructuring recommendations in 1965, this section will provide a case study of the developments in art education in Victoria since the 1950s.

With the post-war population boom, the increasing numbers of students in Victoria completing secondary school in the 1950s led to the development of special three-year short courses in teacher training – Trained Secondary Teacher Certificate – in teachers colleges. There was also increasing pressure on the university system to expand. Following two national tertiary education reports – the Murray Committee in 1957 on the state of Australian universities and the Tertiary Education in Australia (Martin Report, 1964–1965) – the Commonwealth Advisory Committee on Advanced Education was established. Part of its recommendations concerned the raising of the status of advanced technical education by removing it from the control of state departments of education and establishing an autonomous system of colleges of advanced education, or institutes of technology. It was reckoned that ‘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’, the advantage of autonomy being ‘the free
pursuit of standards’. The Martin Report noted that in 1964, ‘higher technological education outside universities was more advanced in Victoria than in any other State’.

In 1961, independent of and concurrent with federal deliberations, the Victorian State Government set up the Ramsay Committee to ‘advise upon future provisions for tertiary education in Victoria’. Considering the brief of the Martin Committee to provide ‘a critical review of the whole national picture of tertiary education’, the Victorian educational sector was in a prime position to take advantage of the Commonwealth’s report when released.

The Martin Committee recommended that each state establish an institute of colleges, independent of the Department of Education, which would ‘co-ordinate and direct the proposed development of such an alternative educational structure’. In 1965 the Commonwealth Government endorsed the Martin Committee’s report, an important component of which was the considerable injection of Commonwealth funding required for this new system to provide improved facilities and ‘improve the image they [the new tertiary institutes] presented to the community’. With this endorsement the Commonwealth Government would be advised by two tertiary education boards: the Australian Universities Commission and the new Commonwealth Advisory Committee on Advanced Education.

This shift in emphasis away from the provision of vocationally trained and skilled workers for an external market represented a displacement of business and industry as the determinants of training requirements (in consultation with state authorities) and a shift

74 Polesel & Teese, op. cit., pp. 9–10.
75 Australia Council, Tertiary Visual Arts Education in Australia: A Report to the Visual Arts Board by the Tertiary Art Education Study Committee, Arts Information Program, Australia Council, Sydney, 1980, p. 64.
77 In its recommendations, the Commonwealth Committee on the Future of Tertiary Education in Australia (Martin Report) noted that ‘in Victoria a broad base for such an alternative tertiary education already existed in the form of senior technical colleges and institutes of technology’. See Law, ibid., p. 53.
78 ibid., p. 54.
79 ibid.
towards ‘a professionalism founded on the pursuit of learning for its own sake’, wherein professional bodies would develop appropriate curricula and control accreditation.\textsuperscript{80}

The Victorian Institute of Colleges Act was passed in June 1965 and the Victorian Institute of Colleges (VIC) came into being at the end of 1965, with the official affiliation of the first group of colleges, including RMIT, Caulfield Technical College and Prahran Technical College. However, budget approval from the Commonwealth for the affiliated colleges was required and would come into effect from 1967 (for the triennium 1967–69). The four years from 1966 to 1969 were a difficult transition period as VIC gradually assumed control of the affiliated colleges in finance, staffing and academic standards.

As the then vice-president of the VIC, Dr Philip Law, noted: ‘the problem [wa]s greatly complicated by the involvement of these colleges with the salary of secondary school teachers and with non-tertiary forms of education’, which was exacerbated as the separation of courses between secondary and tertiary was undertaken.\textsuperscript{81} This transitional phase – from technical trade schools under the control of the state Department of Education to fully-fledged Colleges of Advanced Education affiliated with the Commonwealth funded and autonomous VIC – would take until the early 1970s to be completed.

In terms of the art schools in technical colleges that had previously been under the control of the Department of Education, the interpretation of what constituted an alternative tertiary education led to generational tensions between a vocationally focused and a professionally focused pedagogy.

The level of control exerted by state authorities was incompatible with the pursuits of quality because professionals were not free to regulate their own affairs through independent boards or institutes.\textsuperscript{82}

\textsuperscript{80} Polesel & Teese, op. cit., p. 10.
\textsuperscript{81} Law, op. cit., p. 62.
\textsuperscript{82} Polesel & Teese, op. cit., p. 9.
Although RMIT enjoyed relative autonomy through its own management council, at one remove from the direct administrative control of the Department of Education, its principal objective was to train people vocationally for ‘the practical world of [business and] industry’.\textsuperscript{83}

By 1978 the Victorian system of tertiary art education within the VIC catered for forty-eight per cent of all enrolled art and design students in Australia.\textsuperscript{84} A later report observed that this ‘traumatic period of “tertiary institutionalisation” of art training in the late 1960s and 1970s … produced a wider body of more articulate, critical and self-conscious art education in Australia’.\textsuperscript{85} However, by 1978 there were calls to raise the selection criteria standards and reduce the number of students accepted in this multitude of colleges. Commenting on the call of the vice-president of VIC for limits to be imposed ‘as an “elitist policy”’ to cut the numbers of students enrolling in the arts, the then chairman of the Australia Council, Professor Geoffrey Blainey, noted that although he was not advocating elitism, there was a ‘shortage of money and inspirational teachers’ and the audience for the arts deserved better.\textsuperscript{86} As Bourdieu elucidated: ‘[F]or such professions, whose symbolic capital and economic capital cannot tolerate a great influx and a great dispersion, the threat comes from numbers.’\textsuperscript{87} Status accrues to rarity; the more rigorous the application of selection criteria (hence the increased likelihood of exclusion), the greater the increase in status and symbolic power to those applying the criteria and to those who are selected.

**The changing definition of ‘professional’**

The shift in the definition of professional practice from the mid 1950s to the late 1970s, particularly in relation to sculpture, is significant, and traces the institutional developments of sculpture throughout this period. The definition of ‘professional’ that

\textsuperscript{83}ibid., p. 7.
\textsuperscript{84}Australia Council, *Tertiary Visual Arts Education in Australia*, op. cit., p. 65.
\textsuperscript{85}ibid., p. 65.
\textsuperscript{86}‘Mixed feelings on elitism’, *The Age*, August 1977, newsclipping, McCullough Papers P/A 97/33 Box 20, State Library of Victoria.
\textsuperscript{87}Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production*, op. cit., p. 251.
applied to Australian painters in the 1950s could not be applied to sculptors. Opportunities for exhibiting and selling works at commercial galleries, both in their own cities and at other metropolitan centres, and being selected for inclusion in the burgeoning art prizes, national and local, either did not exist or were financially and logistically too difficult for sculptors. Commissions were few, and often the briefs were restrictive. Contrary to the situation in Europe, Australian sculptors tended to work on their own; there was a lack of trained assistants (presenting another financial burden), and specialised services. There were few opportunities for teaching work. In response to the lack of support from galleries and collectors, the Victorian Sculptors Society (established in 1948) and the NSW Society of Sculptors and Associates (formed in 1951) offered regular exhibitions of their members’ works, providing a focus for the disparate sculpture communities of their respective states. In 1958 the NGV organised an exhibition of sculpture through the auspices of the Victorian Sculptors Society, which then toured to Victorian country centres, including to the Mildura Art Gallery under the management of the Council of Adult Education.

Against this background, _The Group of Four_, a group of Melbourne sculptors, mostly post-war émigrés, held two exhibitions of their work (1953 and 1955) at the School of Architecture at the University of Melbourne: ‘[I]t was the first alternative to the official society of sculptors, and the venue of a school of architecture affirmed the link between sculpture and architecture’.

This linking of sculpture to architecture was based in a European tradition of the professional artist as one whose professional identification was ‘grounded in a material knowledge and technical ability’ and client-focused; that is, ‘the professional puts to use a deep knowledge and a set of specific skills to … produce a particular outcome’. It was the deliberate, proactive aligning of the sculptors’ determination to raise the professional status of their practice through the associated prestige of a university discipline. It was a timely and mutually beneficial move, given the prospect of a building boom in the lead-up to the Melbourne Olympic Games of 1956.

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88 Ken Scarlett, _Australian Sculptors_, Thomas Nelson, Melbourne, 1980, p. 302. _The Group of Four_ comprised sculptors Norma Redpath, Inge King, Clifford Last and Julius Kane and was the initiative of Julius Kane.

89 Singerman, op. cit., pp. 192, 193.
and planned major infrastructure spending by the Victorian State Government, particularly after the election of Henry Bolte in 1955. In 1959, *Six Sculptors* was shown as part of the survey series of exhibitions organised by the NGV focusing on contemporary art. These six sculptors – Norma Redpath, Julius Kane, Inge King, Clifford Last, Vincas Jomantas and Teisutis Zikaras, plus Lenton Parr (who had been absent in London at the time of the exhibition) – formed the basis of an important group, Centre 5, that would have a significant influence on educating sculptors and on the development of the professional identity of sculpture in Melbourne during the 1960s.

For sculpture, the 1960s were characterised by an increase in the number of prizes specifically focused on sculpture or inclusive of sculpture, commencing with the Mildara Sculpture Prize. Due to a booming economy and major public building programs, it was also a period of expanded commissioning opportunities for sculptors, particularly those linked to the major architecture firms. The capital city of Canberra, through its National Capital Development Commission (NCDC), was a most important commissioner of sculpture for public monuments. Certain capital cities were keen to promote their cultural sophistication: Sydney, Melbourne, Adelaide and Canberra. From the mid 1960s to early 1970s, the expansion in educational opportunities for sculptors and students marked a further step in the development of a professional practice, both through increased teaching opportunities, the increase in places offered for sculptural training as well as the eventual shift of art schools to autonomous tertiary institutes.

In terms of professional development in Victoria, 1961 was a particularly important year: the first national Triennial Sculpture Prize was initiated in Mildura, the Centre 5 program was launched and Lenton Parr’s booklet, *Sculpture*, was published. Centre 5 had been the inspiration of Julius Kane, who had developed the five-point program from which the group took its name. More a set of practical objectives than a manifesto, the program aimed to raise the status of sculpture and sculptors through an active education campaign and focus on professional representation. By reinforcing the close association of

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90 The Centre 5 program, developed by Julius Kane in 1961, aimed: (1) to bridge the gap between artist and public through individual and group activities, including exhibitions and lectures, radio and television
sculpture with architecture, the program aimed to elevate the status of sculpture to a professional practice; one that contained the dispositions of both skills orientation and academic certification.

Education was an important focus; lectures and demonstrations, through an open studio program for 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.⁹¹

A further momentum for professional recognition was raised at a Conference of Victoria Sculptors, convened at the NGV in August 1962, ‘to discuss the present situation and problems of the Victorian Sculptors’.⁹² Sculptors, public and commercial galleries’ representatives and architects attended. Also in attendance was Ernst van Hattum, the director of Mildura Art Gallery. The aim of the conference was to produce a client and public focused education campaign. The significance of education in the Centre 5 program was concurrent with international thinking in terms of an expanding definition of the role of the professional artist. Alan Kaprow, in an article in *Art News* in 1964, proposed the following: ‘Essentially the task [of the artist] is an educational one … [the] job is to place at the disposal of a receptive audience those new thoughts, new works, the new stances even, which will enable this work to be better understood.’⁹³

Throughout the appearances, newspaper and magazine articles; (2) to seek better representation in the National Art Galleries of Australia; (3) to foster a closer relationship with architects; (4) to publicise the need in Australia for an art development policy similar to that in other countries based on the principle of devoting a percentage of public building costs to works of art; (5) to seek assistance in creating more scholarships and fellowships for sculptors. The Centre 5 members were Julius Kane, Lenton Parr, Clifford Last, Vincas Jomantas, Inge King, Norma Redpath and Teisutis Zikaras. See Introduction to catalogue, Centre 5, exhibition at Geelong Gallery, Victoria, September 1973, quoted in Scarlett, *Australian Sculptors*, op. cit., p. 303.⁹¹


⁹³ Alan Kaprow, ‘Should the artist become a man of the world?’, *Art News* 63, no. 6, October 1964, pp. 37, 58, quoted in Singerman, op. cit., p. 158.
late 1950s and 1960s, many of the members of Centre 5 were sculpture lecturers at RMIT. Their impact on a significant number of young sculptors contributed to an articulate notion of professional practice amongst Victorian sculptors.

The importance of the recommendations of the Conference of Victorian Sculptors was based upon the need for the formation of a professional body that would determine the professional standing of applicants for commissions and influence the professional standing of those qualified for the nascent tertiary education field. Specifically, all points elaborated in the report presented by the Working Party on Education were addressed to the Department of Education with regard to the provision of postgraduate studies in art in preparation for the delivery of courses, at a tertiary level, in a ‘proper institution … for example the art school at the new Cultural Centre’ by teachers ‘of recognised professional status such as would be indicated by membership of a chartered professional society’.  

No such professionally accredited sculptors’ association resulted from the Conference of Victorian Sculptors discussions. However, the opportunity afforded later in the 1960s by the establishment of the VIC and its commitment to setting up an academic board of studies (including a fine art and industrial art sub-committee) which would control academic standards by approving courses, academic awards and examinations based on peer assessment, provided the framework necessary for the development of a professionally accredited practice.

Nationally, from the early to mid 1970s, the system of autonomous tertiary institutes of advanced education in each state would become the recognised accreditation authorities of professional training for artists; thus, by association, the artist-teachers in these new institutions would be selected on the basis of professional standing within the art community. That is, rather than based on seniority for the position as previously existed within the various state departments of education or technical education, selection was based upon a process of peer assessment and recommendation. The demise of the

sculptors’ associations in Victoria and New South Wales, from the late 1960s, was linked to the expansion of the art schools within a tertiary framework and increased employment opportunities for the new generation of sculptors.95

For sculptors, during the 1960s, inclusion in prize exhibitions became an important professional criterion and was espoused in the Centre 5 objectives. There was a virtual explosion in the number of national, regional and local prizes that included sculpture. Apart from the triennial Mildura Sculpture Prizes inaugurated in 1961, many of the more important national prizes came into existence with the waning of the annual sculpture society exhibitions. A number of critics acknowledged that the prize exhibitions, from 1967 and including the 3rd Mildura Sculpture Prize, were the places to see the ‘new art’. The most significant were the Alcorso-Sekers Travelling Scholarship Award which exhibited its selection on alternate years at the Art Gallery of New South Wales (AGNSW) and the NGV; the Transfield Prize (although established in 1961 and the richest national prize, from 1966 to 1971 it included sculpture); the Comalco Invitation Award for Sculpture; and the Flotta-Lauro Prize and Scholarship. The move from one major national sculpture exhibition every three years to four each year (particularly between 1967 and 1970) in the metropolitan centres of either Sydney or Melbourne was a remarkable development.

By 1971 the rapidity of the demise of prizes and the demotion of their symbolic value indicated the presence of a new determinant in what would be considered professional practice. As each of these national prizes ‘developed a unique annual glamour, creating interstate forums at which artists, gallery directors, critics and sponsors met in a spirit of mutual optimism’, the emphasis shifted from the significance of anointing a winner of the category ‘sculpture’ in an open competition to the symbolic significance of the control of the selection of the participants.96 By 1970 the Mildura Sculpture Triennial was no longer a prize but an exhibition of works by invited sculptors. The definition of ‘professional’

95 In 1972 the NSW Society of Sculptors and Associates moved to new premises (disused Bond stores) in The Rocks, Sydney.
shifted again, to reflect the selection and validation by one’s peers – an internal function of an emerging field of competition. It was an important determinant in contrast to the older version of ‘professional’ whereby external assessments, based on experience, skill and client responses, were the foundation.

This new definition of ‘professional’ was made possible through the establishment of a parallel economy created by the rapidly changing field of art education, which provided expanded employment and training opportunities, and the commitment of funding support through the field of political power to arts education and also to an active engagement with direct cultural funding.

Until recently the attitude to the encouragement of artists has been that the market itself has operated as the most satisfactory supporter of the artist of ability [professional], and that while it continued to function adequately in this way it was undesirable to interfere with the mechanism by introducing other forms of assistance for artists. However, it now appears that while this may be true with regard to painters it may not have the same validity when applied to certain other branches of the visual arts such as sculpture, and possibly to the truly ‘avant-garde’ artists of any generation whose work rarely has much initial appeal except perhaps for a limited public. The Board realised the need for creative patronage in cases where commercial galleries have not been able to assist artists.97

This quote from an agenda paper of the Visual and Plastic Arts Board (previously the Commonwealth Art Advisory Board) of the Australian Council for the Arts was written just after the opening of the 1970 Mildura Sculpture Triennial. It would be reasonable to assume that some members of the Board may have attended the opening on 28 February 1970. Functioning as a ‘salon’, this invitational Mildura Sculpture Triennial enabled ‘genuine articulations between the fields’ of political power, education and art that would ‘help to determine the direction of the generosities of state patronage’.98 What is implied but not overtly stated is that the sheer number of students enrolling in art schools and the expansionary pressures this created are magnified in the process of the transition from technical training to a more tertiary system. The expansion of the teaching of art history

and theory in universities, together with new criticism, constitute major morphological changes that have driven a radical change in art practice and are a necessary ‘precondition of the process of autonomisation of the … artistic field’. Alternative systems of exhibition, validation and consecration are required to reflect the professional status of these new lecturers, artists, critics, academics and gallery directors; practitioners such as Tom McCullough and John Davis.

By the mid 1970s the professional definition of artists was more akin to that of an intellectual; the work was the process, whether conceptual or physical, and its premise was supported by theoretical propositions interpreted through ‘intellectual commentaries’ and validated by peer assessment. This new definition ‘cannot be understood independently of the transformations of the artistic field’ which manifested an expanded set of competing positions for control of the right to define what art was. With rapid institutional expansion backed by government investment both in the field of education and, by 1973, in the emergent field of artistic production, the field of visual arts practice in Australia by 1978 was a large, constantly shifting, highly competitive set of interrelated positions. For sculptors, and those emerging artists and students whose new-media works were embraced at the various Mildura Sculpture Triennials, and for the critics, academics and administrators who supported them, this new economy of art production was interpreted as a radical break from the historical necessities and the social and economic forces that had previously shaped and controlled the narratives and forms of art in Australia. The issue for many of these participants was the misrecognition of this new field as totally autonomous, as opposed to the reality of its relative autonomy in relation to the field of economic and political power.

Pierre Bourdieu’s theory of the evolution of an autonomous field enables the re-integration of what was, at the time, believed to be a rupture in the practice and conception of art – and experienced as both radically ahistorical and independent of

99 ibid., p. 55.
101 ibid., p. 110.
social and economic pressures – back into an historical discourse that began in developments in the field of art education in the 1950s and 1960s. This trajectory can be mapped through the changing definitions of what was considered professional within sculptural practice over this period of time.

**Conclusion**

This introductory chapter provides the background to key cultural and educational developments in Australia from the 1950s and 1960s, which underpinned the major expansion of opportunities for Australian visual artists, particularly sculptors, from the 1970s onwards. The Mildura Sculpture Triennials, particularly those from 1961 to 1978, are identified as important network bridges from which it is possible to map, every three years, not only the changing responses to sculptural practice but also the rapidly changing cultural and educational institutional landscape in Australian visual arts over this period. Bourdieu’s recognition that the development of an autonomous field of artistic production was based upon the system’s ‘profound dependence on the educational system, the indispensable means of its reproduction and growth’ provides an interpretative sociological framework that offers a non-teleological exploration of the significance of the Mildura Sculpture Triennials. I argue that Bourdieu’s sociological method clarifies the under-recognised significance of the Mildura Sculpture Triennials up to 1978 whose function, as major nodal networks for Australia’s visual arts community, was critical to the genesis of an autonomous field of artistic production. However, it must be emphasised that this is an art-historical thesis and in no way attempts to present a thoroughly sociological theoretical argument.

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102 ibid., p.123.